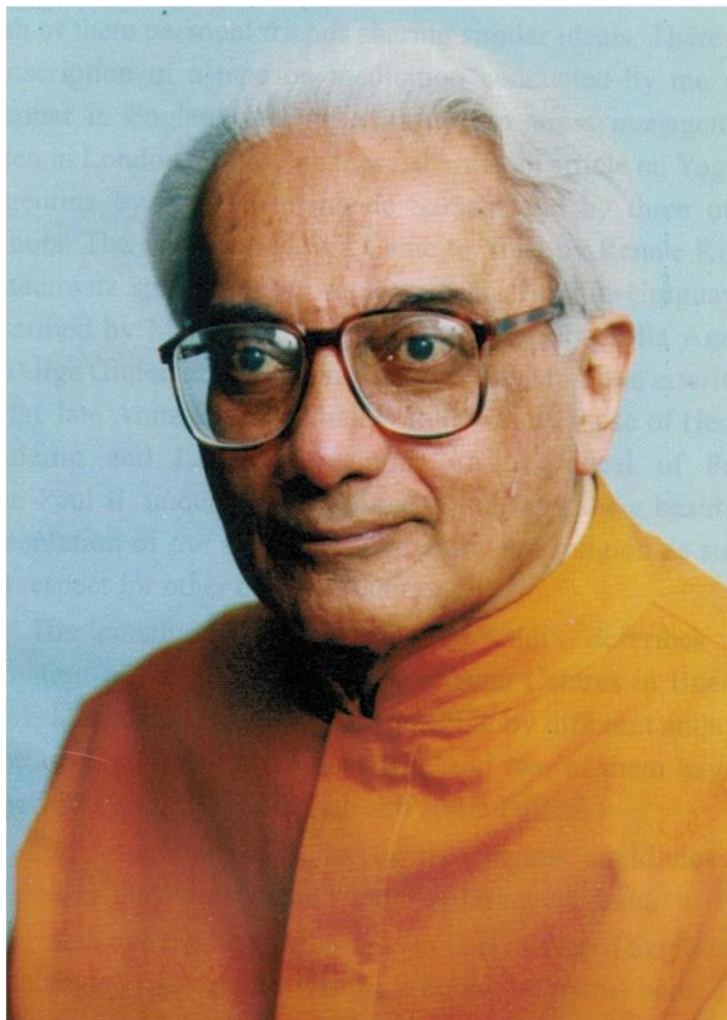


AN INSIGHT INTO YOGA

Swami Shivapremananda

SWAMI SHIVAPREMANANDA



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By Swami Shivapremananda

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FOREWORD

The book *An Insight into Yoga* is authored by H.H. Reverend Sri Swami Shivapremanandaji who has his field of activity in Yoga (theory as well as practical classes) and philosophical lecturing in three South American capital cities, namely Buenos Aires in Argentina, and Montevideo in Uruguay, both on the South American east coast, and the third in Santiago de Chile, the capital city of the country, on the west coast. He has been doing this Yoga-Vedanta work for more than the past 43 years, since the year 1962. His work has benefited immensely thousands of earnest seekers who are eager to acquire the knowledge of the science of Yoga as well as its philosophy, both theory and practice. Yoga and Vedanta are highly venerated, since they are regarded as a priceless and precious spiritual gift given to the modern world by ancient India's great Yoga adepts and philosophers of a long bygone and hoary era.

The contents of the book cover a wide-range of knowledge, dealing with more than 115 topics. In its encyclopaedic all-comprehensiveness, the book is a mini-library in itself.

I wish that this work has the widest possible circulation so that it brings immense benefit to the reading public.

May the Divine Grace of God and the sacred benedictions of Holy Master, the late H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj be upon this book in their abundance! My fullest blessings are upon this book as well as its readers.

Swami Chidananda

President, The Divine Life Society

Rama Navami

17th April, 2005

PREFACE

An Insight into Yoga is a collection of interrelated articles which formed the basis of my courses on the various aspects of Yoga and other related philosophical and psychological subjects. They were given at seminars held in Britain and Ireland, New York, Antwerp, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile from 1962 to 2004.

Chapter I deals with philosophical enquiries as to the search for truth, the spirit of Yoga without being in conflict with religion, and the definition of a yogi and a guru. Chapter II speaks on the philosophy and practice of Gyana Yoga or Vedanta, in the light of the teachings of the *Upanishads*. Chapter III covers the first steps in Raja Yoga, such as the ethical values of *yama* and *niyama*. Chapter IV extensively examines the theory and practice of meditation. Chapter V discusses the nature of the mind and its control through self-education, and the various criteria for inner balance. Chapter VI gives some thoughts to ponder over, and Chapter VII some resolutions to make. Chapter VIII discusses chants. Chapter IX deals with knowledge through enquiry, while Chapter X explores the subject of criterion and inner balance. Chapter XI gives some guiding values of peace and liberty. Chapter XII discusses the meaning of culture. Chapter XIII focuses on the problems of human nature. Chapter XIV discusses the Buddha's teachings. Chapter XV deals with Yoga and Christianity. Chapter XVI focuses on Yoga, God and religion. Chapter XVII explores the three *gunas* or qualities of nature. Chapter XVIII ruminates on many themes divided into two parts. Chapter XIX discusses the six systems of Indian philosophy. Chapter XX presents some thoughts for the month. Chapter XXI relates some anecdotes again divided into two parts.

The Appendix is divided into several parts: the first offers a detailed explanation of the *Gayatri* mantra, the second gives two interviews with me by Jane Sill, the present editor of *Yoga and Health* magazine, published in the United Kingdom, and the second by her predecessor, the late Ronald Hutchinson, when the magazine was called *Yoga Today*. I consider both of them personal friends sharing similar ideals. There is a transcription of a tape on meditation conducted by me at a seminar in England and of a lecture on stress management given in London. Following these, there is an article on 'Yoga in Argentina' by Ana Hosmann de Sarasin and by three other authors. The article on 'How I Came to Yoga' by Renate Rikke Gradenwitz is on the same subject. 'Yoga in Uruguay' is described by Mario Caffera, Humberto Cairoli, Sofia Aguiar

and Olga Gutierrez. The main article on ‘Yoga in Chile is written by the late Anita Palma which is followed by those of Hector Calderon and Lucila Broughton. An encyclical of Pope John-Paul II, under the title *Know Thyself*, makes a beautiful presentation of the spirit of Christianity and religion as such, and respect for other cultural traditions.

The concluding part of the Appendix describes the formation of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centres in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile by different authors, some of them being quite nostalgic. Two have since passed away: Ulrich Hartschuh and Anita Palma.

The reiteration of some of the themes could not be avoided, as they were needed under different contexts.

I wish to express my gratitude to H.H. Reverend Sri Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj for writing a Foreword to this book. His blessings are always very precious to me as the most senior living Gurubhai and because I have known him to be the closest disciple of Gurudev H.H. Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj.

I also wish to give my grateful thanks to Sri Kaviraj Nayak for his editorial and proof-reading assistance, and to Sri Swami Narasimhuluji for the final revision of the book.

Swami Shivapremananda

Buddha Purnima

23rd May, 2005

Rishikesh, Uttara

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AFTERWORD

Swami Shivapremanandaji asked me to republish *An Insight Into Yoga* and gave permission for revisions of language and spelling to be made. The contents had originally appeared in serialised form in *Yoga and Health* from 1990 until 2013 and the manuscript was updated by Swamiji following its original publication, including a few additions which had not appeared in the 2005 edition of the book. Sadly, the project was not completed before Swamiji's passing on 4th September 2019. I am happy that the promise has been finally kept and has allowed me to keep Swamiji close to mind and heart throughout the past year during its revision. I should like to thank very warmly Mary Neville who has helped proof-read the final version throughout this process. Mary came late to Yoga, close to her 90th birthday, and continues with a weekly practice. I am sure Swamiji would have admired and appreciated her attention to detail, qualities which he so manifestly displayed himself. Many thanks also to George Paxton, Editor of The Gandhi Way (quarterly Journal of the Gandhi Foundation) for his final suggested amendments. The Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre in Buenos Aires, led by Susana Porter and other close students, have created a new website expressly to allow easy access of all of Swamiji's books both in Spanish and English. It is hoped that many more students to come will gain insights and greater clarity about the teachings of the timeless philosophy and practice of the universal science of Yoga. In this way, Swamiji's unique voice and great kindness which he showed his students, will live on, so too the long line of outspoken free thinkers epitomised by the radical reformer, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, a direct ancestor of Swamiji, who founded the Brahmo Samaj in the early nineteenth century.

Jane Sill

Easter Sunday

4th April, 2021

London

CHAPTER 1 — WHAT IS YOGA?

SEARCH FOR TRUTH

In Latin truth is *veritas*, or that which is determined by verification. The purpose of verification is to be sure about something, a primary human need for security. In Sanskrit truth is *satya*. Its root *sat* means existence, that of an unchanging reality behind changing forms of expression. The purpose of *sat* is also to give security by its principle of constancy and, in addition, to motivate the search for a series of inner truths, such as the existence of the physical body being possible not merely by sustenance through food, a reality in itself, but by the possibility of assimilation through the biochemical aspect of the *prana*, the vital principle, which itself is sustained by a spiritual presence, the *atma*, giving life to the body.

To say that the body or the material world is unreal is to indulge in hypocrisy. The truth is that the grosser reality of the body is dependent on the subtler reality of the *atma*, and a parallel truth is also that the subtler reality of the *atma* needs the grosser reality of the body to express itself, not for its existence, but to say that the *atma* is a greater reality.

Here arises the question of truth as *veritas*. A scientific verification of an energy form as the basis of an element is possible. Nothing can exist without energy, the cosmic *shakti*. Behind this macrocosmic force, the *purusha* or cosmic spirit, gives expression to life by its presence, for example, in a microcosmic form such as the body as its *atma* or soul. Once this subtle entity passes out of it, no measurable form of energy can revive it. Thus, the temporary existence of a subtle spiritual presence within a living body is self-evident. Buddhists do not recognise the soul

but in effect, disregarding the semantic interpretation, do so by presupposing a deathless, subtle entity which survives the death of the body and reincarnates again.

That which is derived from an underlying spiritual reality, *sat*, giving a conceptual form to a fact, as apart from an illusion which gives a distorted meaning to a fact, is called *satya*. The greatly misunderstood theory of *maya* is not meant to deny the empirical reality of the life around but helps to differentiate the relevance of reality and illusion as per our attitude towards it. A subtle reality is hidden behind a series of illusions created by our infatuation and expectation, pride and prejudice, fear and insecurity. The purpose of truth is to remove these layers of illusion by a discerning search for reality.

The ugliest thing about truth to avoid is the scripture-thumping, dogmatic passion for truth.

NATURE OF TRUTH

There are two levels of reality, the empirical and what an empirical fact signifies, both being deeply interrelated. For example: the inner security of a home, in a loving relationship, within the outer security of the possession of a house, is the true purpose of a household. The fact of a title to a property is an empirical reality, its inner truth being the spiritual satisfaction the owner experiences.

If the spirit behind the letter of a law, or the intention behind assessing and expressing a fact is not in consonance, there is distortion of truth.

It is easy to know empirical truth, and its purpose is always to serve a common need, such as the denominating factor of temperature measured by a thermometer. However, the experience of an empirical truth is plastic, someone feeling warmer or colder than someone else. In the case of a subtler experience, such as a good or a bad action, the determining factors being the good through benefit and the bad by harm, there are many shades as to what it means individually and collectively.

It is because an empirically verifiable truth does not give us a deeper satisfaction, we seek higher levels of truth. Through a series of dreams, we seek a subtler truth, not to escape a hard reality, but to expand its meaning, its relevance, in the fathomless depth of our conscience, although interacting in a dimensional world.

The Spanish philosopher George Santayana said, “Truth is a dream, if my dream is true”. It means that, apart from the verification of a fact, a spiritual search for the meaning of life, of the universe around and our relevance to it, an infinite process in itself, is the higher purpose of truth.

We are confronted with two basic facts: our human nature with which we are dissatisfied and our inner longing to be happier, which is possible only by lessening the degree of our imperfection. Behind the public truth of a person known by what he does, the promises he keeps, there is a private truth in the state of his mind, in which he lives most of the time and which is known only to himself. Behind this private truth, there is another hidden layer of a deeper truth, unknown even to himself and which he can only know by a lot of soul-searching.

The public truth is that which is expressed or verifiable by others, the private truth is that which is experienced or verifiable by oneself, and the unknown, inner truth is *sat* or that which is longed for spiritually. *Sat* is a series of dreams meant to be realised, not just to nurse in our fantasy, but to deepen and widen the dimension of the known, of our life, in the process of the search for the unknown.

RELATIVITY OF TRUTH

The saying of Andre Malraux, the French writer, “the truth of a person is in the first place what he hides” indicates that one is ashamed of an unpleasant truth due to a regard for a wholesome truth, as to what one should be. It shows the relationship between a private truth and *sat*, or the imperfect state of the *I* and its dormant spiritual longing.

The German philosopher Gotthold Lessing said that if God had ‘truth’ in one hand and the ‘search for truth’ in the other, he would ask for the gift of the ‘search for truth’ because it gives “an infinite possibility for hypotheses”. The search for truth opens up the spiritual fountain of life, its meaning and its values, for a mind without curiosity is like dead wood; a life without purpose is like a dried-up fountain.

The yogic saying “Truth is self-evident; it does not need mystification” is very true. We hide our ignorance behind mystery, our vanity behind transcendentalism. The Western saying that “politics is an art of the possible and philosophy an art of the impossible” is rather silly, because why should one try for something after pre-empting the possibility of its realisation? The saying that “truth is only relative” is also not quite true, because truth in order to give individual

security must have a permanent consistency and an unchangeable constancy, and in order to give collective security must have a universal character.

It is the perception of truth by individuals under different circumstances that is relative, due to the difference in the manner and experience of cognition. For example: we arrive at a common agreement as to the measurement of one metre. Multiplying it by one thousand makes the distance of one kilometre. There cannot be two truths about it because its determination is universal, but there can be several opinions formed by individual experience of the distance, such as for a healthy young man it is not a long walk but for a sickly old man it is a long way to go. The difference does not alter the truth of the distance, and what is relative is the experience of it.

Truth is neither hard nor soft. It feels hard and hurts because our ego does not permit us to recognise and accept an unpleasant reality, or the malicious way we are hit with it by those who use truth as a weapon to hurt us. Like God, truth is impartial. Like a mirror, truth hides nothing but reflects as things are, beautiful or ugly, good or bad. Like a mirror, truth does not judge and is synonymous with honesty. Like God, truth embraces all, the virtuous and the sinner and, like rain, it washes all: the virtuous of the pride of their virtue and the sinner the impurity of their error. Truth is the light that is hidden by the dark shades of vanity and selfishness in our heart.

CRITERIA OF TRUTH

Unity is the spirit of truth and division of untruth. Promoting individual and collective welfare is the purpose of truth, whereas that which leads to unhappiness and harm is untruth. Harmony and peace are the two basic ideals of truth, and that is why truth is called beauty, because beauty means harmony, and harmony is that which gives peace. When a bad deed of a person is called an ugly truth, it means that it ought not to be so, although it is so.

Truth and beauty are interrelated because beauty is a balance of lines and contours blending into each other and uniting into a whole. The Italian writer, Umberto Eco, said that “the wholeness or integrity of a form (or a work) is called perfection”. Ugliness is that which is unfinished or imperfect. Perfection is the first principle of beauty, either of a concept or a form, a poem or a painting, a sculpture or a piece of architecture, of a work well done. The *Bhagavad Gita* says *yogah karmasu kausalam*: yoga is efficiency in action. The second principle is the balance of proportion or consonance, such as a room is said to be well constructed when one,

sitting inside, is not aware of its walls. The third is clarity of light refracting into colours and shades, giving depth and dimension to what is created.

Depth and peace are synonymous, as are superficiality and lack of peace. Life is beautiful if there is depth of insight, together with harmony, in its relatedness. Beauty is harmonious because its expressiveness unites the beholder with the beholder. Ugliness freezes out the beholder, denying the togetherness and the plasticity of one's spirit.

The Vedic saying "Truth is one, spoken of variously" means that truth is universal and that many truths are united by the universality of their pertinence. When it is said that truth is one, it is hard to disregard how much blood has been shed in the name of one God, with scripturally-mandated disapproval of polytheism and idolatry. The relevancy of any singular entity is, indeed, tied down to doctrinal conformity requiring one's subjugation to it.

To say that all religions started well and their followers spoiled them later is to go against the evidence of the built-in imperfection of man in his search for security and identity, as he revealed himself in the pages of his scriptures and in the different stages of his evolution.

"Truth is one; paths are many" is a noble saying, evoking tolerance and upholding the autonomy of the human spirit, but there is no guarantee that all paths supposedly leading to truth will actually lead to it. The freedom to search for oneself, like a bee drawing honey from many flowers, while maintaining the integrity of one's search is the universal spirit of truth.

The Vedic saying "Truth alone is victorious, not untruth", adopted as a worthy motto in the national emblem of India, is an inspiring and encouraging ideal, but not necessarily true. Sometimes truth is victorious and sometimes not when untruth rules roughshod. If striving for the unity of India, as Mahatma Gandhi did, is an ideal truth to strive for, which truly it was and still is, he did not succeed. Religious animosity prevailed, over a million died and untruth won. One day the truth of religious unity may make division on the basis of religion irrelevant, but meanwhile who can deny the immense suffering visited upon the people and the hollowness of the claim that truth alone is victorious? Any ideal needs constant striving and nursing, vigilance and protection. By itself, truth does not grace human nature.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We may use five guiding principles in our understanding of truth:

- 1 That which can be verified under different circumstances without losing its basic permanent character, in order to have security.
- 2 An effort to widen and deepen our experience of values that can make life happier and more meaningful.
- 3 That which represents freedom of conscience, freedom from any theocratic or ideological servitude or any kind of dogmatism, and from ignorance, fear and passion.
- 4 To promote collective welfare by the mutual identity of our good; fairness and justice by knowledge not mystery and by constructive co-operation, not confrontation of selfish interests.
- 5 To bring a spiritual fulfilment to the individual and harmony and amity to society.

Whereas denying a fact is a clear breach of truth, exaggerating, underrating, hiding and distorting are its four contradictions. We underrate out of prejudice and overrate due to infatuation. We lie because of three basic reasons: fear, selfishness and vanity. Children lie due to the fear of punishment, and adults due to the fear of shame. Children lie, not wanting to share with other children what they like to keep for themselves, just as some adults do not like to pay fully their share of income-tax. Children and adults lie in order to enhance their self-importance.

The practice of truth does not merely mean not to lie, boast, conceal, misrepresent or depreciate. It also means to have a sense of duty, self-respect and obligation; trustworthiness, loyalty and responsibility; moral courage, commitment and consistency. It means to be reasonable, fair-minded and considerate. The practice of truth covers the whole gamut of ethics. It is, indeed, a lifelong process, a lifelong effort.

As truth is infinite, no one can have the last word about it. No religion has an exclusive authority to represent truth. Untruth is behind the claim of truth which rejects investigation. Untruth is behind all beliefs and ideologies that do not tolerate the plurality of opinion. A truth expressed in a scripture is an experience of its author that came to them as a revelation in their search for wisdom, and which continues to endure due to its collective relevance. Its main purpose is to serve and enlighten humanity.

Buddha said that he was not teaching truth but about truth. The spirit of yoga is expressed in the saying “a revealed truth is only part of the truth” for there is a lot to be learned by the individual in their search, a long way to go in the limitless land of self-discovery.

MEANING OF PHILOSOPHY

Our lives are shaped by two basic forces. One is the need to preserve the vehicle of consciousness, the physical body conditioned by its primordial instincts, or the force of self-preservation. The other is the need to be fulfilled through a sense of purpose, meaning, relatedness in various roles, a sense of belonging, or the force of self-extension, a corollary to self-preservation.

When the mind is less cultivated, life functions through physical instincts. Motivation is directly related to their fulfilment by material incentive and security, and the exercise of the power of one’s ego over weaker egos, or by submission to stronger egos. However, as material security does not necessarily create self-confidence, there remains the anxiety of not having enough or losing what one has. As ego-sensation in relationship, characterised by self-interest and possessiveness, does not give the fulfilment one longs for, it is difficult to get over the feeling of so many empty pockets in life.

It is these empty pockets or insecurities that conceive philosophy and religion. Life is woven around myths because people seem to need them for their ever-shifting sentimental identity and emotional release, philosophical or religious directions to a good ethical life not being enough. We like to live in light and shadow, sometimes to feel free under the sun and see ourselves as we are and things as they are, but mostly we soak in the moods of our elongated egos and want to be comforted in the shadows of make-believe.

We need superstars like Krishna or Jesus, not as they really were on this earth but in our own idealised versions, in order to seek help and be comforted when buffeted by the vagaries and afflictions of life and failed illusions of our own making.

There are two basic purposes of philosophy. One is to improve the quality of motivation, so that there is a better capacity to relate, reconstruct and improve self-expression in conduct, action, evaluation of goals and make effort for their realisation. The other is to develop an insight into life, a deeper comprehension of things, an ability to determine what one really wants and

needs, and a capacity to absorb the essence of knowledge rather than merely remain on the level of dialectics or the sensation of the intellect by induction and deduction.

Philosophy, thus, is a vision of life through a better motivation and understanding, the Sanskrit word for philosophy being *darshana* or vision, just as the Greek meaning is love (*philos*) of wisdom (*sophia*).

ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGY

Whereas the purpose of philosophy is to give inspiration, idealism and direction, the role of psychology is to improve self-knowledge and give an understanding of how the mind works. Basically, it means a rational knowledge (*logos*) of the inner mind (*psyche*). In Sanskrit, the word for psychology is *manovigyana* or verifiable knowledge (*vigyana*) of the mind (*manas*). In spite of the theological connotation of our soul (*psyche* also means soul) being pure, immortal and an image of God, the Greek and the modern meaning indicates an individuality of consciousness, both in its material and spiritual qualities, expressing itself through tangible instincts and longings and, in the process, being covered by layers of mental patterns acquired through sense-experience and thinking.

Thus, psychology is not merely knowing how the mind works in the subconscious level in order to understand our behaviour, character moulds, instinctive reflexes and emotional conflicts; its purpose is to give a better understanding of our spiritual longings, an ability to sift the true from the false as to beliefs, inclinations and affirmations, and to try to sublimate the negative with the help of the positive (*pratipaksha bhavana*). In yoga philosophy, it is not enough to know the underlying causes of one's conflicts, but it is imperative to provide a regimen for the re-orientation of attitude and to act in order to resolve them.

Philosophy and psychology are interrelated, and their purpose is to search for the truth of our being, both in its material and spiritual facets. Their purpose is assimilation of knowledge in order to make the best use of it, and to enhance the depth and clarity of our relationships and, therefore, identities. The goal is not merely a better understanding of life and motivation, but to find spiritual security and fulfilment, deepen the experience of inner harmony and improve our character.

All search presupposes a want, and all wants are due to a feeling of isolation. On the physical level, due to not sensing the body enough by oneself, there arises the need for sense-

experience in contact with sense-objects. On the mental level, the inadequacy of perception leads to a search for knowledge, ratiocination, investigation, discovery and invention. On the emotional level, the insufficiency of self-love leads to greater dimensions of love in relationship to others. On the spiritual level, the inadequacy of identity and a lack of fulfilment and security within the family and among friends give rise to religion and notions about God.

In trying to make up for this insufficiency, we impose our egos on each other in friendship, in family and social relationship. Since everyone is doing the same and no one likes the selfishness of the other, there is mutual dissatisfaction. Out of this arises a sense of isolation. Isolation is due to a lack of understanding, and a lack of understanding is because of self-importance. Being isolated one feeds on self-pity and stew in unhappiness.

INTER-RESPONSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is individual and group-oriented, and it can function only through relatedness, directly or by means of memory. The individuality of consciousness is sustained only by its ability to inter-respond, just as the validity of truth is in its capacity to verify itself, the Latin word for truth being *veritas* or that which is verifiable. The Sanskrit word is *sat* or that which truly or verifiably exists. There is nothing called an isolated truth, or an absolute or ultimate truth. The transcendental nature of truth means that anything we know to be true is subject to improvement endlessly, for truth is infinite.

Philosophical posturing as to an unseen God being the only reality (*Brahma satyam*) and the tangible world, with which one has perforce to cope, being an illusion (*jagat mithya*) is not only conducive to hypocrisy but makes people irresponsible, indolent and irrational. When thin air becomes an unaccountable reality and the visible is thought to be unreal, instead of coming to grips with life, one becomes an escapist and unproductive (except in terms of reproduction) and one tends to exist on the subsistence level alone.

Likewise, the view of creation being God's *lila* (play) makes one a fatalist and blurs the line between good and evil. What takes over is not divine inspiration but the peasant's cunning. Sayings like "God does not play roulette" or "one cannot know the mind of God" is not convincing either and makes a cruel mockery of divine wisdom, when the history of humanity is fractured by genocide, plague (which wiped out one-third of the population of Europe in the fourteenth century), famine and holocaust.

Personally, I prefer the definition of indefinable God as a transcendental and immanent source of our being, expressed however limitedly through the consciousness of spiritual values, rather than an unconscionably incompetent or powerless divine ruler. We are what we make ourselves to be. Spiritual effort, character-building and prayers (*purushartha*) serve like a lens through which the rays of the sun equally shining on all (like the immanence of God) are focused to gather strength to help us move forward. In the ups and downs of life that is all we can do. Some lenses being more powerful due to will and endeavor are more effective, and those of us who are weaker have to find peace and harmony by coming to terms with the possible, having done our best.

In the inter-response of life, as the individual consciousness tries to fulfil itself by finding its reality through the relativity of experience, it is generally frustrated in the process. Out of this arises a need for transcendence, a need to reach out into the beyond, into the infinite, a need to be free from structured ideas.

SECURITY OF EGO

Life functions in this seeming contradiction of dependence on relatedness and yet needing to rise above this dependence in order to experience the ever-elusive fullness of our being, for we are both a material product and also children of the infinite spirit. Thus, within the individuality of consciousness there is the built-in urge to dissolve individuality, just as in the atom the cohesive force co-exists with the de-cohesive force.

Being incomplete, an individual needs to find wholeness by means of a series of relationships with family, religion, regional culture and tradition. This leads to the acquisition of layers of personality. The Latin word *persona* comes from the Etruscan *phersu*, meaning a mask. To act out the different roles we get involved in, we constantly put on more and more masks. Who can really say, deep down within, what one truly is? As to the sky-scraping claims about the human being created in the image of God and the soul being ever pure and blissful, the best that can be said is that they do serve a useful, inspiring and motivational purpose.

Life begins with imitation and, consciously or unconsciously, we keep trying to acquire better kinds of *persona* – sometimes getting stuck with one for a long time – in order to discard an old and less-satisfying one. To be gratified, we try to conform to the object of gratification

through a process of possessing and being possessed. Thus, the need for the security of the ego is at the base of all relatedness.

The security of the ego is sought in the easiest way, such as on the material base of property and income with which relationships are formed, sometimes even bought, but real security comes from the security of unselfish love and understanding, and it means to sublimate our egos. Thus, the discipline and education of the self is a primary concern of philosophy. Without self-discipline and self-confidence, two cornerstones of character, there can be no inner security. Self-confidence comes only through loving, practising and gaining experience in what one believes. Formation of values means to see a little more clearly, feel a little more deeply and learn a little more comprehensively, so that one can be more secure and fulfilled.

IMMORTALITY OF SOUL

The consciousness of individuality or the ego-self leads to attachment to those objects that sustain each consciousness, such as the body and the artefacts that make it happy. This attachment is extended into the beyond through notions of immortality and such states of existence in afterlife that would (God willing!) be just heavenly.

Immortality of soul, a direct product of attachment to our individual self, serves two concrete purposes as a premise of belief. Instruments of religion such as temples, holy places, prayers, acquiring virtue to merit such immortality, soften the rough edges of life and provide a place to seek peace, serve as an ethical restraint in society, and give security through spiritual identity and hope. The other purpose, consciously or unconsciously, gives incentive to be remembered after death. Didn't Baruch Spinoza say that the "author of a tome on humility takes care of putting his name on the first folio" and didn't we build statues of our idols the world over? But out of this incentive comes leadership, flower arts, literature and architecture, and out of moral convictions are formed cultural moulds and national identities. It is the attachment to one's beliefs, even if they are altruistic and idealistic, that makes their propagation and, therefore, civilisation possible.

As material success leaves still a part of oneself unfulfilled, as does the exercise of power as a leader, or seeking happiness through human love or good deeds, one is led to ask: Is there anything in life that would give the fulfilment one misses? Out of this inquiry is born spiritual search, very often leading to a momentarily blissful escape into pretty illusions about what is

beyond tangible reality, such as “eternal bliss” (sic, one could get sick of it!) and glorious salvation from every known and unknown demon.

Yet, this spiritual search alone, in and through the tangible, enables the experience of a deeper peace, inner harmony, purity of heart, sublimity of soul, or whatever one might call it. Out of such inspiration evolves clarity of vision, a wholesome maturity, a nobler character, a truer wisdom and a better capacity to cope with life. The search begins in every little thing that is done, in every little duty on every level of relationship, in the understanding and direction of every desire and aspiration, and does not end until the last day of life. There can only be bursts of enlightenment or sudden encounters with truths about which a long search had already been going on subconsciously, but there is nothing called an ultimate enlightenment. God or truth being infinite, attaining God-realisation or self-realisation in one’s lifetime is a relative goal of seeking spiritual progress at best, even if thought to be a pinnacle of attainment, and it also serves as a canonical hat for the purpose of institutional hagiolatry.

In all search there is the extension of the experience of the known into the unknown in order to expand the dimensions of the known and encounter truths that were never known. Science does so through hypothesis, and if it cannot prove itself it is discarded for a new hypothesis. Philosophy does so through speculation, and if a theory does not work, a new theory is geared to a desired result. Religion does so through faith, and if it does not give the believer inner peace and spiritual strength, two of its touchstones, there is something wrong with that faith.

If you discard the known in order not to extend the conditioning of the known and wait for the unknown to reveal itself, it is more likely that you will be sitting forever and remain the same fool. And what guarantee is there that what you call the awareness of reality is not a state of your own mind? That is why it is all the more necessary not to commit the same escapist errors that conduce to the deficiency of the known. Otherwise, there will be no end to the illusions about the unknown.

WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT?

When I came to New York for the first time in 1961, I was told by my host, the late John Olin Murray, then a senior Vice-President of the Macy’s, “In America we have a dictum that if you have not succeeded in your career by the time you are 40, then you are a failure.”

Competitiveness, part of the western ethos, has indeed led to rapid material progress in the West, but it has also exacted a high price in cardiovascular tension, psychological stress and family alienation.

There are two types of success, the outer and the inner, and one needs a balance of both. For one's peace of mind and happiness and also that of one's family, inner success is more important than an overriding concern in not missing the career bus. It means being a decent person: compassionate, understanding and honest, reliable, patient and trustworthy, caring, loving and modest, selfless, loyal and pure-hearted. The purpose of outer success is after all to be happy and self-confident and to make others happy. Its relevance, therefore, depends on inner success.

However, it is good to be reminded of the fact that only one person in 10 has leadership qualities in any field of achievement. How are the remaining nine to come to terms with not being able to succeed or rise to the top in a career? Is that not a cause for frustration among 90% of those who happen to be egged on by ambitious parents or wives to be equal to the 10%?

Some of us are born talented and the rest are less so. Some are ambitious enough to stretch their talents and the rest are too easy-going even to find out whether they have talents or not. Some are alert and look for and grasp opportunities and astute enough to exploit circumstances energetically, whereas others being lackadaisical fall by the wayside. Some have initiative, enterprise and perseverance, all necessary to get ahead in life, and others do not.

As the term itself indicates, without motivation one remains stagnant, but it is necessary to examine the nature of motivation and to come to terms with what is possible and necessary for a useful life and for one's happiness, by being supportive to others and to contribute to society of which we are a part, for better or worse.

To reshape our motivation and ethos, it is good to be reminded of a few pithy sayings that evolved from the minds of some seekers of truth, to each of which I have added a one-sentence commentary.

- “The path is more important than the goal,” for if the path is noble, so will be the goal.
- “Walking is more important than reaching,” for if you learn how to walk sensibly and know where you are going, you will surely arrive.
- “Doing is more important than achieving,” for if you act intelligently and diligently, the result will certainly be rewarding.

- “Means are more important than the end,” for the consequences of the means will also be harvested in the end.
- “Being is more important than professing,” for if your example is good, your words will surely be more reassuring.
- “Learning is more important than scholarship,” for if you absorb the lessons of life carefully, you will indeed avoid many errors in human relationship.
- “Duty is more important than renunciation,” for you must first of all have something significant to renounce, whereas there will always be duties to fulfil in any circumstance of life.
- “Obligations are more important than rights,” for only after carrying out your obligations conscientiously, have you the right to claim your rights.
- “Not offending others and not taking offence are more important than forgiving,” for by not causing trouble to others and making them react, or by not making yourself vulnerable, you would not need to sit on the throne of forgiving.
- “Being interested wholeheartedly and unselfishly in what you do and expecting a good result is more important than disinterested action regardless of result,” for how can you improve your action without giving the best of yourself and learning from the result as to whether it has been appropriately and efficiently done or not?
- “Loving your friends is more important than loving your enemies,” for it is your friends who care for you and make it possible for you to love them, while your enemies do not give a damn whether you do so or not.
- “Loving God is more important than fearing him,” for fear invariably casts a pall over love and love is a greater liberating force to free us from errors than is fear.

THE UNIVERSAL SPIRIT OF YOGA - IS YOGA AGAINST RELIGION?

There is a general lack of understanding of what yoga is about in the West, in spite of its popularity as a system of physical exercises, consisting mainly of controlled movement of postures, breathing techniques and relaxation. Some even think that the postures are merely static and that the body has to be tied into a knot. Hatha Yoga is in fact a rational form of exercises, some very simple and some complicated, which anyone can do at any age according to the individual's physical condition. Breathing is co-ordinated with the movements, breathing deeply while holding a posture and while contracting, stretching and relaxing different parts of the body while fixing and withdrawing the mind. There are no weird practices in yoga, although fakirism is sometimes confused with it.

Apart from the physical aspect, the spiritual side of yoga which consists of meditative practices as well as religious ideas can sometimes put off an average Westerner who may

consider it as an attempt to introduce Hinduism by the back door. The fact is that, if you are secure in the moorings of your own religion, no one can take it away from you or convert you into another, and it is very odd that this anxiety should arise in a religion famous for its proselytising zeal and then try to deny others what it itself wishes to pursue.

Yoga is, of course, not a particular religion mainly because it is not bound to any obligatory dogma, such as Jesus Christ being the only begotten son of God, but it does respect the beliefs of those who worship him as a divine incarnation in the same way as Hindus believe Rama and Krishna to be so. In yoga, religion is a very private and personal concern of faith. What it tries to promote is a broadminded vision of one's personal choice.

To those who practise yoga, life itself becomes a living experience of religion, both in its highest spiritual and literal sense because *re-ligare*, the Latin root for religion, means a continuous process of re-integration of human nature with its potentially divine counterpart. Whatever means is useful to realise this goal, not in an afterlife about which one can only speculate but during one's lifetime, can be called the practice of yoga. One who is deeply committed to spiritual ideals while not believing in any particular godhead is, indeed, a better religious person than a believer lacking in moral qualities.

As early as 1960, as a secretary of the late Swami Sivananda, the founder of the Divine Life Society in Rishikesh, India, I was present when the Catholic archbishop of Agra came to ask him about the spiritual goals of yoga. That was two years before the Second Vatican Council began. It is known among the Jesuits that their former superior general, Pedro Arrupe, practised yoga. In 1963, Thomas Merton, who was then a director of the Trappist monastery in Gethsemane, Kentucky, and already a famous author of Christian literature, invited me to give classes there not only on yoga philosophy but also on *asanas*. Later, in 1968, I gave courses on Gyana Yoga at the Salvador University in Buenos Aires under its Jesuit rector Father Quiles. Since then, I have done so in many other Catholic universities in both the Americas.

Religion as a tribal identity is among the more primitive instincts of humans due to ignorance, fear and insecurity. It can be dangerously divisive in a backward society. However, the general idea of religion is to unite the masses by an allegiance to a common divinity through identical beliefs, rituals and cultural habits. The yogic ideal of union (*yuj*), as also of *re-ligare*, retying, evolved because of the insatiable human hunger for perfect love, peace and truth. This indicates a spiritual source of one's being, a spark of God within, by a conscious unity with

which it was believed that life could be made happier. The idea of this possibility is also indicative of the fact that no one can want something of which one has no conscious or primordially unconscious experience.

HUMAN AND DIVINE NATURE: As truth is self-evident, from universal experience we know that our origins are in both matter and spirit which co-exist in a state of inter-relatedness. Energy in a pulsating and interactive form is the basis of matter. We are a product of nature's law of evolution. Having evolved from lower forms of life, our body and mind are subject to the laws of cohesion and decohesion, adaptive mutation, recombination, development and extinction of that form.

Early in human existence, a short lifespan made a high birth rate necessary. Uncertain food supply induced greed, the need to hunt for food made violence imperative and physical weakness before a stronger opponent led to cunning. It is only nine thousand years since the agricultural revolution when collective living became a necessity, that moral codes began to serve, albeit not too successfully, as a restraining factor on nature's natural law of the bigger fish eating the smaller, or the survival of the fittest, or 10% of the more efficient among us having more rights than the 90% of the less capable. We are still adhering to these under the veneer of civilised norms of society.

However, being unhappy with natural laws, we became aware of a potential spiritual source of our being some three thousand years ago, when *Vedanta* philosophy spoke of humans being basically divine. At about the same time, the *Old Testament* declared that God created man in his own image. As identity has to be upward in order to give security and made evolution possible, harping on about our monkey image is hardly helpful. The clarion call to measure up to a divine image became the highest motivation that morality bestowed, rather than merely providing a balance of self-interest.

It was from amongst the most intelligent philosophical devices which helped to civilise society. This had to come from the mouth of God in order to be acceptable to the primitive mind in awe and fear of the supernatural, and also to inspire the more refined minds to raise themselves to their spiritual source. This image of God, or the Vedantic concept of humans being potentially divine in spite of their enormous capacity for wickedness, was no myth or invention either, but a self-evident truth as we all know that our peace and happiness lie in the restraint and

sublimation of the ego, the love of truth and compassion, in goodness and purity, and not in their contradiction. This is a basic ideal of yoga.

UNITY OF LIFE: Not only are the problems of suffering, selfishness and aggression similar everywhere, but also the need for justice, love and security. There cannot be a greater motivation for social justice than the ideal of not treating others as one would not like to be treated by them: the basis of Judeo-Christian ethics. There cannot be a better inspiration for this than the recognition of the presence of God in everyone, as also seen in *Vedanta* philosophy. In the midst of the self-evident inequality in every aspect of life, holding on to this belief in a common, spiritually uniting way, can best promote the civilising urges in society.

There is also a basic relatedness between human beings and nature, in spite of an adversary relationship at times. When nature is destructive and not beneficial, humans try to control it by such methods as building dams and digging canals. But if nature is over exploited, this basic unity is disturbed and humans suffer as a result. Sometimes the relationship is harmonious and at other times not, such as in the case of overpopulation and epidemics. Nature by itself does not have a perfect intelligence. Human intelligence and nature have to be mutually adaptive. Instead of trying to conquer nature, humans need rather to co-operate with it.

UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH: Overcoming ignorance is a primary goal of yoga: ignorance of human nature and the spiritual make up of our being, about life ridden by insecurity and attachment, about differing cultures due to dissimilar habits and appearance, about the universe we live in without the many illusions and superstitions. It is ignorance that makes us deny the world as an illusion, thus avoiding an unpleasant reality and seeking comfort in the foggy bottom of speculation. It is also ignorance that causes infatuation with what is by its nature imperfect.

In yoga there is no antagonism between faith and reason and their integration is a basic goal. Faith is the sunlight that lifts the mist of ignorance. Faith is the fountain of inspiration to search for truth, while reason is a disciplined effort to make such a search enlightening. There is neither blind faith nor dry intellectualisation in yoga. No spiritual search is possible without inspiration, and the fountain of faith cannot irrigate the field of life well without the aqueduct of reason.

Reconciliation of the material and the spiritual is another goal of yoga. Out of a transcendental source of which we know very little as yet, sprang this universe. Through a long process of evolution arose human beings in whom slowly arose the need to know their ultimate origins. Thus, are sketched in the pages of scriptures what is understood to be the source, the multi-hued imageries of God, reflecting the evolution of the human mind with its need for protection, emotional fulfilment and search for a meaning in life. The clearer and purer the mind became, the brighter the light of the inner spirit shining through.

UNITY OF CREEDS: In this process, humans devised codes of conduct for their material security, and wrote and recited prayers to improve their self-image through a higher identity and also for their protection. Thus, religions were organised with three basic components: rituals for group identity and personal sanctity; mythology to bring colour to a rather dull life and also to explain a metaphysical meaning through interesting stories appealing to simple minds; and philosophy to motivate, inspire and direct individual and collective life.

The latter helped to define a sense of right and wrong. The four guiding principles of what is right are: 1) that which promotes harmony and unity, 2) that which helps one to be creative and progressive, 3) that which seeks justice and the welfare for all, relating one's interests with those of others, and 4) that which does not need to be concealed or kept secret. Wrong can be defined by their contradiction.

It is ignorance that makes us suspicious of each other's religion, and it is ignorance that confuses religion with social customs and habits of prayer rather than different ways of looking at and reaching out to the same spiritual source and destination. Yoga regards religions to be like different rivers rising from, and flowing into, the same ocean with different names, rising first as vapour, then forming as clouds, becoming springs and snows in the mountains, then flowing as streams and swelling with rains as rivers to take on the characteristics of the lands over which they flow, ultimately to merge into the same ocean from which they arose.

UNITY OF PATHS: A medieval sage of India, Appaya Dikshita, asked God for forgiveness for three errors he had made in the course of his devotional practices: by giving him a name and form when he cannot be defined or limited to any concept or form; by localising him in a house of worship when he is everywhere; and by praising him when he does not need, nor is

susceptible to, any praise like a human being. The sage said that he had done so because his limited mind could not think of the infinite, because he needed a sacred place where he could forget the blemished world, and that in order not to be vain and proud, he needed to attribute all glory to his divine father. This is the universal spirit of yoga.

Yoga being union, all its paths are intertwined although we may be more involved with one particular path rather than another. We cannot separate the search for truth in our understanding of life, in our thinking and conduct (*Gyana Yoga*), from the need to sublimate our passions and emotions through selfless love and devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*), nor from the need to look within, to understand our mind and seek unity with God (*Raja Yoga*), nor from doing our duty with the love of the ideal of service (*Karma Yoga*). *Hatha Yoga* is not only a part of *Raja Yoga* but also helps to keep the body healthy. What objection can Christianity or any religion have to this universal spirit of a human being?

WHO REALLY IS A YOGI?

By definition, one who practises yoga is a yogi. But who really is a yogi? In India, the image of a *yogi* is generally of a man sitting in lotus posture, in deep meditation, bare-bodied, withdrawn from the world, impervious to heat and cold, with absolute control over his mind, breath and body, and seemingly in a continuous state of transcendental consciousness (*samadhi*), or union with God (*Ishwara*) as Patanjali would say. But what good is he to his fellow beings? His followers would claim that he is helping all of humanity through his meditation. But where is the evidence? After all, the first qualification of truth (in Latin, *veritas*) is verification.

In the West, if someone twists their body into various postures (*asanas*) and does certain breathing exercises (*pranayama*) regularly, they can claim to be a yogi, just because they practise two aspects of *Hatha Yoga*. But *Hatha Yoga* is only a minor branch of yoga, even though all-important in the West. *Hatha Yogis* in India are generally not highly regarded, mainly because most of them tend to be overly conscious of their bodies and are rather ignorant of the spiritual side of yoga. There is surely nothing derogatory about *Hatha Yoga*, as long as one does not lose sight of the higher goals that an optimum condition of physical and mental health may help to attain. But there are many *Hatha Yogis* who, in spite of their lifelong practice, fall sick due to factors of heredity and lifestyle.

The meaning of the word yoga, of course, is ‘union’. A more significant translation would be ‘integration’. This refers to an integration of body, mind and soul, bringing the three aspects of a human being into a state of balance. The term body indicates physical nature, dominated by earthly instincts. What is meant by mind is rational intelligence; by soul an unselfish, idealistic aspiration to realise higher values. Yoga also means unity of heart and mind, or faith and reason – faith that is love of an ideal, and reason a search to know its reality. It is folly to separate the two.

Patanjali interprets yoga as a controlled state of mind in the second *sutra* of his *Raja Yoga*, to be acquired through meditation. He urges ethical and spiritual disciplines (*yama* and *niyama*) as the first two steps because, without a practical application of noble ideals, meditation will at best be a relaxing experience through a mild form of self-hypnosis, or just an exercise in wool-gathering.

Many traditional books define yoga as “union with God”. But who knows what God is? For any two entities to unite spiritually, one must know each very well on a tangible, understandable level. Since we do not know what God is, and what is learned about God is only half the truth, the other having to be completed by each one for themselves, it is better to begin by working on ourselves.

The highest value of yoga is in the integration of the two sides of our nature: human and spiritual. The fact that a liar does not want to be lied to, a hater to be hated, a violent person to be treated violently, that one finds peace in forgiveness rather by vengeance, shows that we do have a spiritual side. The sublimation of human nature, by awakening the dormant soul within, is the basic goal of a yogi. This is begun by bringing one’s thought, word and deed in a straight line, for any yogic integration begins with integrity.

FIVE INTEGRITIES

The five integrities that a yogi should seek to perfect are:

- **Integrity of thought** – this means to be honest with oneself and not indulge in wishful thinking. It means to search for truth through evidence, rather than a dumb acceptance of what is said just because it suits one to do so. It is to measure the validity of a theory by its consequence through its implementation, and by testing on a collective basis over a long period of time. For truth is not merely a claim verified but it is a principle of common

security and welfare. It is said that “Dreams are private myths and myths are public dreams”, both being necessary to communicate between the known and the unknown, between the individual and public psyche and the reality of human nature. The weaving of myths around and about God is inevitable due to human psychological inadequacy and dependence. But, as long as they do not mislead people by encouraging irrationality and are done in good taste, they serve a useful purpose. However, a yogi should search his or her heart to find out if they really believe in what they read and profess.

- **Integrity of feeling** – this means not to indulge in sentimentalism, which is simply a form of self-love, either about God or in a human relationship. Rather, it is to deepen sentiments by the purity of devotion. Even on a human level, a better definition of love is that it is a form of devotion for the finest qualities and values in a person one loves. Then the basic requirement of measuring one’s feelings by deeds has to be met. When the heart moves, the hands should also move.
- **Integrity of speech** - indicates not merely to desist from lying blatantly, but not to exaggerate, undermine, misrepresent, manipulate or distort facts to suit one’s convenience. It is to refrain from saying something one does not really mean. It is not to be a panegyrist without conviction or to perform to the gallery for self-enhancement. It means the supreme importance of keeping one’s word. It is to avoid dripping with fat by flattering a vainglorious person, for a yogi should not indulge in buttering up others or allow their vanity to be tickled by it.
- **Integrity of action** – is to be constructive in deed and to avoid harming others either thoughtlessly or deliberately due to vindictiveness. It means to have a sense of duty and to carry it out intelligently and responsibly. It is to have the spirit of service and selflessness in helping someone in need without making them feel like an object of charity.
- **Integrity of conduct** – begins with the Biblical injunction not to treat others as one would not like oneself to be treated. It is to respect the rights of others before thinking about one’s own prerogatives. It needs boundless patience and tolerance and a profound understanding of the generally complex human nature.

These five integrities are the basis of a yogic life because it is only by behaving with integrity to oneself and others that makes integration with God viable at all. The greatness of a culture is directly related to the average level of honesty of its people, just as an abiding honesty and selflessness are the shining qualities of a yogi. Duplicity cannot sully a generous heart, and tolerance for the defects of others is due to deep compassion, while inner detachment makes a sense of responsibility all the more effective.

OTHER QUALITIES OF CHARACTER

Just as simple peasants cannot distinguish between intelligence and cunning or between dignity and vanity, the spiritually primitive cannot differentiate between tolerance and indifference or detachment and imperviousness to responsibility. The yogi does not live an unconcerned life but is full of concern for the welfare of those he cares for and is responsible to, because he is highly conscientious. He is never impersonal, since his religion begins with the assumption of personal responsibility in whatever he does, and his ears are surely sensitive to the call of duty. He never says that he is carrying out God's will, because he is not conceited enough to think that he has a private telephone line to God. Instead, he prays for guidance and strength to do what must be done to the best of his ability, in the light of his understanding, and with the help of God, but knowing well that it is he alone who must bear the responsibility for his deeds. He knows that it is imperative to come to grips with the realities of life and avoids being a philosophical sculptor whose material is fog!

A true yogi is not image-conscious and does not have the distressing habit of performing for others as a spiritual person, for a self-serving image carefully polished can be mercilessly contradicted by one's deeds that will inevitably reflect upon it. One of the main reasons for not progressing on the path of yoga is the predilection for self-delusion. It is easy to fool oneself by petty lies which, if indulged in long enough, and if there are sycophants around to cater for one's vainglory, there is little to prevent oneself from being addicted to it.

A yogi should not be inclined to a false sense of modesty either and ought to avoid the habit of an elaborate display of humility to impress others. Vanity and arrogance are the twin companions of renown and power, even if they are dressed up in a dubious gesture of modesty, or in a theatrical claim of fulfilling God's mission, or being dragged upon to do so by the urging of others.

There are two levels of progress in a person's life: the outer and the inner. Outer progress is a product of ambition and will power and an insatiable hunger for achievement and wanting to be famous. It is a result of initiative, daring and tireless perseverance, as well as the capacity to exploit the circumstances to one's best advantage and the ability to harness other people's talents and employ them for self-enhancement. It is the result of a burning and consuming longing for success in what one desires to achieve.

Inner progress consists in the cultivation of a pristine conscience, in the painstaking and arduous crafting of ideals to be guided by through the sublimation of human nature, in making oneself useful to others and in sharing the best one has. For such a person life is what he does with it, making the best use of his inner resources and grasping every opportunity to widen the horizons of his mind through learning in whatever ways he can. This he achieves by cleansing his heart through selfless service, by refinement of his passions and sentiments through love of God and of those he can relate with. To him the saying that “life is transitory” means that it is all the more reason to grasp well and make the best use of the moment rather than drift about in lethargic detachment. To him life is far too precious and the focus of human relationship too short-lived to be sullied by little grudges, meanness and animus.

In the spirit of the teachings of ancient sages of the East, the yogi realises that:

*“The path is more important than the goal,
For if the path is good, so will be the goal.*

*Walking is more important than reaching,
For if you learn how to walk sensibly
And know where you are going,
You will surely reach the destination.*

*Doing is more important than achieving,
For if you act intelligently and well,
The result will certainly be rewarding.*

*Means are more important than the end,
For the consequences of the means
Will be harvested as well in the end.*

*Being is more important than professing,
For if your example is good,
Eloquent surely will be your words”.*

WHO NEEDS A GURU?

No one is good enough to be another's spiritual master in the absolute sense – as a guide, surely, but respecting the autonomy of the disciple. One should try to learn from those who have a superior quality of knowledge which is worth applying. The greatest teacher is God within, our innermost conscience, which has to be awakened through spiritual aspiration and, if we are lucky enough, with the help of a few we can relate to, due to the chemistry of spirit and affinity of ideals.

Is a *guru* absolutely necessary? I would say no. Most great teachers did not have one. Ramakrishna, Ramana Maharishi, Aurobindo and Sivananda, did not have a *guru* in the traditional sense. Totapuri's contact with and initiation with Ramakrishna were informal. Vishwananda saw Sivananda in a *dharmashala* (inn) opposite the old post office in Rishikesh only for a few days (they never met again), and his token act of initiating Sivananda into monkhood (*sannyasa*) on 1 June 1924, was only symbolically meaningful. Aurobindo's encounter with a teacher when a professor at Baroda College, was casual. Ramana Maharishi did not have a *guru*. The real meaning of *guru* is a special personal and long-lasting spiritual bond with a disciple. Few indeed are lucky to have it. To have masses of disciples is a contradiction of this meaning,

DEFINITIONS OF GURU

The two most commonly accepted interpretations of the word *guru* are “one who removes the darkness of (spiritual) ignorance” and “one who clears away the obstacles on the (spiritual) path”. As the Buddha says, teachers can only show the ways for the disciples to choose from and walk along.

In India, the head of an *ashram* is called a *guru*, equivalent to an abbot in a Catholic monastery. A *guru* is also one who gives a *mantra* or *sannyasin* initiation. These are institutional and general definitions of the term *guru*. There need not be an incompatibility between the general and personal meanings, but the more general the term becomes, obviously the less personal its significance.

That no spiritual progress is possible without a *guru* and that there is no need for a *guru* at all are equally ridiculous assertions. To have an honest and efficient teacher is a great help, but to be an unquestioning spiritual slave of another is to deny oneself personal responsibility. A

glass is, of course, useful when it is empty, denoting humility of spirit and receptivity, but one should also have the choice of being able to empty what has been put into it if unsuitable.

It is not necessarily true that when the *chela* (disciple) is ready the *guru* will appear. Even supposing the disciple is ready, it is not sure that the *guru* will appear by himself. Instead of waiting forever, the *chela* should seek out a suitable teacher to learn from.

To learn simple arithmetic, one has to go to a primary school first, then move to a high school to learn algebra, geometry and more advanced arithmetic, while moving on to university in order to study higher maths. One cannot master advanced mathematics right from the beginning all alone. With basic grounding, the erstwhile student progresses through personal research, while not losing a special bond if it did develop with a teacher. Looking back, my first five years with Swami Sivananda were most valuable in allowing me to gain maturity of perspective.

One should choose such teachings that, first of all, make sense in order to find out their usefulness by practical application. The purpose is to learn as best one can, select the best, and ignore the rest. That is what I did. The bottom line is not to be a hypocrite and pretend to follow and prattle on about something one does not honestly believe in. It is as simple as that.

GURU IS NO GOD

Along with Swami Venkatesananda, I happened to be in the last batch of students who had the benefit of learning from Swami Sivananda's class talks. Thereafter, senior monks did the teaching. We also learned from his books. What we learned most, however, was from the way he expressed his thoughts in everyday life, from his attitude, his behaviour, the way he made decisions, his patience, tolerance, discretion, and his forbearance of the foibles of others.

Meeting Jiddu Krishnamurti years ago, I was non-plussed at his obduracy in rejecting *gurus* and dismissing out of hand the ochre robe. He had a point, of course, there being so many sullied models swishing around in silken *gerua* (ochre) habits and, especially in India, knowing the theatrical hyperbole that connotes the role of a *guru*. However, leaving aside bad examples including irrationally dictatorial *gurus*, there are genuine *swamis* and decent *gurus* who never use their designations with a capital letter, so to speak.

To say that a *guru* is a visible god is to belittle the vision of the divine. People are, first and foremost, human beings. After a life-long effort at self-improvement and often with the

advantage of being born with fewer imperfections, there can be shining examples of integrity, compassion, selflessness and pure-heartedness. This does not mean that they are perfect and incapable of an occasional error of judgement or conduct due to the force of circumstances. That is why it is fair to say that saints actually abide in heaven (an idealised vision of how they ought to be) and that they are made on earth by their disciples and institutions.

The double consciousness of a *jivanmukta* (liberated soul while alive) who is in tune with God within, while acting outwardly like others, as is claimed, is rubbish! One cannot be a saint inside and cut corners or behave otherwise externally. One should not only desist from doing what is wrong but ought not to be seen doing what may be considered improper. Then again, why the fiat about liberation? From what? From imperfection? From the cycle of birth and death? Is it not complaining too much to say one is fed up with life? Given the chance, one would indeed choose the imperfect known in preference to the Elysian unknown, for the simple reason that consciousness is geared to the tangible.

There are people, of course, who are inclined to be dependent, and some with a special need for a father figure. For them, a charismatic *guru* comes in handy, although falling into wrong hands that can be very harmful. A real *guru* helps the disciple to stand on his or her mental, emotional and spiritual feet. A real *guru* does not brag about, or cause to be bragged about, as a self-realised or God-realised soul for the simple reason that these are mythical terms. Self-realisation or God-realisation are an infinite process which cannot be worn as a celestial order. A real *guru* is also happy to see his disciple surpass him spiritually and as a teacher. Now you should know who really is a *guru* and how difficult a role it is to fulfil.

CHAPTER 2 — THE PATH OF KNOWLEDGE

PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE OF GYANA YOGA

Gyana Yoga is one of the four major branches of yoga, the others being *Bhakti*, *Raja* and *Karma*; *Hatha Yoga* is an auxiliary to *Raja Yoga*. If the earlier parts of the *Vedas* – *Samhitas*, *Brahmanas* and *Aranyakas* – could be called the *Old Testament* of India, the *Upanishads*, together with the *Bhagavad Gita*, are the *New Testament*.

The path of *Gyana Yoga* evolved around 3,000 years ago. Its foundations are in the metaphysical philosophy of the *Upanishads*, which are also called *Vedanta* or the concluding (*anta*) parts of the *Vedas*. The Sanskrit word for knowledge is *gyana*, also spelt *jnana* but pronounced with the sound *ga* (as in *go*) with a slightly nasal sound of *gna*. The word knowledge comes from the Latin *gnoscere* (to know) which is derived from the Greek *gnosis*.

The purpose of *Gyana Yoga* is the realisation of one's spiritual potentialities and liberation or freedom from illusion, delusion, superimposition, untruth, fear, uncertainty and anxiety. Aristotle said that we all have an inherent right to knowledge, the right to know the truth. The *New Testament* says that truth shall make one free. The *Upanishads* say *satyam*, *gyanam*, *anantam Brahma* or the supreme spirit is infinite truth and knowledge.

The second most important of human rights, after the right to life, ie protection under the rule of law and the right to survive through the right to work, is the right to knowledge. It means not only the availability of universal education but the freedom to explore, know and express the

truth after due verification by facts and their relevance, in the best light of one's understanding. This is to enable people to be better informed and protected from exploitation by untruth, manipulated information and religious and ideological demagoguery.

A society remains backward and impoverished because of its addiction to lie to itself and declare truth by fiat, confuse knowledge through regimented information such as under totalitarian governments, befuddle faith through blind conformity and abuse liberty through irresponsible licence. It is the controlled manipulation of knowledge, whether by the state or by a theocratic authority, that impedes the material, moral and spiritual progress of a nation.

A remarkable saying is: The main obstacle to knowledge, on a personal level, is the insolent ego and the main corruptor of faith is passionate dogmatism.

The purpose of knowledge is to know oneself so that the ego can be educated, desires controlled and passions sublimated. It is to know each other in order to improve mutual relationship through sharing of values and to discipline irrational expectation. It is to know the nature of the world and the universe we live in, so as to be free from the ignorance of our surroundings and, therefore, superstition. It is to learn a vocation in order to be economically independent and be able to contribute to society, to deepen one's spiritual and cultural values in the process of trying to be a better person. It is to strive collectively to create a more compassionate, just and civilised society.

Even though it is said that *Gyana Yoga* is practised mainly by meditation on selected verses of the *Upanishads* and on *maha vakyas* or great sayings of related scriptures, it is actually a lifelong process of cultivating a philosophy of life and its application under different circumstances, requiring a lot of wisdom through experience, idealism and strength of character.

It is a common fallacy to think that techniques and daily routine alone, such as getting up before dawn, sitting in a cross-legged posture, closing the eyes and meditating on some mystic symbols, repeating a secret *mantra*, chanting hymns from the scriptures and doing some *asanas* and *pranayamas*, comprise the whole of yoga. These are only disciplinary means to a way of life guided by a state of mind that is shaped and reshaped through profound thinking and understanding spiritual values on the anvil of personal experience.

The real practice of yoga consists in what you make of your life, how you think, feel, behave and relate, how you handle your emotions, passions and prejudices, how you cultivate a broad-minded, unbiased vision of what God or the spirit of your being means to you, how

fulfilling are your relationships and, as such, how you form your overall perspective and, in the process, cultivate yourself.

The term self-realisation covers the gamut of all these, including the realisation of one's higher self which, according to Judeo-Christian credo, is called the 'image of God' consisting of infinite spiritual potentialities identical to the supreme goodness attributed to God. I prefer not to capitalise the letter 's' in the word 'self' simply because we know so little even of our little self and to avoid indulging in the bombastics about the higher self, while yet recognising the universal experience of the flow of the purest of emotions from this spiritual source.

God-realisation and self-realisation are relative terms indicating a lifelong quest which does not cease until the last day of one's life. Human nature being what it is, can never be totally free from its residual dross even in a highly evolved soul. The idealised versions of a self-realised or liberated soul on earth are to show respect for saintly persons or for the creation of an institutional hierarchy.

FOURFOLD DISCIPLINES

Shankaracharya, the 8th century *Vedantin*, sets down some basic requirements for a Gyana Yogi in his *Vivekachudamani*, which are also elaborated by other teachers as *sadhana chatustaya* or fourfold spiritual disciplines. They are, of course, not the only ones for, or exclusive to, *Gyana Yogis*.

Viveka or cultivation of a discerning intelligence: to think using facts, not indulging in emotional fantasies. To try to know the nature of reality by uniting the perception of the external with the understanding of one's relationship with it through an inward search for its relevance. It is to know the nature of *maya* or the illusion experienced when under the spell of infatuation or being a slave of attachment, passions and desires.

Viveka should also make one free from the myth about *maya* which projects the world as an illusion, in itself an irresponsible attitude born of unresolved frustration and discontentment on account of one's foolish attachment caused by self-love. The world is not an illusion but an empirical, even if changing, reality. Just because something is subject to change does not make it illusory. The illusion, or the avoidance of it, consists in one's attitude, perception of relevance and relationship to life.

Here are some examples. Money as a token for acquiring material objects is not an illusion, nor are the objects illusory in themselves. It is hypocritical to deny their reality. Illusion is in the idea that money can buy friendship or love, or that material objects can make one happy, even if they do make life easier. The chemical property of the liquid in a £50 bottle of perfume is surely not an illusion. Its molecular reality is undeniable. The illusion is in a silly girl's imagining that the use of it will make her physically desirable enough for the eventual purpose of landing a prince charming.

One would be a liar to say that to buy a house for which someone has worked hard for years, is an illusion. Its reality to give protection against the elements and material security by the title of ownership is obvious and necessary. But, just as one does not live by bread alone, one is not happy with material reality by itself. Behind this external reality there is an inner reality which one seeks to relate with, for we are both matter and spirit. It is the reality of having a home which consists in a psychological experience of love and care, a sense of belonging through sharing of values, understanding and support, an inner meaning of a home behind the external ownership of a house.

As such, whereas it will be irresponsible to deny the reality of a house by indulging in such inanity as the 'snake-in-the-rope' analogy [1], it will be even more irresponsible to neglect the nurturing of the greater reality of a home, wherever or with whomever or amidst whatever surroundings one lives, even if that be only a temporary home.

Vairagya or dispassion is acquired by the application of *viveka* in one's daily life. It does not mean a lack of interest or involvement. It means to free oneself from dependence on others at all levels, but mainly emotionally as in an ego-ridden, possessive relationship. It means to deepen one's spiritual love through the sublimation of physical passions.

The philosophy of *vairagya* consists in non-expectation while being unselfishly involved in the welfare of those one loves. It is not a moribund state of mind, the negative goal of which is to be alive to nothing, to avoid responsibility and to vegetate in the dusk between life and death.

¹ A Vedantic saying about the illusory perception of the world as one would presume a rope lying on the ground to be a snake. One has to be rather dim and unduly apprehensive for such an assumption.

The goal of *vairagya* is to avoid mistakes by loss of judgment in a blindly attached relationship. Its purpose is to understand, educate and purify passions and desires, and to acquire mastery over them for a better direction of one's life. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says: "The spirit of man consists of desire. As is his desire, so is his resolve. As is his resolve, so is his deed. As is his deed, so is his fate. If a man regulates his desire properly, he can lead himself to a desirable destiny".

The ideal is to have a measure of control over one's life. It means: do not be resigned to presumptuous unknown *karmas* of a past life which cannot be verified anyhow, do not be a victim of an unseen fate, do not be like a dry leaf tossed about by the gusts of other people's attitudes, do not be weak. The *Mahabharata* says, "to be weak is a great sin".

Vairagya should neither be mistaken for a state of lack of ego. However much one tries, one cannot be free from the ego. One can only suppress it or hide it. To be unselfish and unassuming is a virtue, but to be without ego is not a desirable goal. The ego, or the consciousness of one's individuality, is imperative in making a choice, in order to be personally responsible. Also, a person with a listless ego can be a victim of another's strong ego and, thus, may be easily manipulated and exploited.

It is understandable, though, how uncomfortable one can be in the company of self-important persons, especially if they happen to be stupid. The ideal is to educate, refine and sublimate the ego, not to throw one's weight around and be obnoxious, not to be vain and conceited, for there is a lot to learn and much to improve in oneself. To be modest ought to be a natural virtue. Ignorance and dumbness combined with pretension and vainglory are malodorous ingredients for repugnance.

Shat-sampatti or the sixfold virtues to cultivate are:

- **Shama** or tranquillity is acquired through the practice of detachment, patience, tolerance and understanding of human nature and meditation on the qualities of inner peace and freedom. It is also acquired by recognising and correcting the causes of restlessness which are basically due to an excess of the ego, too many desires, uncontrolled passions such as anger and infatuation, and an absence of love due to one's selfishness.
- **Dama** is self-control, not through repression or guilt-complex, but by the love of the ideal directing us as to why one should sublimate a negative instinct such as resentment, because one is hurt more by it than the person resented. It is achieved by the substitution of a higher emotion through loving and helping those who need our love and attention, and by the

practice of charity of heart. Patanjali calls this substitution process *pratipaksha bhavana* or a counterposing of feelings.

- **Titiksha** does not mean foolish austerity but signifies endurance of adverse conditions without complaining, after one has tried unsuccessfully to change them. Reinhold Niebuhr speaks eloquently of this ideal: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference”. It also means self-denial in order to strengthen will power and physical endurance so as to toughen the body and mind.
- **Uparati** is the aspiration for inner satisfaction with the help of a higher desire in the process of overcoming a lower desire, such as sensual passion, through spiritual love or a desire to be famous by a desire for selfless service. It is also a form of substitution.
- **Shraddha** or faith is cultivated, not by conformity or blind acceptance of a credo, but by a careful examination of the premises and motivation of one’s beliefs, ie if they are a manner of hoping for what is convenient or wishful thinking, or if they represent a true love of the ideal on which one’s faith is focused. When faith is love, it means to search for the true nature of the object of faith. It means the practice of those spiritual qualities represented by such an object of faith, the person of Jesus to a Christian, for example.
- **Samadhana** is resolution of doubts and inner contradictions through study and contemplation. It also means strengthening of resolve to do one’s best in what should be done and commitment to ideals, with a mind free from fanaticism.

WHAT IS LIBERATION?

Mumukshutwa is the last of the four sets of disciplines given by Shankaracharya. Some commentators translate this term as a ‘burning longing for liberation’. It is not to be misunderstood, however, as an escape from the ‘cycle of birth and death’ as the goal is superficially thought of by many Hindus, or as some Christians seeking salvation in order to avoid eternal damnation in hell. Given the choice, one is more likely to choose reincarnating into a state of existence known to oneself rather than opting for what is an unverified promise of a heavenly sojourn for eternity.

As of now, personally it matters little to me as to what happens after death. In order to believe in an afterlife or be afraid of death, one has to be sufficiently attached to the present life. If there is a reincarnation, as the *Upanishads* and also Pythagoras and Plato believed, it makes little difference because the conscious mind is not carried over to the next which would allow us to remember the past motivation for striving for a better life.

Eternal heaven or hell, or being hurled into an animal birth, are not convincing enough for a rational mind, for even the most imperfect judge would not be so drastic in so judging a person in the dock before him. On the death of the body, the soul being dissolved in the universal spirit would be ideal, in the manner of the symbolic doll made of salt which dissolves as it starts to swim in the ocean in search of its origin. But no one can be sure of one's preference at the moment of death, if a choice is possible. It is unrealistic to underestimate the attachment to life.

What is more important is the tangible kind of liberation one should seek in this life, the only one we know sufficiently well to be able to cope with it, to take measure of and handle with sufficient care so as not to hurt others and ourselves, to make the best of what we have, within potentially and without circumstantially. Thus, *mumukshutwa* can be interpreted as a longing to be free from the defects of human nature each day of one's life, rather than waiting for liberation or salvation after death.

Mumukshutwa is spiritual aspiration through a life devoted to 1) understanding, restraint and sublimation of mundane desires and passions; 2) integrity, honesty and straightforwardness; 3) compassion, generosity of heart, selfless service and love of one's fellow beings; 4) education, discipline and refinement of the ego; and 5) commitment to such basic values as accountability, duty, trustworthiness, constancy, loyalty, responsibility, reliability and moral courage. The true meaning of *mumukshutwa* is to be free from the contradiction of these ideals in our character. It is, indeed, a lifelong process and demands attention every day.

In a similar category of interpretation *mumukshutwa* can be defined as a longing for liberation from twelve *kleshas* or causes of human suffering: 1) *ahamkara*, ego; 2) *swartha*, selfishness; 3) *darpa*, arrogance; 4) *mada*, intoxication by pride; 5) *moha*, infatuation; 6) *kama*, lust; 7) *krodha*, anger; 8) *lobha*, greed; 9) *matsyarya*, jealousy; 10) *irsha*, envy; 11) *dwesha*, hatred; and 12) *dambha*, hypocrisy.

Far from being a dry intellectual pursuit, *Gyana Yoga* is a practical philosophy of life. *Gyana* is a mental vision formed through a search for reality and strengthened by its application in daily life. It includes faith and devotion, mental discipline and meditation that inspired the teachings of *Bhakti* and *Raja Yogas*. The basic line, however, is liberation from *avidya* or ignorance and *maya* or illusion due to ignorance of reality. *Vidya* or knowledge of reality in following the path of truth as per one's best understanding, however, is the primary concern of *Gyana Yoga*.

Transcendental knowledge is its goal, but this should not be taken to mean jumping out of one's mind into an airy state of blissful loftiness. The term is indicative of an ever-widening dimension of knowledge. As knowledge is infinite, any revelation is subject to a better revelation and any transcendental knowledge is geared to a greater transcendence. To transcend something, you must know well what you are transcending. As knowledge has to be defined, there can always be a better definition. As such, *Gyana Yoga* is free from dogmatism characteristic of revealed religions.

The first step of *Gyana* is the awareness that one does not know enough. The *Kena Upanishad* says: “He who knows not [that he] knows not, knows not. He who knows [that he] knows not, knows”. The second step is to find its validity by application, so that affirmations such as ‘reality is *Brahman*’ or ‘that thou art’ do not remain figments of imagination. It is more important to know the truth of ‘what am I’ and start working on oneself from that level than to jump into an ineffable ‘that thou art’.

Like perfection, love, faith and devotion, truth has to be ever progressive and subject to verification in order to be acceptable as truth rather than an opinion. The Latin word for truth is *veritas* and the Sanskrit *satya* (truth) comes from *sat* or that which exists. Whether God as a deity exists or not is not a question of truth but of faith, and the reality of faith is in the truth of its consequence, ie if the believer has spiritual strength and security and, therefore, peace and freedom from fear and anxiety.

WHAT IS GOD?

In *Gyana Yoga*, a personal God such as the heavenly father, is regarded as an idealised and visionary form of the universal spirit, not physical but spiritual, shaped and reshaped by the individual's devotional aspiration which is conditioned by one's cultural and historical background. As such, it is not imperative to a *Gyana Yogi* to believe in a personal deity but in the infinite spirit sustaining life at all levels – from the structuring of matter through energy, to the expression of such spiritual qualities as peace and love, integrity and purity of heart, that are consciously or unconsciously longed for in human existence.

Most religions presuppose a supernatural creator, omnipotent and omniscient. This offers psychological help in the process of survival and sustains hope that life can be happier herein and, due to attachment to the herein, in the hereafter. The *Vedic* religion, by observing the

elemental forces of nature, created supernatural entities behind them. In *Gyana Yoga*, these elemental forces were fused into a transcendental spiritual force called *Brahman* or the universal spirit rather than a person or deity – not a creator but a creative, sustaining, illuminating and dissolving principle.

Through observation we know that a life-giving principle enables continuity of existence. For example, the seed of a tree becomes another tree, so too with animals and humans. Matter is substantiated through energy, living beings through the vital force, and the universe including our earth, through a cosmic force whether or not one calls it a combination of electromagnetic, gravitational, cohesive and de-cohesive forces.

In an earlier age, before the evaluation of *Gyana Yoga*, the instinct of fear and the desire to be protected and happy, created sacrificial rituals in order to propitiate the elemental forces of nature. To promote a wholesome outlook, *Gyana Yoga* postulated that there is a superior force behind natural forces, that the universe is the body of this spiritual force of God, that all life is sacred, for there is God in all and, if you love God, you love nature, animals and human beings. This postulation of divine immanence, while yet being transcendental, is a unique contribution of *Gyana Yoga* to the spiritual culture of humanity.

The diffidence to and fear of the supernatural gave place to optimism and love of idealism. Antagonism among the worshippers of different religious deities was addressed by making these gods various expressions of the same spiritual essence as per the differing predilections in the cultural backgrounds of the people to express their devotion and aspiration, rather than to subordinate or annul them under a supremely dictatorial God.

Gyana Yoga speaks of *prakriti* as the material force in creation, making evolution possible through interaction and competition, elimination and assimilation. Behind *prakriti*, out of which the body and mind are formed with instincts and passions, is *purusha* or the spiritual force. This is expressed by love and truth, purity and selflessness, and harmony and peace in human consciousness.

The spiritual force is the essence of the individual soul that is identical with the infinite spirit. For example, if the sun is the source of light, the content of the individual soul can be compared to a spark in a state of embodiment. The physical body is the vehicle and within it is the mind containing instincts, memories and a discerning intelligence. Within the mind is hidden

the spiritual spark giving it the light of perception and life to the body. The mind is like a lampshade. The cleaner the lampshade, the clearer the expression of the light.

WHAT IS DESTINY?

The interaction of the material and spiritual forces shapes human destiny. When the spiritual force has a better sway over the material force, there is harmony and life is happier. When the material force dominates the spiritual force, there is conflict with its consequent suffering. In a state of fusion of these two forces the infinite spirit is transcendent and, thus, impartial and beyond good and evil.

Without the interaction of these two forces emerging from a transcendental source, consciousness cannot be evaluative. *Prakriti* or nature by itself is neither moral nor immoral, such as in the suffering brought about by an earthquake to both the good and the wicked alike and, thus, cannot be called an act of God but a consequence of an evolutionary process in nature.

Our responsibility to both these forces in awakening and tapping the spiritual and controlling and utilising the natural within and without, makes us the hewer of our destiny. However, there is always an element of the unknown which *Gyana Yoga* tries to explain by the philosophy of *karma*. Unlike in many religions, the infinite spirit or God of the *Upanishads*, does not reward or punish. One reaches out to it through holy aspiration and draws strength and inspiration for one's deeds. It is the individual who rewards and punishes himself through these deeds.

The philosophy of *karma* is a rationalisation of destiny as a substitute to the presumption about God's will and nihilistic pessimism about the unfairness of life, such as the circumstance of birth, inequality of opportunity, difference in intelligence, inborn talents and character traits, the instances of some who try to live honestly losing and some of the wicked winning. It tries to answer the questions of why life is so unequal and full of vagaries.

There is nothing dogmatic about the theory of *karma*, as also with the other basic philosophical positions in yoga, but an attempt is made to promote an understanding of the nature of life. If it helps, fine. If it does not, search more and find your own solution.

As attachment to life causes notions about afterlife and as reward and punishment determine the nature of afterlife in heaven or hell, the idea of one life alone makes divine justice

brutal and amnesty brought about by repentance only rather farcical. The philosophy of *karma* and the inevitable reincarnation is an attempt, however imperfect, to make life fairer.

Love of life is inherent in all and leads to attachment to our existence, and this attachment to notions of immortality. Immortality presupposes life after death. As desire for a life free from trouble assumes an experience of happiness, and as no happiness can be sustained as such without the polarity of experience, a state of permanent bliss is an irrational expectation.

Since everything in creation is subject to change, the *Upanishads* presume heaven and hell to be as impermanent as the earth, and are for a temporary sojourn only for the virtuous and the wicked, respectively. Symbolically they ought to be regarded as a part of life's experience right here on earth.

The predilection to reincarnation on earth is an acknowledgement of the preference of the known rather than the unknown, if one is given the choice. However, the *Upanishads* speculate about many planes of existence of higher and lower levels of evolution. Such an idea is surely not impossible considering that in the galaxy of our solar system alone there are a hundred to two hundred thousand million stars. If a medium-sized star like our sun can have an earth among its nine planets with a life-supporting environment, there could be millions of others among the billions of galaxies.

Ultimately, *Gyana Yoga* presumes that when a human being attains an optimum level of spiritual evolution and when all earthly desires are satiated and sublimated, there remains only the longing of the pure essence of the soul to merge itself into its origin: the infinite, eternal, universal and transcendental spirit. The embodied spirit finally returns to its source. The doll made of salt loses its embodiment in the salt of the ocean.

PATHS ARE INTERRELATED

As in other yogas, *Gyana* requires guidance, ethical conduct and self-discipline. First is through study and contemplation. It is an individual search, although with the help of teachers. Spiritual dependence on any external authority is not encouraged and only guidance sought in order to improve one's discernment. Ultimately, all learning is through personal experience.

Ethical conduct needs an adequate sense of right and wrong developed through study and contemplation, and substantiated by practical experience and the evaluation of the results of one's actions. Self-discipline is best acquired through inspiration of the ideal behind the act of

discipline. If you want something for your good, you have to love the goal with your heart and soul.

It is a mistaken idea that *Gyana Yoga* is devoid of emotion, for knowledge and devotion, which is a higher form of emotion, are two sides of the same coin. The two cannot be separated. Just as *Gyana* is not merely an intellectual vision, neither is *Bhakti* a flux of emotionalism. Through devotion comes peace and through knowledge strength, through devotion, grace and through knowledge wisdom.

Brahman, while not being a deity but infinite spirit, is grace that is love and light that is knowledge. Knowledge is born in the heart through spiritual aspiration, not in the head. Reason or *yukti* (literally, uniting) is learned in the head through intellectual discipline and *Gyana*, or wisdom, is awakened in the heart as the result of absorbing the essence of knowledge through the practice of spiritual ideals.

In *Gyana Yoga*, God is neither one nor many but a transcendental and universal spirit. The infinite cannot be particularised as one, or even absolute (*ab*, from, *solvere*, free), because the absoluteness of the absolute is dependent on the non-absolute and, thus, cannot be ‘free from’ or truly absolute. There are no greater or lesser gods but better and lesser understanding of spiritual values and, therefore, of God.

The immanence of the transcendental spirit gave birth to morality which *Gyana Yoga* does not consider as social norms but as a basic respect for life expressed through disciplines like non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), chastity (*brahmacharya*), non-stealing or honesty (*asteya*), and non-covetousness (*aparigraha*). These were to be codified many centuries later by Patanjali.

Teachings of the scriptures are called threads (*sutra*) with which one has to weave one’s own garment of realisation. Illusions are not outside but in our own mind. The changing nature of the material world does not make it unreal, just as one’s ideation about the reality of *Brahman* does not make God any more real in life but rather the practice of spiritual values attributed to him.

Gyana Yoga respects saints and prophets and acknowledges their role in the guidance of humanity. It insists on the autonomy of the individual spirit and personal responsibility for spiritual progress. Whereas God’s grace and the unique role of a personal deity such as Jesus

Christ for Christians, and Krishna for the Vaishnavite Hindus, are imperative in *Bhakti Yoga*, but they are not basic to *Gyana Yoga*.

Ethical conduct is meant to give a concrete expression to knowledge, devotion and meditation. It is a common imperative to all yogas, as are also self-denial and self-discipline in order to gain inner strength. Without integrity and mental clarity (*Gyana*), love and compassion (*Bhakti*), one-pointed and balanced mind (*Raja*), and righteous and selfless conduct (*Karma*), no branch of yoga can be of great significance².

THE SPIRIT OF THE UPANISHADS

The fulfilment of a sense of belonging is one of the deeper human needs. In all civilisations, the questions about our origin and the purpose of existence have troubled thinking minds in search of an inner security and the reason for being alive. Some 40,000 years ago, man began to express his relatedness to life through his cave paintings and, much earlier, his feelings by blowing into his bamboo flute. Some 9,000 years ago agricultural communities were already living on the banks of the Euphrates, Tigris, Jordan, Nile and Yellow rivers. In ancient India, some 6,000 years ago, agricultural communities were thriving in the region of the 5 rivers (*pancha apas* from which the name, Punjab, is derived).

Rains and floods, so necessary for agriculture, gave man a sense of relatedness to nature. His primitive mind was frightened by natural forces: lightning, thunder, storm, earthquake, death. Man's constant companion was fear, even as it is today in a reasonable form. His life was, and still is, violent because he has evolved from the brute forces of nature.

We are individual capsules of thousands of millions of cells, each with a limited and similar intelligence of its own, bearing the imprint of not only our physical forms and susceptibility to disease but also emotional and character patterns, transforming and evolving, adapting and mutating in relationship to the environment through their own momentum as well as by our individual effort.

² Excerpts from class talks given at St Vincent's monastery in Mill Hill, London, between 1-7 June 1991 during a spiritual retreat.

The idea that man originated from a divine being came much later to help him to overcome his brutish nature through a higher sense of identity. For identity serves its purpose, ie to give security and fulfilment, only when directed upward. However, those who devised such an identity extended their own imperfect nature by making the creator try to liquidate his creation by deluge (*Genesis*), having become disgusted with it. Man transferred his insecurity and jealousy by making God demand that no other gods be adored before him and threaten that if idols were worshipped, not only would such a worshipper be punished, but his children and their children also. Thus, was revealed man's vengeful character (the first two of the *Ten Commandments*) and his distressing egolatriy (*Bhagavad Gita*).

The clever amongst men exploited this fear for survival by inventing a series of rites to propitiate supernatural entities called gods which were linked to the various natural forces which threatened him, thereby creating a caste for commiseration between men and gods. The murderous nature of man expressed itself through human sacrifice of those whom he did not like or was envious of. A little improvement in his relationship to the supernatural was shown by the sacrifice of a bull in Sumer, a horse in ancient India (*Ashwamedha Yagna*), and a ram in Judea.

In Vedic India, some 3,800 years ago, poets began to sing hymns in praise of the entities behind natural forces because man was in awe of them or frightened by them, eg lightning (*Indra*); needed them for agriculture (*Varuna*); or survival (*Vayu* and *Agni*). Man's relationship to *Jehova* was not very different, being afraid of or in need of him for protection. All these responses show that we have evolved from the forces of nature, reflecting the violence of the storm and the gentleness of the breeze, the domination of the powerful and the submission of the weak.

From the gods we needed power because being powerful enabled us better to survive. We needed wisdom because our life would be full of fears if we were ignorant. Thus, *Zeus* became the powerful leader of the Greek gods and, to a lesser extent, *Indra* of the Indian gods. *Jehova* became the only true God for the Jews, rejecting all other gods, in the same way as Moslems only worshipped *Allah*, and *Christ* was the only incarnation of God for Christians.

MYSTICAL VISION

In the later Vedic period, about the time of Solomon, the *Upanishads* tried to unify all Hindu gods into a mystical, eternal, all-pervasive, infinite spirit, called *Braham*. This infinite spirit, by

becoming all, not rejecting any, made religious prejudice irrelevant, and it became irrelevant as to how it was named. This did not solve social prejudice of course, but an attempt was made at theological tolerance. The transformation of a primordial and transcendental spiritual essence by its creative principle (*brahman*) and its sustenance by its cosmic mind (*Hiranyagarbha*) through the laws of nature (*prakriti*) was a unique idea originating in the *Upanishads*. However, no explanation was given as to how a perfect essence could become an imperfect creation.

A product of this mystical vision was the Buddha who, 2,500 years ago, thought that love among people was more important than what one thought about God. He taught that love was the water which put out the fire of hate, and said that when one's house was on fire, one did not ask who caused it, but rather tried to put the fire out. So, indeed, it is pointless to dispute about God when there is so much suffering in life. More important is to find ways to overcome that suffering through spiritual effort.

Some 2,000 years ago, a great reformer arose in a Hellenised Jewish society for whom God was love and his justice was tempered by mercy. Jesus made loving God meaningful by loving one's neighbours and returning good for evil as a way of overcoming the vengefulness in human nature. He appealed to the good in us and, like Buddha, taught that the retribution of evil can only perpetuate it. The way out was to do the opposite.

Neither the Vedic immanence of God by which we can somewhat soften the coarseness of life, nor Jewish ideal of not treating others as one would not like to be treated oneself, Buddhist compassion, nor Christian charity or Moslem brotherhood, managed to free the mind from intolerance of course. However, they acted as a powerful influence helping to civilise society.

A mystical vision of the "tree of life" rises in the *Upanishads* and later in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a tree which has roots in heaven and its trunk, branches, leaves and fruits, on earth. So, our earthly existence is conditioned by our material surroundings and yet draws its sap from the roots projected into our divine identity.

The *Upanishads* speak of our bodies as a part of the universe, our minds as sparks of the cosmic intelligence trapped in its opaque jackets of matter, and our souls as droplets of infinite spiritual essence expressing itself through truth, love, beauty and goodness, however limited this may be in our finite minds. Such traits help to make morality meaningful and provide a healing grace to life.

The *Upanishads* underrate rituals and glorify *gyana* or wisdom which is meaningful only when applied on a tangible level in human relationship. They do not promote suffering but, rather, the means to overcome it through renunciation of attachment and pride, and through truth, love and self-discipline. They ask for the worship of Brahman through the practice of three ideals: *rita* which is the sum total of righteousness, truth, faith and divine law; *yagna* or sacrifice of ignorance and selfishness; and *tyaga* or renunciation of passion, vanity and slavery to the sense objects.

Sacrifice is not a diminishing act but a creative process, because knowledge frees us, enabling us to be creative, whilst ignorance and selfishness are limiting. By renouncing attachment and pride, passion and vanity, we learn to love truly and relate better with others. Seeking truth, we improve our understanding of life and can deal with its problems without being affected by *maya* or illusion, a product of perception without wisdom or perception distorted by passion and attachment. Thus, we refrain from the illusion of regarding the world as an illusion.

ALL-PERVASIVE SPIRIT

The *Chandogya Upanishad* gives an all-pervasive vision of God and man's relatedness to him which is a typical elan in *Gyana Yoga*:

*The infinite spirit
Is above and below,
To the east and to the west,
To the north and to the south;
Truly, it is the whole universe.*

Then comes the teaching in the same *Upanishad* about dissolving our individual egos:

*I am above and below, I am
To the east and the west,
To the north and to the south;
Truly, I am this whole universe.*

After this message of the relatedness of the human spirit to the transcendental and yet immanent infinite spirit, a vision of our destiny is given in the *Mundaka Upanishad*.

*As rivers flowing forward
Find their home in the ocean,
Leaving name and form behind,
So does man, released
From name and form,
Draw near the divine spirit
Which is beyond the beyond.*

This inseparability of the immanence and transcendence of God is a special contribution of the *Upanishads* to the philosophical and religious search of humanity. The all pervasiveness of *Isha* (Lord or God) is narrated in the *Isha Upanishad*:

*The unmoving one
Is swifter than thought;
The gods (luminous intellects)
Cannot get hold of it,
As it speeds ahead of them.
It moves and moves not,
It is far (for the ignorant)
And yet near (to the wise);
It is within the whole universe
And yet beyond it.*

The *Upanishads* speak of God interchangeably as *purusha* (supreme being), *brahman* (infinite spirit) and *paramatman* (supreme soul), while maintaining that such a being is formless, all-pervasive and transcendent, of which the soul or spirit of man is a part. It is not part of the partless spirit but like the formless space within a jar (*ghatakasha*) taking the form of the jar and

apparently being in a state of separateness from the formless space around it. As such, the human vehicle is the body, with the mind and personality being the jar.

The many visions or ideas about God can be compared to the colours of a rainbow. As man tries to find his real self through many cultures, religions and spiritual inspiration, the white light of his inner spirit is refracted in the many hues of his mind. Although apparently clashing with each other when set apart, ultimately they come from the same source: the white light.

This is the spirit of the *Upanishads* which shone for a while in ancient India. To negate this universal vision and make God a tribal deity is to use religion as a divisive and obscurant force rather than being a uniting and illuminating influence in life which its Latin root *re-ligare* (reunite) literally means. Religion becomes an opiate when it sets apart God from the world and makes him a means of escape from suffering that is a part of life. This does not solve the problems that cause suffering but anaesthetises one to them.

The obvious reality is that man has not found the happiness he seeks and, in the process of this search, has created a God of his imagination. If the imagination is primitive and merely serves the need for protection, the bones of his fear and prejudice rattle in the closets of his scriptures. If his imagination widens and soars as spiritual aspiration, he finds the reality of peace and fulfilment and tries to make the world a better place to live in, to the extent he is capable of, by the expression of his higher self. Thus, the meaning of life is realised individually as to what we want to make of it and are capable of effectuating. The *Upanishads* ask us to shape it by three means:

Through loving devotion (*bhakti*) to what are noble or to spiritual ideals, the supreme symbol of which is God, without a threat of having to be accountable to a deity and the need to grovel for mercy, and without emotional theatrics.

Through contemplative understanding (*gyana*) of what such ideals mean in the depth of our feelings rather than through an intellectual effort; in a pure heart rather than by doctrinaire dialectics.

We make such an understanding of our love meaningful for what we adore spiritually, in the way we act (*karma*) and get along and work with others, in how we love those who are dear to us, how we hope and manage our desires, how we cope with adversity that may cross our path, and how we pick ourselves up from the consequence of our errors, our minds and feelings temporarily bruised but the spirit remaining unsullied.

THE VISION OF VEDANTA

Is there a meaning to our existence? It is for the individual to make one. By itself there is none, considering the massive, brutal forces and the consequent suffering through which life has evolved. In the march of civilisation, we have tried to tame our animal nature and refine our sensibilities to widen the awareness of what we are and wish to be and what is around us. Through such an interaction we seem to seek out a purpose, create a motivation, for being alive. The bottom line is love of life.

The invention of agriculture nearly 10,000 years ago forced us to live in communities and led to initial experiments in what should be our behaviour pattern for the sake of social harmony and creativity. Out of this, evolved notions of justice by means of retribution and reward.

Even earlier, the struggle for survival created an inherent insecurity in our mindset and initiated the role of shamans who gave the sick herbal and mineral extracts and intoned magical incantations to cast off the evil eye by imagining and invoking supernatural forces. Millennia rolled on.

From insecurity came fear, and from fear the need to be saved. Thus, came about the idea of salvation. Few thought that it was cruel to be damned by the original sin of a mythical ancestor that was neither comprehensible nor fair, and then be offered the grail of salvation!

Since human relationship was not all that pretty, the cloud of unhappiness and not being adequately fulfilled emotionally, drifted in and out of our consciousness. Thus, fear and unhappiness became the parents of religion, and tribal identity the response for group security, its jealous mistress.

Attachment to life as we know it, to our body and the objects of pleasure that make it happy, led to notions of an afterlife minus the miseries. The urge for happiness and the avoidance of suffering being inherent, there rose visions of paradise and fantasies of eternal bliss.

Few bothered to think that the intensity of experience wanes through continuity, and that psychological experience is only possible through its relativity to the residual memory of its opposite. It was easier to be spaced out in a trans-dimensional fog than to come to grips with tangible reality requiring personal responsibility.

Being tired of the bipolar swings from excitement to ennui, the fatigue of the spirit gave birth to the idea of going beyond the mind, rising above duality, and merging in the infinite spirit.

Since we did not want those we disliked on earth to be around in paradise, and were too weak to punish those who had harmed us, we invented an appropriate place like hell for them to be roasted in!

As civilisation evolved, the angst of existence produced some real philosophers – not the stereotype of wool-gatherers – who sought answers to the quirks of life from within, asking the reasons why, observing and learning from experience, and trying to free the mind from superstition and ignorance.

FAITH AND REASON

The second oldest profession had formed much earlier, to which in a way I belong, that of priests, the successors of shamans. For inevitably, the spirit takes a back seat after the flesh. They tried to cope with a vastly numerous and rather superstitious clientele by seeking guidance from above, communicating in their fertile minds with heavenly deities.

Brahmans, or intermediaries between *Brahman*, the creator, and his imperfectly created beings, crafted *karma-kanda* in the *Vedas*. These consisted of ritualistic duties to absolve sin and, therefore, punishment, and to ensure heavenly existence in the afterlife, in the meantime keeping themselves employed!

The *rishis* or philosophers devised *gyana-kanda* or moral duties inspired by the knowledge of spiritual identity among fellow beings, and searched for reality behind appearance. They sought the roots of the spirit inside human nature through basic observations: that truth gave security, unselfish love fulfilment, and purity of heart, peace. They found that this was a universal experience.

Hebrew prophets such as Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Micah and others, having earlier discovered (if you don't like the subversively honest word, 'invented') God, as he came to be known in Western and Islamic societies, and then set out a code of conduct through the *Ten Commandments*. They sought guidance from above by means of their faith in order to interpret what God had said through Moses in the *Torah*. Others made later contributions.

Hellenic philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras and others, sought direction from within in the fountain of reason and spirited dialogue, thereby enabling a personal search and consensus.

Both did so through a commitment to the ideals they loved, the former by means of obedience and the latter through reason. The Hebrew prophets had the motivation of heaven and the fear of hell. The Hellenic philosophers had the satisfaction of the search for truth and in being fair to all citizens alike (ignoring slaves).

The imperative of commandment is obedience, and the tool of obedience in the common mind is fear. The imperative of reason is mutual welfare, and the tool of discipline is the love of rational analysis rather than the manipulation of the emotions of fear and unhappiness as happened in religion.

Religion found the individual to be weak-minded, indecisive, selfish and prone to avoid responsibility. It provided the alternative as submission to God's will (as though there were a direct line of communication), while obeying his commandments as scripture dictated. The celebration of the suffering of Job and of the virtuous, not questioning God's wisdom, became the test of faith.

Since human nature is more emotional than rational, more lazy and thus less likely to work on itself and more likely to get emotional about a deity in appealing for a way out, religion succeeded and philosophy failed. You have only to look at the clientele.

Few bothered to think that Job's case was exceptional in being rewarded in this very life. To the suffering individual, the incomprehension of a divine mind becomes meaningless as does the promissory note of reward in the intangible afterlife.

Suffering by itself corrupts and promotes servility, unless one specifically tries to learn from it before becoming benumbed. The proclamation of its virtue also comes handy in offsetting the possibility of a revolution by the masses against a minority of privileged classes.

For some, like Job, faith is the acceptance of fate ordained by God. For the vast majority, faith is just hope. For only a few, faith is commitment to the ideals that the deity ought to inspire: purity of heart, selfless love and integrity; devotion, discernment and dispassion; loyalty, fairness and duty; responsibility, humility and accountability.

Or belief is a bridge between the known and the unknown. It begins with a provisional acceptance requiring a search in order to encounter the reality of its premise. If you accept

nothing, you find nothing. If you accept something and do nothing to find its truth, you remain stupid! If the search is fruitful, the element of doubt inherent in belief disappears. Then you no longer say, “I believe that is so”, but calmly state “I know that is it so, and yet I have a lot more to know about it”.

Belief by itself means a possibility, even plausibility. If you stretch this too far, it enters the realm of wishful thinking, if not hypocrisy.

CONSCIENCE

Devising the role model of God is fundamental to evolution, as identity serves both the needs for security and upliftment from a deficient state of being. Imagine the shock to self-importance if one is identified with the monkey! Imagine, again, the vanity of chest-thumping for being created equally in the image of God, or the *jivatma* (supreme soul) being identical with the *paramatma* (supreme soul), when at every step the inequality of life is in contradiction. The easy way out is to blame *agyana* (ignorance) or original sin.

The presumption, however, provided the seeds of human rights and adult franchise which took nearly 3,000 years to germinate. Individual spiritual aspiration, however, gave birth to conscience much earlier. The sanctity of life is the basis of democracy.

Conscience is a product of a sense of guilt in giving vent to lower passions and in the process of surviving at the expense of weaker individuals. It is evolutionary in nature and mainly moulded by education and cultural influence. No one is born with a God-given conscience for making a choice.

Raw human nature on its own has no conscience and follows the rule of mother nature (*prakriti*): that might makes right, that the fittest survive at the expense of weaklings, and that cheating is inevitable if one can get away with it.

However, the human spirit, originating from *purusha* (infinite spirit), feels suffocated by such a rule and seeks peace by countering it through self-restraint, self-denial, compassion and fairness to all.

Human nature being a contradiction unto itself, due to the interaction of *purusha* and *prakriti*, falls for the palliative provided by religion that the creator’s wisdom is ineffable, and that if you cannot overcome suffering you have to bear the burden gracefully.

Few bother to see the contradiction. How can the supreme being be all-powerful and yet indifferent to the prevalence of injustice, be all-merciful and yet unable or unwilling to prevent suffering brought about by war, famine, holocaust, Gulag, genocide and pestilence.

Thus arises the philosophy that life is what you are able to make of it, tapping the potentials from within, and making use of the opportunities around, venturing out and seeking them to the best of your ability. Only then can you learn from the quirks of fate. Only by experimenting in real life a premise of knowledge can you know its reality.

ORIGIN OF VEDANTA

Like the *Old Testament*, the *Vedas* relate a story about people who call themselves *arya*. In Sanskrit the word means noble. The *Vedas* are the earliest religious literature extant that have shaped the Hindu view of life. The word is derived from the root *vid*, to know. About the time of Abraham, some 3,700 years ago, the Aryans came from the north-west to the ‘land of five rivers’, *pancha apas*, from which is derived the name of the province: Punjab. They found an already existing civilisation in the Indus valley in what is now Pakistan. Its roots may have existed earlier in Sumeria.

The Aryan tribes were partially absorbed into this culture and then, within a few centuries, expanded into the Gangetic plains and the Himalayan region. They were fascinated by nature and composed many exquisite odes expressing their relationship with the universe. These formed the early part of the *Vedas* and were called *Samhita*. The Aryans recited these odes as part of their religious practice.

By the time of the early Hebrew prophets, nearly 3,000 years ago, the philosophers among the Aryans started composing the *Upanishads*. These came to be known as *Vedanta* and formed the 4th part of the *Vedas*, the second and third parts being *Brahmana* and *Aranyaka*, consisting of rituals and social codes respectively. The word *anta* means conclusion, as well as culmination, of the Vedic teachings.

In *Vedanta*, the sages variously expressed the soaring of the human spirit in search of its identity. Most of the authors of the *Upanishads* which consisted of succinct philosophical treatises, were anonymous. But some, like Yagnyavalkya and Aitareya, identified themselves. Krishna Dwaipayana Vyasa reflected the teachings in his *Brahma-sutra* and, in the name of Krishna, in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Other subsequent philosophers such as Gaudapada, Shankara

and Ramanuja, addressed different facets of *Vedanta*. Some were erudite, dealing with the nature of existence. Others were sculpted in fog in stretching the doctrine of *maya* or illusion!

Vedanta is also known as *Gyana Yoga* or the path of knowledge. The Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*, may have derived from *gyana* and so too the Latin *gnoscere*, to know.

Although *Vedanta* philosophy has its roots in the *Upanishads*, it has a constantly evolving and adapting leitmotif, like any other philosophy or, for that matter, religion, making it meaningful to life.

SPIRITUAL GOAL

The awareness of one's ignorance is the first step to knowledge. The second step is, after learning a premise of knowledge, to apply it in action. One does not know so much by reading and contemplating but by doing, through which alone knowledge improves and becomes useful. Whatever the merits of the awareness of or being one with the infinite, it has done no good to the world!

Knowledge has two sides: 1) empirical and 2) the pertinence of what is perceived empirically. The Sanskrit root for truth is *sat*, or that which exists. In the same way, the Latin for truth is *veritas*, or that which is verifiable. The pertinence of the verifiable has an infinite possibility of widening its understanding and applicability. Empirical chemistry or physics, for example, has an endless relevance to improving the quality of life, as through a proper vocation the shaping of perspective.

The purpose of knowledge is to give us a bearing, thus a measure of security; direction, thus a sense of purpose; and creativity, thus fulfilment. The goal of knowledge is to enlighten the mind and to free it from *avidya* or ignorance. From ignorance is born fear, anxiety, superstition and prejudice. As such, ignorance is the worst pollutant. From fear comes intolerance, and from intolerance, injustice and violence.

The philosophy of *Vedanta* is to regard the world as a stage in which the actors play out a morality play (*lila*), just as in ancient Greece the actors put on different masks to act out their roles. The word personality comes from the Etruscan *phersui*, meaning a mask. Acting out the roles we give ourselves is to fulfil life, not to bear with but to try to overcome suffering and be happy. Happiness (*ananda*) is the innate nature of the spirit, embodied in an inadequate vehicle, living in an imperfect world.

Freedom of the soul (the individual, pure consciousness or *chit*) from material bondage is the spiritual goal, and its merger in the transcendental spirit (*Brahma*) the common destiny. This freedom is attained through devotion to one's inner spirit (*atman*) or that which represents spiritual values, understanding of the various truths of existence, and a life of self-discipline and self-improvement. It is the presence of the soul that makes progress possible.

Life suffers when it is led by the blind force of impulses and mundane desires. The purpose of *Vedanta* philosophy is to understand, educate and sublimate them. It is done by the cultivation of a moral sense and its application in daily life by the practice of basic ideals, not as commandments but as guidelines to cherish.

- **Chitta-suddhi** or purity of heart. To be free from hate, malice, resentment, vengeance, avarice, wickedness and imputing bad motives to others.
- **Daya** or compassion. A feeling heart, spontaneous kindness, being considerate of the needs of others, with matching deeds.
- **Satya** or integrity. A depth of sentiment, rather than sentimentalism, of thinking, of expression through speech and action, not hurting, and honesty to oneself and others.
- **Tyaga** or self-abnegation. Not to be selfish, thinking of the welfare of others before one's own, not to be possessive or a slave of desires, practising detachment, overcoming infatuation.
- **Dama** or self-discipline. Sublimation of passions and lust by selfless love, of anger by patience and tolerance, of greed by self-restraint.
- **Viveka** or discernment. To know the difference between right and wrong by measuring the consequences, ie whether constructive or destructive, unifying rather than divisive, healing rather than hurting, being authentic and not deceitful.
- **Vinaya** or humility. The purification of the ego by practising modesty. Knowing that there is a lot to learn and to improve oneself.
- **Mumukshutva** or spiritual aspiration. A longing to be free from bondage, dependence, attachment and character deficiencies.

PHILOSOPHICAL POSTULATES

The philosophy of *Vedanta* evolved as a positive unifying force of reconciliation among diverging concepts of God in ancient India. Its other purpose was to make religion (*dharma*) a practical way of life by the performance of one's duty (*dharma*) based on righteousness

(*dharma*). To the Sanskrit word for religion, *Vedanta* added the same for duty and righteousness, *dhri* being the root, meaning that which supports.

By the vision of monism, making God a transcendental, all-pervading spirit, rather than a singular, all-important and the only valid deity as in monotheism, it took away the inherent sting of intolerance and iconoclasm. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a lot to learn from it, as indeed all religions should learn from the best in each other.

The broad perspective of *Vedanta* is expressed in the following way: *Brahman* or the infinite spirit is not a deity or a substance that can be confined within a conceptual image, but is the spiritual essence in creation while being transcendental. Thus, polytheistic differences were submerged by the vision that what people call God is but a spiritual form of one's devotion, sacred love and aspiration. It comes into shape in the process of trying to relate to the transcendental spirit.

That is why the *Bhagavad Gita* says that God comes to the devotee in the form of his or her seeking. The *Kena Upanishad* points out that the *devas* or elemental forces of nature have no power of their own but are able to function on account of the supreme spirit (*Brahma*) within them.

Even though *Brahman* cannot be defined, the human spirit can relate to the indefinable through spiritual ideals such as love and truth, but qualified by adjectives which allow it to rise above such qualifications: 1) infinite, to expand them constantly; 2) eternal, to provide the security of permanence; 3) universal, to have the relevance among all, irrespective of religious and cultural background; and 4) transcendental, in order to realise them better for evermore.

The mantra, *Isha vasyam idam sarvam*, in the *Isha Upanishad*, that all is pervaded by the infinite spirit, created for the first time in human consciousness a sense of sanctity for all forms of life, not only for humankind, and not merely confined to one's own tribes, but respect for animals as well. This has only recently penetrated western thinking through the institutions for the prevention of cruelty against animals (even if they are eaten to satisfy greed) and ecological responsibility.

The three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) uphold God as the transcendental, commanding creator. The *Brahma* of *Vedanta*, while being transcendental, does not have a dictating role. Being the essence of the universe, as energy or matter, *prakriti* or the neutral natural force, makes evolution possible through the interaction of atoms (*anu*) and so also

its dissolution. Being the essence as *purusha* or spiritual force, it gives birth to individual consciousness, evolving as conscience and shaping moral values.

RECONCILIATION AND UNITY

This vision of the all-pervasiveness of spirit shaped some basic ideals of tolerance, reconciliation and unity.

Vedanta sought to reconcile religious antagonism by the epigraphic comparison of various faiths in search of God as vapours arising from the ocean becoming clouds. Then, by coming into contact with mountains and forming as springs and streams, they began to flow and join together as rivers, coursing through various lands and acquiring their various characteristics before finally once again merging into the ocean from whence they had sprung.

Thus, in spite of religious differences and cultural habits, *Vedanta* postulated that humanity's origin and destiny are the same. The simile of a multihued garland of flowers is also used. Each flower is different but there is a common thread of universal spirit which unites them holistically.

Vedanta spoke of the identity of this spirit as the essence of the individual soul, in the same way that a spark of light is identical with the sun, or a drop of water with the ocean. Thus, all members of humanity, having a common spiritual heritage, should try to rise above religious dogmatism and extend the law of "Thou shalt not kill" beyond their tribal and national groups and live without warfare.

The light of the spirit is equally luminous in every soul (an echo of the Biblical ethos that God created all human beings equally in his own image), but expresses itself in different degrees of transparency through one's conscience. This is due to the shades of opacity or impurity of the covering sheaths or various layers of mind. Uncovering the light within and expressing it through spiritual values in relationship is the goal of life.

No one should be coerced into following a dictated path of faith but each should grow according to the law of one's own evolution as per personal inspiration, choice and effort. Just as there are many paths leading to the summit of a mountain, the role of teachers is only to point them out and provide the expertise of their own experience. It is up to each individual to do the climbing and arrive at the peak of self-realisation. It is better not to be bombastic by capitalising the 's'.

The ultimate goal is to merge the individual soul with transcendental consciousness. This is illustrated by the simile of a doll made of salt which wanted to know where it came from and, entering the ocean, began to swim in search of its origin. The more it swam, the less became its form which finally disappeared. Its essence remained which became one with its source, the ocean.

The mystical vision of God, not referring to a deity, is given in *Vedanta* by the phrase, *sat-chit-ananda*, reflecting the ultimate longing for the reality of truth (*sat*), its ever-widening comprehension (*chit*), and realisation as supreme love (*ananda*).

The deity is meant to serve the need of a limited mind to provide focus, but is a superimposition. No one should be dogmatic about its supremacy.

OTHERWORLDLINESS

There is a running thread of otherworldliness throughout Indian spiritual literature. It has caused a structural weakness in the mindset of those raised on it, thwarting inventiveness, creativity and initiative. There have been occasional flashes of excellence in mathematics, such as in the invention of the decimal before the common era, and in metallurgy, as in the case of the 1,700 year old iron pillar still unoxidised in the complex of Qutab Minar in Delhi.

However, one hardly sees any contribution to science and engineering, let alone social engineering, to improve the quality of life. There is nothing like the creativity of early medieval China or late medieval Europe. This lack of concern for material things has been commented upon by some Macedonians who came to India with Alexander the Great. He took with him to Babylon two Indian gymnosophists, ascetic philosophers, who hardly wore any clothing.

Later, the chroniclers Al Beruni and Ibn Batuta in the courts of the Turko-Afghan invaders, in the 10th/11th and 13th centuries, respectively made similar comments in addition to rating Indians as irrational, unlike the Chinese.

Yet, in Chanakya's *Arthashastra*, one finds deep insight into realpolitik. In the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Panchatantra* (all BCE) and, later, in the *Puranas*, there is comment about social values based on moral principles to cope with the foibles of human nature. But one cannot avoid the deep-rooted antipathy to the world in Indian religious lore. Anything rejected remains misunderstood.

Christianity shared the same tendency until it became a state religion in the 4th century. Since then, it has paid only lip service to, and assiduously ignored, the otherworldliness in the teachings of Jesus.

In India, there was nothing like the age of reason which unfolded in the UK, France and the USA, some 250 years ago with the rediscovery of the Hellenic homocentric ideals of the rule of reason, fairness to and autonomy of the individual, blended with a theocentric Christian humanism.

The age of reason was, of course, blinkered within the tribal identities of their innovators. The Americans did not condescend to respect basic human rights of native Indians in their own land, let alone consider citizenship, and contemptuously treated African slaves as beasts of burden. In the same way, the British and French excluded the denizens of their colonies from the age of reason. The white man's burden became an egregiously self-righteous euphemism for the white man's greed. It took nearly 200 years for the intellectuals in western democracies to recognise the selective morality of their ancestors, or the uncivilised equation in signs such as "Chinese and dogs are not allowed" at the entrance of the park facing Shanghai's Bund.

Indians never bothered to cultivate a sense of history. Without knowledge of the past, one cannot understand how the present came about and, therefore, fails to correct its deficiencies. Nor can one apply to the present those measures which had proved themselves in the past, in anticipation of the future. When reality is sought in thin air and the tangible world hypocritically dismissed as unreal, stagnation takes over and detachment becomes synonymous with indifference and irresponsibility.

MAYA AND ADVAITA

The doctrine of *maya* is a later addition to *Vedanta* philosophy, denoting the illusory nature of existence. The original teachings do not underrate the importance of the world as *dharmakshetra*, or field of righteous duty. *Maya* indicates the nature of the mind fooling itself by its craving and attachment and forgetting the inner reality behind appearances, such as happiness being in the possession of material wealth and the experience of sensual pleasure. Happiness derives in fact from a state of harmony with oneself and with others.

Maya denotes the temporary nature of life's experience in the sense that no infatuation or sorrow lasts forever, and warns that if the mind conjures up fantasies in a relationship, it should

be prepared for a disillusionment. Not to be carried away by wishful thinking and passions, not to suffer on account of injured vanity, not to be swayed by pride and prejudice, while being balanced in success and failure, pleasure and pain: this is what the doctrine of maya tries to teach.

The thread of unity, *advaita* or non-duality, is emphasised in recognition of bickering selfishness in human nature, and its aggressiveness causing so much division and suffering. It is meant to remind us that the *atman*, or what the Bible calls the image of God, is identical in all. This assumption is to provide the basis of our moral values. *Advaita* is not meant to create a dull uniformity of perception, or to disregard the fact that it is the interaction within multiplicity that makes progress possible.

The ontology of Gaudapada and other philosophers of his ilk that the *jivatman* (individual soul) and the *paramatman* (supreme soul) are one and the same (indivisible, *advaita*), drags down the transcendence of Brahman. Identical in its context, maybe, but to say *aham-brahmasmi* (I am Brahman), or that the spark of light is the same as the sun, smacks of pompous irrationality when you consider that one's human nature will contradict such a bombastic statement sooner or later. What relevancy does it have for real life?

The relevancy of *Vedanta* is to take the best of its adaptable postulations in order to make the journey through life more agreeable, meaningful, creative, enlightening and fulfilling, while rising above religious differences. Its basic message that life should be lived according to spiritual values rather than rituals or devotional exercises was astonishingly far-sighted and is even more valid today that it was nearly 3,000 years ago.

CHAPTER 3 — THE INTEGRAL PATH

FIRST STEPS IN RAJA YOGA

Raja Yoga originated in northern India some 2,300 years ago, although the system was given that name many centuries later. Patanjali classified and expressed in his own way already existing teachings into 8 interrelated parts which he called *Ashtanga Yoga* or yoga with 8 limbs. In his 194 sparse aphorisms (*sutras*), were laid down a moral foundation through the 10 disciplines of *yama* and *niyama*. Then followed an exposition of the value of mastery over postures (*asanas*) for meditation, and regulation of the breath (*pranayama*). Curiously, he did not deal with *Hatha Yoga* as a whole even though some forms had been practised for many centuries without being named as such. To be fair, Patanjali may not have known the benefits of the wide-ranging postures and breathing exercises such as *kapalabhati* (a purificatory *kriya*) on physical health. He would have been put off by some of the weird practices of the ascetics as was Gautama Buddha who was said to have observed: “I do not have to twist my body into knots to attain illumination”.

Patanjali emphasised the path of meditation (*samyama*) through a combined practice of withdrawing attention from the memory of sense objects to conduce a state of abstraction (*pratyahara*) in order to concentrate on (*dharana*), and be absorbed in, one’s spiritual ideal (*dhyana*). He spoke of the highest goal being the union (*yoga*) of the individual soul with the supreme soul (*Ishwara*). This is attained in a transcendental state following the summation of all the previous practices (*samadhi*).

The oldest of the yogas is *Gyana Yoga* or the path of *Vedanta* which evolved around 2,800 to 3,000 years ago, although modern Indian scholars tend to push back the period by about

500 years. They base their hypothesis on archaeological digs in the area of Dwaraka in north western India, the ancient capital of Krishna's kingdom. The philosopher king, later worshipped as an *avatara*, taught a synthesis of many yogas to Arjuna. These were recorded in the *Bhagavad Gita* in the dramatic setting of a battlefield sermon in which Krishna Dwapayana Vyasa extolled the importance of fulfilling one's duty through selfless action, or *Karma Yoga*, as the highest *dharma* (religion). This was to be combined with devotion, the cultivation of virtues and meditation.

Ritualistic practices were universal in ancient India. They became even more prominent in the age of the *Puranas* during the first 1,000 years of the Christian era. They continue to dominate village life today, human nature being very dependent and emotional rather than self-confident and rational. The path of meditation remained exclusive to a minority seeking spiritual progress and self-knowledge. Ancient in origin, *Hatha Yoga* as a system was outlined about 700 years ago in northern India by Swatmarama, a disciple of Gorakhnath, founder of an ascetic sect. Popular in the West, it is practised by a fewer number of people, percentage wise, in India. In its complete and extended form, it is a stepping stone to *Kundalini Yoga* rather than *Raja Yoga*.

Even though more comprehensive, *Raja Yoga* is not a royal (*raja*) path any more than the 3 other major branches of yoga: *Gyana*, *Bhakti* and *Karma*. The 4 paths are interrelated and differ in order to suit individual temperaments while each is indispensable to the other. Without discernment, devotion can become merely emotionalism and, without devotion, discernment, a dry intellectualism. Without selfless service, meditation can become an escapism, and without an inner balance and clarity of perspective through meditation, service can become an exercise of the self-righteous ego. Likewise, the 8 branches of *Raja Yoga* are intertwined. Actually, there are 7 parts to be practised together, *samadhi* or the 8th being a culmination of the 7th, *dhyana*, rather than a practice in itself.

The first 2 consist of basic ideals to guide one's life: 5 restraints (*yamas*) and 5 rules for observance (*niyama*). The following 2 aim to develop physical and mental discipline through steadiness of posture (*asana*) and breath control (*pranayama*) in order to facilitate meditation. The next 3, *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*, aim to smooth the mental waves in order to acquire harmony, a better understanding of oneself, to purify character blemishes and to sublimate passions by *pratipaksha* or affirmative contemplation on their positive qualities, finally reaching spiritual unity.

GUIDELINES FOR MEDITATION

Although rather overrated in western yoga circles, Patanjali made a unique contribution to self-improvement by his method of substituting what is negative through the practice of its positive counterpart. In other words, rather than harping on about what one should not do, one should instead meditate on and do what one ought to. The mind being a field of energy, it needs a channel to express itself. Denying a negative instinct, its energy is repressed and complexes created. By giving the mind a better kind of motivation, its energy is channelled in a constructive way. Patanjali's insight into the nature of the mind laid a foundation for future psychological investigation and his work is probably the earliest of its kind on the subject.

The purpose of *pratyahara* is to make the mind abstract by a counter-feeding process. When the senses are withdrawn as one begins the practice of meditation, the mind immediately starts to feed on its memories, wandering from one to another. A memory is sustained as long as the 'I' is involved. It is impossible to think of something without being a participant, such as one would not remember a billboard on a highway without being interested in what it advertised. So, one of the best methods of *pratyahara* may be practised as follows:

- Sit in a comfortable position with the back, shoulders and neck straight without being rigid. Relax the mind by feeling detached. Do not think that you have to meditate on anything, nor have to stop thinking or make the mind blank. Forget yourself. Breathe spontaneously, being gently conscious of the coolness of the inflowing breath (*puraka prana*) deep inside the head and the warmth of the outflowing breath (*rechaka prana*) inside the nostrils. This is to absorb the mind in a subtle, physical feeling. It should be continuous. From time to time, repeat mentally 'shanti' or peace while inhaling, and 'mukti' or freedom while exhaling. This brings a psychological feeling of inner calm, a profound peacefulness and a deep sense of release from all that is negative.
- When a thought drifts in, say to it "I am not interested in you, I am absorbed in peace". Then gently refocus the mind on the practice. The thought will drift away, lacking your attention. Thoughts will continue to move in and out, of course. Do not resist them but bring the mind back again and again to your practice. As Patanjali says, the key to success is *abhyasa*, continuous practice. The counter-feeding process, replacing wandering, weightier thoughts with subtle, lighter feelings is called *pratyahara*.
- After 5 minutes, pause for a while, de-focus the mind, breathing freely and keeping the eyes closed. Then begin the next step, *dharana*. One of the best forms is by mentally concentrating on a slow and clear pronunciation of a *mantra*, with or without synchronising with the breath. If the *mantra* is 'Soham', repeat slowly 'So' (the infinite spirit) while inhaling, and 'ham' (I am one with – not I am, as it is ridiculous for a drop of water to call

itself the ocean) while exhaling. Continue the repetition for 5 minutes in deep concentration, feeling that this sense of oneness fills one's heart with sublime love with every in breath and that you are being enveloped by this love on each out breath. Then pause for a minute or 2, the mind relaxed, unfocussed, breathing spontaneously.

- Now you may begin *dhyana*, the purpose of which is to be absorbed in the ideal of the mantra just repeated. There are different kinds of mantras. The word mantra means to consciously (*manas*) engrave (*trada*) in the subconscious a feeling of one's spiritual identity through a continuous repetition of a sound-form, such as in the case of an *ishta* (from *Ishwara*) mantra. If you have repeated 'Soham' (I am one with the infinite spirit), or 'Om Namah Shivaya' (I consecrate myself to the auspicious Lord), or 'Om Namo Narayanaya' (to the Lord who sustains me), or 'Om Jesus', now begin the contemplation part or *dhyana* with the help of the following 3 phrases:
- Repeat mentally, "My body is your temple" a few times, slowly. Then feel the flow of a harmonious energy coursing through the body, giving it strength, health, and a sense of well-being, feeling as if you are inside a house of worship. Likewise, repeat "My mind is your altar" and visualise a clear sky, an expansive altar of the infinite spirit, feeling that such is your mind, free from impurity, profoundly peaceful. Then repeat "My soul is where you reside" and visualise in your heart a sphere of light, or a yellow lotus, or an image related to the mantra, as a symbol of pure love, uplifting you and filling you with the warmth of a spiritual presence. Thus, *dhyana* is a process of absorbing the ideal of meditation. It may be done for 5 to 10 minutes and can be alternated with *japa* or repetition of the mantra.
- When the help of contemplation is not needed to maintain the awareness of spiritual unity, without the influx of thoughts or body consciousness, this is called *samadhi*, the 8th step, or summation (*sama*) and transcendence (*adhi*) of the 3 previous steps in *samyama*.

PSYCHOLOGY OF VIOLENCE

The 5 *yamas* are: 1) *ahimsa* or non-violence; 2) *satya* or truthfulness; 3) *brahmacharya* or chastity, the literal meaning being godly (*brahma*) conduct (*achara*); *asteya* or honesty, literally non-stealing; and 5) *aparigraha* or non-covetousness, including refraining from adultery.

The 5 *niyamas* are: 1) *saucha* or physical cleanliness and mental purity; 2) *santosha* or contentment by cultivating inner harmony through the education and sublimation of the ego and control of desires; 3) *tapas* or endurance of adverse conditions without complaining, as well as sensible austerity; 4) *swadhyaya* or self-education by study and practice of useful teachings; and 5) *Ishwara* (God) *pranidhana* (dedication to) or spiritual aspiration.

In this section I shall dwell at length on the importance of the first *yama*, non-violence, as in the history of humanity no other century has been so accursed by violence as the 20th. The instinct of violence is the product of nature's law of the strong exercising power over the weak

and the weak seeking vengeance. On the individual level, 3 factors combining make violence possible are: 1) genetical predisposition or that which is inherited generally from one's parents; 2) the family, social and cultural environment in which one is raised and lives, and 3) the immediate or triggering factor of provocation.

Violence is both an impulsive act and the result of something brewing in the mind which leads to verbal abuse and harmful action. The first cause is resentment or a strong dislike making one intolerant. The second cause, which precedes the first, is an insecure and unfulfilled ego which leads to loss of self-control. One cannot cure rancour by trying to love the person resented. Instead, one needs to treat the cause, the insecure ego, through a practice of detachment, non-expectation and understanding as to why the relationship went sour. The ego then needs to be educated and find fulfilment in a wholesome way by being considerate, caring and helpful to those who need you, in the first instance, rather than to the person who has caused you harm.

Violence is possible only when directed towards an object or a person. Crashing crockery results from getting mad at oneself. Most of us like or dislike a person, not so much due to that person's values, but to the extent that our self-interest is served or denied and our ego is fulfilled or troubled. The opposite of violence is love. But one cannot order someone to love another just for the sake of loving. To love is to be less self-centred which means to be compassionate, patient and tolerant. Improving a relationship means to respect and share each other's values. Love can only blossom in an unselfish heart.

Violence is inborn due to our prehistoric past when survival depended upon killing. After hunger and the urge to procreate, aggression is the third most powerful instinct, followed by fear. On the animal plane, violence is the product of fear, just as fanaticism is a reaction to insecurity. As with most instincts, violence is an emotional experience and expression, in the same way that passion is expressed through procreation, hate through anger and avarice through jealousy. The higher emotions are experienced as devotion and selfless love and expressed through caring, helping and serving. As life is evolutionary, higher emotions are inborn in the same way as lower emotions. But they appear in different stages of dormancy and are dependent upon external influences for their development, along with self-effort. As both are in conflict with each other, the development of higher emotions needs the support of meditation. The following exercise may be helpful in sublimating the instinct of violence.

- After practising the first three steps given in the guidelines on meditation, the 4th may be carried out in the following way. Repeat mentally, while feeling the coolness of the in-flowing breath inside the head, “Peace is my real nature” and, while feeling the warmth of the out-flowing breath inside nostrils, “not conflict”. After repeating this 4 or 5 times, breathe naturally and feel that, with each inflow of breath, subtle impressions of peace are gathering in the inner recesses of the mind, while untying and emptying knots of conflict with each outflow of breath. Then, repeat “Love is my real nature”, “not resentment”, and follow the same process. Then, “Strength is my real nature”, “not weakness”. “Patience is my real nature”, “not impatience”. “Tolerance is my real nature”, “not intolerance”. “Happiness is my real nature”, “not unhappiness”.
- Pause for a couple of minutes, allowing the mind to relax. Now, inhaling, repeat “Peace” and, exhaling, “only peace”, 4 or 5 times. Likewise, “Love”, “spiritual love”. “Strength”, “mental strength”. “Patience”, “gentle patience”. “Tolerance”, “loving kindness”. “Happiness”, “inner fullness”. Conclude by breathing freely for a few minutes, feeling peaceful and rested.

TRUTHFULNESS AND CHASTITY

The 2nd *yama* is fundamental to self-confidence, for *satya* or truthfulness means security and strength. We are weak because we are neither honest with ourselves nor with others.

Truthfulness has many facets. One has to start with oneself. As the saying goes, it is not so easy to deceive one’s superiors, difficult to deceive one’s subordinates and easiest to deceive oneself. Honesty with oneself is the first step to self-improvement. Without integrity in a relationship there cannot be any trust and, without trust, no stability. Without credibility, there cannot be mutual respect and, without the respect of others, one cannot have self-esteem. Lack of self-esteem is a basic cause of depression and self-destructiveness.

Truthfulness is not synonymous with tactlessness, whereas tactlessness is synonymous with stupidity. Thoughtfulness is imperative to the usefulness of truth. A measure of truth is in its constructiveness, just as the mark of untruth is in its destructive nature. That which promotes harmony and peace is the criterion of truth. Unity is its goal, not division. It is truth that makes the mind free from fear. The nature of its independence makes one free from anxiety, for truth stands by itself without the support of a second truth, whereas untruth stays in a state of perpetual dependence on a chain of lies. Truth is neither hard nor soft, but neutral. Hardness is in the intention of the person who uses truth to hurt another, or in one’s unwillingness to accept an unpleasant fact.

Untruth arises due to the fear of a loss of reputation, to which one loses claim by being a hypocrite. It is also due to selfishness, such as hiding one's gain and trying to avoid paying one's full share of income tax, for example. Its other cause is vanity which makes one lie in order to exaggerate self-importance. The practice of truth should always be relative to love and conducive to harmony. It means to be unselfish and to cultivate a humility of spirit, for there is a lot to learn and a great deal to improve upon.

Brahmacharya or chastity as a restraint of sexual passion is directly related to responsibility, faithfulness and integrity. Sexuality is a primordial means for the survival of the species. There is nothing to be ashamed about, for we would not be here without it. The feeling of shame or squeamishness, although possibly exaggerated due to religious or cultural hang-ups, is ingrained in human consciousness. That is because we are both body and spirit. Physical in nature, sexuality as a means of sense-gratification is to make oneself self-confident as a body, accepting it partly due to the instinct of survival of the species and partly to being loved as a person. However, as a spirit, our longing to be fulfilled is boundless. The finite means of the senses cannot keep up to their promise, thus the veiled disappointment, the squeamishness, the hang-up.

The body, however, is merely a vehicle. What is lovable and unlovable are the qualities of the person inside that vehicle. Thus, sexual passion by itself is not satisfactory and less fulfilling if it lacks the mutual harmony of the qualities of both persons involved. In itself it is neither holy nor unholy but, like energy, its nature depends upon how it is used and the consequences it produces. Being physical, it is limited in its capacity to give the psychological fulfilment the soul seeks and, therefore, the need for decency, refinement, responsibility, understanding, care and concern for the person within the body, to make the relationship more meaningful. Otherwise, the relationship is merely one of possessing an object for ego-gratification through the senses. However, since the person is not an object, insecurity is inevitable in such a relationship, with jealousy as its companion.

Like the physical body, sexual passion is neither pure nor impure. In the same way that the body needs to be washed, sexual passion needs to be cleansed by unselfish love. It is lying, deceiving, hiding, lacking in feeling, callousness and irresponsibility that makes it impure. In yoga circles in India, as indeed in Hindu culture generally, sexuality is regarded more pathologically and hypocritically while extolling celibacy, as *brahmacharya* as narrowly

interpreted rather than as a sublimation of passion through deeper emotions of loving kindness and affection. The universal experience occurs when the mind is drawn closer to the spirit, reducing the need of sensory gratification. As in the case of non-violence, similarly paraphrased affirmative meditation will be helpful.

HONESTY AND NON-COVETOUSNESS

There is no greater morality than in identifying one's welfare and rights with those of others. This is the basis of *asteya* or honesty, that is not depriving others of what belongs to them. Social justice is promoted through the right to work and receiving an equitable share of the fruits of productivity according to one's capacity, while providing an adequate means of dignified subsistence. Stealing out of necessity cannot be justified because it means violating another's right to keep what he or she has earned or inherited. In the case of the concentration of wealth among a minority, it is up to a civilised legal process to close the gap of disparity, such as by death duty and wealth levy. A crime should be regarded as a crime, whatever the cause, and the individual should be accountable first of all, while society should take the necessary measures to treat the cause.

Access to education is a universal right but has to be geared to the individual's intelligence and vocational talent. Whereas the ideal of compassion should assure survival with dignity, human beings should not be regarded as objects of charity. Protection of the ignorant and less talented from being exploited by the astute and the more efficient is the ideal of *asteya*. But it also means educating the ignorant and creating opportunities, allowing people to express their talents. A better distribution of wealth in itself does not solve the problem of stealing. Instead, a moral education and a better way to invest riches in order to generate wealth by productivity should be encouraged, because without productivity by incentive and good management, distributed wealth will soon disappear and poverty will become even more widespread. Selfishness is the cause of stealing, deceiving and exploiting. All this is to be refrained in *asteya* by educating and sublimating egoistical behaviour.

The morality of non-covetousness, *aparigraha*, is the work ethic, that is one must earn the right to have what one desires. *Apara* means 'of another' and *agraha* 'to crave for'. Thus, *aparigraha* is the craving for what belongs to another. Envy arises in an empty mind unwilling to

educate and apply itself to useful effort. It simmers in a lazy nature hankering for gain without honest labour, in a wicked heart resenting the success of others. Desires, like horses, need control and direction. They have to be understood and motivated with the ideals of creativity, relating material progress to self-improvement. Desires have to be measured by one's capacity and the effort needed to realise them, while considering if they are worthwhile.

Such a person will not be covetous of the success of others. Purity of heart, right motivation and corresponding effort, not expecting something for which one has not worked, are the means to counter covetousness. Envy and jealousy are primitive instincts that need a lot of education. To be aware of one's deficiency is the first requisite, but to progress one must love its positive counterpart and practise it. Ethics is not limited to the 5 *yamas*. "Do not treat others as you yourself would not want to be treated", is the basis of morality.

CLEANLINESS, CONTENTMENT AND FORTITUDE

Saucha relates both to physical cleanliness and mental purity. It also means keeping one's surroundings clean. It is to bathe daily in a hot climate and on alternate days in cold weather. Cleanliness has a direct influence on the mind. Mental *saucha* means to think positively. When a negative thought about a person arises, this should be countered by remembering an act of kindness he or she may have done in the past. In rare cases, when it is impossible to recall a positive act by a person who has treated you badly over a long period of time and when resentment therefore keeps welling up, immediately think of someone you love and respect. It is also necessary to avoid external negative influences. Meditation, including affirmative contemplation, helps to purify the mind.

Santosha is a state of contentment which is acquired by replacing a lower desire with a higher one, such as a desire for a material object by a wish to learn and do something useful. One has to know the difference between a need and a want. Needs are physical and mental, in order to keep the body nourished, healthy and protected, and the mind occupied with interesting things to do and learn. Wants are mainly a product of external stimuli. The difference between a need and a want is that if you can do without something and yet desire it, it is a want, and if you cannot reasonably do without it, it is a need. The reason behind want after meeting one's basic needs, is a desire to be happy. But happiness is an inner fulfilment that comes by making others happy.

Santosha is also a personal satisfaction in doing something one likes to do. It is in learning well what one loves to learn, such as music, visual arts, cooking, carpentry, literature, history, geography, astronomy, or whatever helps you to integrate with life. It is in self-expression through creative effort, such as in serving a worthy cause. It is a state of inner calm that comes after one has done the best in what is needed to be done. It is not enough that one prays for the good of others but in what way one contributes to their well-being. An ego-centric person cannot experience *santosha*, nor can it arise through ego massage by one's lackeys. Finally, it arises through coming to terms with oneself and the rest of the world. Total happiness cannot last long and such a goal is not only irrational but unethical in the sense that when there is so much suffering around, one has no right to be exclusively happy.

Tapas should not be understood in the narrow sense of physical austerity. It is not the mortification of the body but self-discipline, patience, tolerance, not complaining and self-abnegation. It is bearing with fortitude adverse conditions that could not be avoided after having tried to overcome them. It is to toughen the body and mind by not being over protective against heat and cold. As Swami Sivananda used to say, bearing insult and injury is an exacting form of *tapas*. It is to be balanced in pleasure and pain.

SELF-EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL ASPIRATION

Swadhyaya is self-education, not only by the study of scriptures as the term is narrowly interpreted but of any useful literature that is helpful to self-knowledge and the understanding of life around us. It is to guide (*ducere*), to teach (*docere*), and to learn (*discere*) by oneself (*swa*) through studying (*dhyaya*) great works. No knowledge is possible without a desire to know, by focusing attention to and loving the subject, all of which are conducive to receptivity. Knowledge does not merely mean the gathering of facts but the perception of their relevance which produces the ability to understand. In Greek *idein* means to see mentally.

An isolated idea is an opinion but when it is tested in a collective experience by different individuals arriving at approximately the same conclusion, it acquires the characteristic of knowledge that can be made use of by all. The purpose of *swadhyaya* is to search for truth by oneself with the help of such ideals that have been realised by the search of others and expressed

in their works. It is said that a revealed truth is only a part of the truth. The remainder has to be discovered by oneself.

Ishwara-pranidhana is dedication or offering oneself (*pranidhana*) to God (*Ishwara*). It simply means to have spiritual aspiration which is, first of all, wanting to be a better person – decent, honest, caring, selfless, pure-hearted, compassionate, free from prejudice, patient, tolerant, loving, helpful, creative and harmonious. Dedication to God consists in the realisation of these values and expressing them in our conduct, rather than how and how long we pray and worship. This is, indeed, the bottom line of God-realisation. Prayer is a movement of the heart to progress spiritually, no matter how it is directed, in relationship to what we do, rather than a petitioning process to a deity somewhere up in the sky.

Some teachers interpret *Ishwara-pranidhana* to be self-surrender to God or to divine will, but one has to understand what that really means. No one can say for sure what is divine will other than in a manner of accepting what seems to be one's destiny after having tried to shape it as best as possible in the light of understanding what one wants from life, or accepting stoically an adverse condition after trying to avert it, a bereavement for example. Fatalism and irresponsibility go together and are not synonymous with self-surrender to God.

Life is a long journey to awaken our spiritual consciousness and express it in how we live. We are born with a partially formed, innocent seeming nature. Our rudimentary characteristics come into focus early in life and begin to develop, both in good and bad ways, as per the influence of our surroundings and self-actuation. No one is born like a blank page but with something already written on it, call it a genetic imprint, personal *karma*, or God's design, as we wish. Then our parents write their share on to it, as do some close relatives, schools, church and society in which we live. We then begin our own writing which we continue to edit and re-edit for as long as we live.

Human nature has an infinite capacity to adapt, including our genes. Imagine a Jewish infant and an Arab infant who are both born in a maternity ward, separated and misplaced, and taken home by the Arab and Jewish mothers, the Jewish child growing up in an Arab home in an Arabic culture, and the Arab child vice versa. Now think of the relevance of the Jewish blood and Arab blood as to the qualities of character. Don't we make a fool of ourselves by making such a fuss about royal blood and commoner's blood? In spite of genetic inheritance, we are what we see, hear and read, where we live, learn and grow up and, above all, we are what we

want to be and not to be. I have known an Indian nuclear scientist living in New York. His grandfather was an illiterate farmer and his father a semi-literate greengrocer in a village near Hyderabad who, as a boy, managed to leave his surroundings.

A spiritual satisfaction psychologically induced through meditation or the realisation of a worthy goal is temporary in nature. To be long-lasting, it has to be the result of moral values realised over a long period of time. However, only a congenital idiot can be forever satisfied or happy. Peace and self-confidence are a result of fulfilment achieved through a commitment to worthy ideals. It is self-centredness that prevents learning from and correcting one's errors. The primary concern of yoga, as taught by Patanjali in his graduated steps, is to try to cure the chronic malaise of human nature which manifests in various forms. Only the pure-hearted can call themselves real yogis. In such a heart alone can peace and love grow and truth and wisdom flower.

CHAPTER 4 — HOW TO MEDITATE

MEDITATION: A PROCESS OF UNDERSTANDING AND ENRICHING LIFE

The practice of yoga begins in a spiritual sense with trying to integrate the various aspects of one's personality: the emotional with the rational, the instinctive with the intuitive, and the material with the spiritual.

The student of yoga, instead of being a helpless victim of circumstances or other people's attitudes, tries to shape his or her life through meditation, or through cultivating self-generated impressions in the subconscious.

Yoga means union or integration, that is to say, union of the conscious mind with the subconscious, which leads to a better understanding of oneself and of each other. It is essentially a process of self-realisation. In a religious sense it means union of man with God. In metaphysical terms, it is union of the primordial unconscious with the superconscious, and of the microcosm with the macrocosm.

GENERAL PATTERN

Everyone is born with a distinct, innate background, characterised by the particular, inborn impressions of the instincts of self-preservation and self-extension. This is termed the individuality of the primordial unconscious, or *antar chitta*. This level of consciousness is apparent even when an infant is six months old, as every mother knows well how different each of her children are, right from early childhood.

As the infant begins to respond to the external world, another level of consciousness is formed. It is called *vahir chitta* or the subconscious, in which the experience of objects, by means of the senses, is particularised as memories. This process goes on until death.

Whereas innate impressions, *samskaras*, faintly influence the general pattern of our aptitudes, the subconscious impressions we receive, beginning with our relationship with our mother, father and other immediate relatives, keep on shaping our lives as we move from childhood into youth. The world around us, circumstances, friends, our studies, the news media, and the many commercial embellishments of life, determine a substantial part of our character.

Whereas it is not always possible to change our circumstances or the disposition of others, it is within our power to cultivate our will, to develop a philosophy of life and to adapt our disposition to others and to circumstances.

I-CONSCIOUSNESS

In order to practise meditation, one should have an understanding of the self. I-consciousness or the ego, is the propelling agent in life. The ‘self’ projects outwardly through instincts and, inwardly, through reflection. When the ‘I’ is involved in mundane things, it is called materialistic. When the ‘I’ functions through spiritual virtue, it is called idealistic.

Mundane or spiritual, the ‘I’ functions through a state of conditioning. The instinctive aspect of our consciousness, while preserving the particularity of our being, involves us in a world of bondage. The spiritual aspect, through idealism, discipline and sublimation, gives us a sense of harmony, peace, unity, and yet freedom.

In its positive aspect, the ‘I’ is like Lucifer the angel. In its negative aspect, it is like Lucifer the devil.

A participatory consciousness such as the ‘I’, functions through movement. Movement is caused by desire, and it is meaningful when there is a goal to be attained. As movement is the nature of consciousness, the movement, that is desire, loses its motivating power once the desire has been fulfilled. The desired object then becomes less interesting.

FULFILMENT

Thus, the I-consciousness fulfils itself through a series of temporary desires. From the mundane to the spiritual, from dependence on external embellishment to the integrity of character, from conflict within to harmony in relationship to others, the I-consciousness evolves.

One's state of mind accords with the nature of the identity one fulfils within oneself. When this is sought through the possession of material things, one tends to become disappointed because, for example, one cannot buy true friendship. It is in the strength of character, the capacity to love and to understand, in the discipline of the selfish nature that the sense of belonging is fulfilled.

No one needs to be convinced of one's material nature. We are continuously influenced by objects of the senses, through enjoyment in their attainment, or frustration in their non-attainment. But what is greatly needed is self-confidence in the experience of the spiritual reality within ourselves.

Anything in existence is tangible only on the basis of duality, such as the experience of joy being conditioned by the experience of sorrow. Both are a part of life and should be taken in their stride as they come and go. That is, one should neither be swept overboard by happiness, nor crushed by depression.

Lofty ideals expressed through symbolic words like God, eternal truth, and pure love, indicate how inadequate life is, how insecure is one's identity in the relativity of experience. The validity of these ideals lies in their ability to lift one's spirit through a sense of the spiritual, of duty, of honour, and also by a feeling for, and understanding of, other human beings.

The thoughts given here would provide some specific themes for contemplation. However, mere contemplation is not meditation. Abstraction of thought, concentration, affirmation of ideals and their experience, all put together constitute meditation.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUES

The following are a few of the suggested techniques:

- Sit with your back, neck and head straight, without being rigid. You do not have to sit cross-legged, but the spine should be relatively straight. A slack spine or drooping head implies mental sloth, and feeling merely restful or being drowsy, does not mean meditation. Awareness, being wakeful inwardly, is the basis of meditation.

- The first step is to cultivate a feeling of mental calm. Thoughts cannot be controlled without giving the mind a feeling to dwell on. In fact, thought-control is not implied at all, but the substitution of thought by a feeling.
- The eyes are closed and you feel totally at peace with yourself and the rest of the world. The mind will, of course, wander, but tell yourself that the thoughts that pass in your mind are merely superficial superimpositions on the vastness of your being, not confined within a form, not tied down by the identity of a name, representing the body-mind-ego principle, that is, the personality.

DETACHMENT

The spirit within is not bound by the limits of a personality. You feel as if you are someone different, a detached witnessing agent, not involved in the thought process, represented by the participation of the ego. You feel that you are like the sky in which the clouds pass by, without affecting the sky itself and that you are that limitless sky in which thoughts come and go without affecting you.

This is called the process of abstraction, *pratyahara*. Remember, thoughts function only through the agency of the ego, the participator in memory: “I did this, I went there, that person did such a thing to me, I enjoyed, I suffered”. As long as the ego is not relatively detached, you do not understand your mind well. You must, therefore, tell yourself: “I am not this body, not this mind, not this ego, but the all-encompassing infinite spirit, in which the thoughts of someone else (as it were) come and go”.

There is another theme: Imagine a vast ocean, without any shores visible, immensely deep and profoundly calm underneath, on the surface of which waves are rising and falling. You are this vast, deep ocean, and the waves, your thoughts, are only a fraction, a superficial surface of your being. They do not affect your depth.

RHYTHMIC BREATHING

As you contemplate in this way, all the time you consciously sense the movement of the breath, *prana*, within your nostrils. The breathing is rhythmic, not too long, not too short (approximately 3 to 5 seconds for each inhalation, and the same length of time for each exhalation).

From time to time, stop the contemplation process, but keep the mind absorbed in experiencing the breath. When you inhale, feel the cool air in the nerves above and behind the

palate, deep within the head. Then try to extend the feeling, that is a sensation in the nerves inside the top of the head, associating it with the idea of mental calm.

When exhaling, feel the warmth of the breath within the lower nostrils with a sense of expansiveness and diffusion. Breath and mind (*prana* and *manas*) are closely related. As you experience the breath, the suggestion – before, during or immediately after – becomes more receptive to the mind.

Then, there is the process of spiritual identity, while experiencing the movement of the breath within.

We are creatures of suggestion and are affected on the basis of the ego by whatever life around us tells us to be or not to be. Our egos also function similarly, based on the memory of sense-experience and ego-fulfilment. Thus, we have a strong sense of division and selfishness.

One now counteracts this state of mind by a series of suggestions. As you inhale and experience the breath, think that “the cosmic spiritual essence, permeating everything, and representing the source of life inside all things, is merging with the individual spiritual essence within me”. While exhaling, think the opposite. Rising above the consciousness of the body and the play of the ego through the name-form-identity process, you feel that you are united in spirit with everything and are rising above infatuation and hatred, possessiveness and retribution.

RELAXATION

From time to time, just relax. Stretch your legs, move the shoulders, take a few deep breaths, and sit peacefully for a while. Then resume the experience of the *prana* (breath) and the process of identity.

After some time, when you have a measure of the experience of mental abstraction (*pratyahara*), peacefully watch the movement of thoughts, all the time telling yourself that you are merely a witness, not a participant. This is called *sakshi bhava*, or witnessing attitude. In the course of time, through this you will be able to understand yourself better, sort out any complexes and, through subsequent steps in meditation, such as affirmation and experience of

ideals (*dhyana*), begin to re-educate your mind. This is helped a great deal by the steps in concentration (*dharana*).³

A GUIDE TO MEDITATION

In the West, the word meditation means a concentrated state of mind in serious reflection. The Latin root of the word meditation, *mederi*, means “to heal”. It is an effort to heal the afflictions of the mind, the hurt ego, by trying to understand the cause of the problem and finding a way to solve it, that is by knowing what counter-measures to take. To meditate is to deepen a state of understanding.

In the East, however, meditation does not mean thinking at all, but fixing the mind on a spiritual ideal, to be one with it, or allowing the thought-consciousness to dissolve into the consciousness of it. According to Zen Buddhism, meditation does not involve any concept but is an awareness of an inner silence. According to Patanjali, meditation is a combination of three steps: *pratyahara* or abstraction and withdrawal of the mind from the sense objects or attention to their memory; *dharana* or concentration; and *dhyana* or contemplation. This, however, is not a thought process but an absorption of the feeling of oneness with the ideal.

Awareness of an inner silence is not easy to achieve. It can be confused with a state of dullness or being soporific, which is not the purpose of meditation. To meditate does not mean to have a good rest while sitting pretty, and silence is not productive without spiritual aspiration. On the other hand, few have the capacity to think clearly, and too much mental exercise can lead to tension and confusion.

In *Bhakti Yoga*, meditation involves visualising the image of a chosen deity, together with a mental repetition of a relevant mantra. For the Vedantin, it is to contemplate the meaning of selected verses from the *Upanishads* or similar scriptures. For Catholics, it involves reciting the rosary, based on mantras such as “Our Father which art in heaven”, or “Hail Mary, full of grace”. For them, it also involves feeling close to Jesus, having received communion and retiring to a quiet place, experiencing the concept of the transubstantiation of the Eucharist.

³ Excerpts from a lecture given at Caxton Hall in London on 15th August 1973.

St Albert the Great, the teacher of St Thomas Aquinas, observed that meditation for philosophers consists of a process of perfecting a thought and, for devotees, of experiencing their love of God. Prayers said in silence, dedicating oneself to God, can also be called meditation because the meaning of meditation is to turn oneself inward to one's spiritual source, leading to peace and inner fulfilment.

For Hindus, the repetition of a *mantra*, with or without a rosary, but with a feeling of spiritual oneness, is meditation. A common Buddhist meditation consists of repeating mantras: *Buddham sharanam gachami, dhammam sharanam gachami, sangham sharanam gachami* (I proceed remembering the Buddha, the righteous path and the welfare of my community). Tibetans base their meditation on the mantra *Om mani padme hum* (I am Om, the jewel in the lotus of my heart). For Moslems, meditation is called *zikr* or repetition of selected names of God from the Koran, generally using a rosary. Feeling the breath is an exercise used in Zen meditation (the word Zen is derived from *dhyana* or meditation). They also count from one to twenty or more, over and over again.

WHY MEDITATE?

The two basic goals of meditation are: 1) Spiritual renewal, or the feeling of oneness with a higher source of life, no matter if one calls this the infinite and eternal spirit, transcendental and yet ever immanent, or a divine being called God, or supreme truth, from which flows peace, wisdom and strength. 2) Through introversion, acquiring a deep state of peace in order to search for the basic truths of life, to separate reality from illusion, to discard illusory ideas about illusion itself, and to acquire a clear understanding of reality rather than confusing it with a foggy thoughtless state. The first is relatively easier by means of devotion and a sincere dedication. The second needs a long practice in order to acquire philosophical maturity.

Peace of mind is a product of the first goal which helps one to understand the problems one faces. An expanded state of consciousness enables one to loosen the psychological tightness of attachment and to rise above petty reactions through the realisation that there is more to life than snobbery caused by an insecure ego and resentment due to wounded vanity. A sense of elevation and oneness with a spiritual source helps to sublimate gross passions and to acquire emotional maturity. Identifying oneself with the essence of one's being strengthens the will to act according to what one should or should not do, after having made appropriate decisions.

Clarity of mind, which is part of the second goal, helps to cultivate a sense of right and wrong, a basic purpose of education and a litmus test of any culture. The Greek root, *charassein*, from which the word ‘character’ is derived, means “to engrave”. The Sanskrit equivalent is *charitra*, meaning “to cultivate”. To engrave or to cultivate cherished ideals is the purpose of meditation, practised in a state of peace and clarity of mind, instilling a love of truth, of what one wishes to be, by sowing the seeds of suggestion through a deep feeling of devotion and dedication.

Purity of heart or freedom from resentment, hate, prejudice and negative thinking, is another objective of meditation. Although it is said that the repetition of a mantra helps to cleanse and enlighten the mind, there is no evidence that the mental sound form does so, rather one’s faith in it and the sincerity to direct one’s life according to the ideals it represents. Thus, it is wrong to say that *mantras* are meaningless sound forms. It is also advisable to discard the myth that no progress in meditation or spiritual life is possible without an initiation by a *guru*, although a worthy teacher may help. As Buddha says:

*“By oneself alone one is purified,
Purity and impurity depend on oneself,
As no one can purify another.
By oneself one must walk the path;
The teacher merely shows the way”.*

WHAT IS REQUIRED TO MEDITATE

The injunction “let your whole life be an act of meditation” is nonsense. Firstly, because it is impossible and, secondly, because its value is diluted. Meditation is a specific act by itself, to be practised regularly. To be effective and meaningful, meditation should inspire a philosophy by which one guides one’s life, or a code of conduct to practise. This is why Patanjali’s *Raja Yoga* begins with two sets of ethics and regulations: *yama* and *niyama*. Practical idealism is the first requirement in meditation so as not to make it a hypocritical act but, rather, to support it by a philosophy which guides one’s attitude, motivation, action and relationship.

The second requisite is to find a suitable place to meditate, clean and peaceful, where one can create the right atmosphere by keeping a symbol such as *Om* on an altar with flowers and, when meditating, by lighting a candle and mild incense, if so desired.

The third is to adopt the right kind of posture, whether sitting cross-legged if comfortable, or in a straight backed and firm chair, keeping the head, neck, shoulders and back straight, without being rigid. This allows one to remain alert by breathing adequately (oxygen helps to maintain lucidity). For most people, even in India, the lotus posture (*padmasana*) is symbolic rather than practical, for one can meditate only when the mind is free from self-inflicted pain in the legs and hips. Nor does it make any sense to let the legs go numb. The position of the arms should be relaxed, keeping the palms facing upwards on the lap, one on top of the other. Otherwise, the hands should rest on the knees with the palms up or down, but the fingers loose and relaxed, the tips of the index finger and thumb gently touching. If sitting on a chair, the feet should be together on the floor, with equal weight under each foot.

The fourth is to cultivate a relaxed disposition before beginning the practice of meditation. There should be no fighting with the thoughts or trying to stop the mind, as it were, or even having a desire to achieve anything at all. For meditation is not an ego-trip or attempt to climb the ladder of success. Rather, it is an effortless feeling of deep, inner poise and faith in, and love for, what one wishes to do: a quiet, absorbing predisposition to the ideal of the act.

With a relaxed mind, one may begin with the awareness of an abiding, expanding relatedness to all that is around, to the whole universe and to the transcendent and immanent spiritual source which is also the essence of one's inner being or soul. There should be a feeling of absorption and envelopment by a deep, inner peace. No doubt thoughts will come and go, but not to be distracted by a thought means not to identify with it, because a thought is sustained by the self's involvement with it. When a thought comes, one may gently tell oneself "I am not interested, but detached and in peace". To begin meditation, it is necessary to compose oneself in this way for a few minutes.

The fifth requisite is called technique which constitutes the main practice of meditation. These are of several kinds, depending on religious or monastic or ashram traditions. For example, in some Catholic monasteries, there are little books of meditation consisting of a thought for each day of the year, gleaned from the scriptures, which is memorised and contemplated upon in solitude, while mentally repeating the phrases from time to time to guide

the meditation. In the chapel, meditation is done differently. When a monk reads aloud passages from sacred writings, his brethren sit with heads bent, eyes closed and fingers crossed, deeply concentrating on what is read.

It will, however, be appropriate to give some basic steps to an integral form of meditation which combines some of practices in *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. The suitability of techniques varies from person to person and the choice should be made from what is available from books or through a teacher. However, it should be remembered that, just as the mark of good journalism is accuracy and the evidence of good research, so also the mark of a good teaching is clarity and precision.

HOW TO MEDITATE

After a few minutes of relaxation as described in the section on how to cultivate a predisposition, gradually absorb the breath in the mind, that is to be aware of the coolness of the in-flowing *prana* deep inside the head, in the nerve cells, and the warmth of the outflowing *prana* inside the lower nostrils while breathing in a natural way. There is no need to slow down the breath deliberately because the concentration on feeling the breath will automatically slow it down and allow it to find its own rhythm. The important thing is to have a sense of being filled with peace and to feel free from all tension and bondage. The practice may be continued for around 10 minutes.

The purpose of this form of *pratyahara* is to experience *prana* in a conscious way, the external form of which is the breath and the internal source, the soul. The Latin root of the word respiration (*spirare*) means “to breathe” and is derived from the word *spiritus*, the soul’s essence that gives life to the body through the vital principle, *prana*. By experiencing the breath through its coolness and warmth, one becomes aware of its source within by a sense of immense peace (*shanti*) and freedom (*mukti*), the two psychological forms of expression of the inner spirit.

After a month of practice, the first stage can be prolonged by continuing to feel only the coolness deep inside the head even when exhaling, and ignoring the warmth of the outgoing *prana*. This cool feeling can be renewed with the help of each inward breath. The psychological experience of the exercise is a state of fullness which can be guided by repeating the word *paripurnam* or its English equivalent, “spiritual fullness”, from time to time. This may be done for five minutes or more, depending on the ability to maintain attention.

Any practice in a prolonged state, especially in the beginning, loses its depth. Thus, after ten or fifteen minutes, detach the mind from the breath, keep the eyes closed and feel restful for a minute or two. One may also loosen up the shoulders, neck and legs, if there is tension,

REPETITION OF MANTRA

The second part of meditation, which is an aspect of internal *dharana* (concentration), consists of *japa* or repetition of a mantra and can be combined with *dhyana* (contemplation). A *mantra* is a sound-form representing a basic spiritual ideal, such as uniting with the infinite spirit (*Om*), or transcendental truth, knowledge, infinity (*satyam*, *gyanam*, *anantam*), or a personal deity like Shiva, Vishnu, Buddha or Christ. A *mantra* can also be an affirmation of an ideal, such as *Soham* (I am one with the infinite) or *Hari Om Tat Sat* (the Lord is the infinite spirit, that is the truth). The two well-known Hebrew mantras are *Adonai* (my Lord) and *Elohim* (the all-powerful Lord of all).

A *mantra* should not be considered a magic formula, for there is no magic in yoga. Continuous repetition of a sound-form helps to tap mental energy and focus it into the subconscious in order to plant and stimulate a spiritual ideal within. This is the basic purpose of *japa*. To call it transcendental meditation is to indulge in hyperbole. There are various kinds of mantras but for *japa* its shorter forms are recommended, such as *Om* or *Soham*, or a slightly longer form as *Hari Om* or *Hari Om Tat Sat*.

According to the voluminous Sanskrit-English dictionary by Sir Monier Monier-Williams (Oxford University Press), the word *mantra* means, among other definitions, “to concentrate with”, drawing its roots *man* from *manas* or mind, more specifically the conscious aspect of the mind, and *tra* from possibly *trada* or that which “pierces” or “engraves”. Thus, *mantra* is a sound-form which “consciously engraves” in the subconscious a spiritual ideal of identity. *Trada* also means that which “opens up”, thus inferentially “one’s spiritual consciousness”. Remotely, the root *tra* can also be traced to *tra* which means “to shine”, suggesting the “spirit within illuminating”.

The mind is a field of energy. Energy pulsates through a principle or structure of movement. The mind moves by the pulsation of memory, latching on from one recollection to another. In this way, the energy of the mind is dissipated. The purpose of repeating a sound-form

continuously is to make the mind move in a tight circle, thus tapping its energy. Simultaneously, the sentiment of love for the spiritual ideal it represents should be felt deeply within.

One may begin the second part of meditation by re-focusing the mind on the breath, trying to be absorbed in it as before, for a minute or two. Then start the mental intonation of the mantra *Om*, slowly and concentrating deeply, along with the inflowing breath, feeling its coolness and again, with the outflowing, feeling the warmth. The process should be continued for several minutes. Afterwards, take a short pause, detaching the mind and experiencing an inner silence, before repeating the practice. Continue for a total of ten minutes in the first month and then extend by another five minutes or so.

DHARANA AND DHYANA

The psychological counterpart of this exercise, to be contemplated alternately, consists in feeling a subtle, sacred presence within. In the body, this promotes health or physical well-being. In the mind, it enlightens with understanding, wiping out the shadows of negativity. While, in the heart or soul, it awakens spiritual aspiration. The latter means loving “God with all your heart and with all your soul”, in the words of Jesus. These guiding sentiments are relative to the repetition of *Om*, which can be directed in between *japa*.

If the mantra is *Soham*, the sound *So* (infinite spirit) should be mentally intoned with the inflowing breath and *ham* (I am one with) with the outflowing, in the same way as with *Om*. The sentiment or contemplative part may be based on the affirmation: “I am one with the eternal, infinite spiritual nature of my soul, rather than a product of physical instincts and personality traits. The self in me is purified by this communion with my soul, the essence of which is the same as the infinite, transcendental spirit of God.”

For a devout Christian, the *mantra* can be Jesus Christ. Although it is not essential to synchronise the repetition of a *mantra* with the breath, the feeling of a harmonious rhythm can be developed by doing so, as if the *mantra* is floating in and out, permeating and enveloping oneself. For example: repeat *Hari Om* inhaling, and *Tat Sat* exhaling; or *Jesus* inhaling, *Christ* exhaling; or, for those of Jewish faith, *Adonai* inhaling, *Elohim* exhaling. While doing *japa*, the mind should be deeply concentrated in intoning silently the *mantra* with a feeling of love for the ideal. Combining this *dharana* (concentration) with *dhyana* (contemplation relative to the *mantra*) is done in the following way.

If the *mantra* is Jesus Christ, or Adonai-Elohim, repeat the words for five minutes, then relax the mind while breathing normally for a minute or two, and begin the contemplative part for around five minutes. This is done with the help of three phrases. In the case of Jesus Christ or Vishnu *mantra* such as *Om Namo Narayanaya*, the image of the deity may be visualised. Or, in the case of *Adonai-Elohim*, a sphere of light may be visualised instead. But this is not easy and can be considered optional.

This combined form of *dharana* and *dhyana* may be practised for five minutes each and then extended to an equal amount of time or a total of twenty minutes, or as long as one wishes.

The idea of sticking to one *mantra* only is to accustom the mind to its sound pattern in order to engrave its grooves in the subconscious as it were. The choice may be made by oneself. Experience will tell, given enough time, if a *mantra* is suitable to one's psychological make-up through a sense of harmony with it, or not. There is no rule that a *mantra* cannot be changed if the mind resists it.

The preference of receiving initiation from a *guru* is personal but there is no dogma that to repeat a *mantra* one has to be initiated into it. Sensible teachers try to find out the psychological inclination of the student before giving a *mantra*, rather than perfunctorily superimposing one with a dubious understanding that the *guru* can know what is appropriate for the disciple just by sensing the vibrations. My teacher, the late Swami Sivananda, never urged anyone to receive *mantra*-initiation but, if someone came to him with that request, he generally inquired about their preference as to how a spiritual identity is sought, before giving an appropriate *mantra*.

Whereas a *mantra* should not be treated frivolously by revealing it to just anybody, to make it top secret is rather silly. All *mantras* can be found in books.

AFFIRMATIONS IN MEDITATION

After the practice of the second part, a short pause is necessary, keeping the eyes closed and feeling detached and restful. If there is tension, move the shoulders and head a little. Breathe freely for a minute or two and then refocus the mind on the breath to begin the third part of this integral meditation which is a combination of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana*. This last part is a process of seeding the subconscious with some basic affirmations, relative to their contrary traits which are common to human nature.

The mind is a complex organism susceptible to influence. No one is born like a blank page on which one's parents and others write what is good or bad. We are all born with innate propensities of character, even though in a rudimentary state, but each as a distinct individual. The first few years of life are highly impressionable, marking the subconscious indelibly through parental influence. Afterwards, in adolescence and later years, we keep on marking the formative mind by the influence of our surroundings and by our own positive endeavour or falling into bad habits, as well as being susceptible to wholesome or negative influence of individuals we closely come into contact with.

The purpose of the following part of meditation is self-educative, as to what should and should not be our true nature, the "reality" being what we need for our security and happiness. One may make a list of affirmations according to individual preference and necessity, and memorise them. However, they should be few and short. The following six affirmations are recommended.

While inhaling and feeling the breath, repeat slowly and with a deep conviction "Peace is my real nature" and, while exhaling, "Not conflict". Repeat the phrase three or four times each, then try to absorb their meaning in silence for about a minute, breathing spontaneously. Then continue with "Love is my real nature", "Not resentment"; "Truth is my real nature", "Not untruth"; "Happiness is my real nature", "Not unhappiness"; "Strength is my real nature", "Not weakness"; "Freedom is my real nature", "Not bondage".

Then give a short pause, breathing freely and feeling detached. Begin again, fixing the mind on the breath and repeat three or four times each, inhaling "Peace" and exhaling "Only peace"; "Love", "Spiritual love"; "Truth", "Only truth"; "Happiness", "Inner fullness"; "Strength", "Mental strength"; "Freedom", "Spiritual freedom". Then conclude with a pause of at least three minutes, breathing freely.

The best time to meditate is in the morning, but only if one wakes up fresh. Otherwise, an appropriate hour should be chosen, but not immediately after a meal. This session of meditation will take from 45 minutes to one hour. In the beginning, one may shorten it to 20 or 30 minutes and, after sufficient practice, prolong up to one hour. For most people, a long meditation is not useful and may even build up tension. The quality is more important than the length.

MORE WAYS TO MEDITATE

The purpose of yoga is mind control. There are two ways to do this: through meditation techniques and through a psychological process of self-education. Both are interrelated and should be combined. The following six techniques may be tried and some chosen for regular practice according to the individual's disposition.

TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION

Fix the mind on the breath, feeling the coolness deep inside the head while inhaling, and the warmth inside the lower nostrils while exhaling. Repeat mentally “peace” or “harmony” inhaling, and “freedom” or “liberation” exhaling. The idea is to feel peaceful and free from conflict and anxiety.

Breathe through alternate nostrils, as in *nadi sodhana pranayama*, that is inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right, and inhaling again through the right and exhaling through the left, continuing on in the same way. The thumb and ring finger are used to hold the nose. Practise this for one month. Then add retention of the breath after inhaling for a few seconds, or as long as one can do so comfortably, while repeating mentally “inner strength”. An alternate form of auto-suggestion can be “will” while inhaling, “spiritual strength” while retaining the breath, and “harmony” while exhaling. Concentration on, or feeling, the breath is important. While retaining, concentrate on the heartbeat.

Breathe freely, that is not concentrating on the breath but visualising a green field (symbol of the subconscious), surrounded by a circular horizon of dark-green trees (the unconscious). Above is a light-blue, clear sky (the spiritual origin of life). Imagine a gentle breeze blowing from above and smoothing the green grass (the conflicts of the subconscious) and then penetrating into the dark-green woods beyond. Repeat mentally “peace” inhaling, “only peace” exhaling and, likewise, “love”, “only love”, “freedom”, “spiritual freedom”. There is no need to retain the breath.

Visualise an ocean with a circular horizon, deep blue in colour, a symbol of life. The sky above is clear and light-blue, the infinite spirit, the source of life. The ocean is full of gently rolling waves which are individual souls. You are one of them, moving in harmony with one another, as you feel the gentle rhythm of your breath. Say to yourself “I am at peace with myself and at peace with the world”, “the essence of my soul is the same as that of all souls”.

Keep a candle level with the eyes at a distance of one metre. Concentrate on the candle-flame for a few seconds, then close the eyes and visualise it as a sphere of light within the head. Contemplate harmony, peace, fullness and inner strength, repeating the words from time to time with the inflowing and outflowing breath. Open the eyes to concentrate on the flame again and repeat the process.

Fix the mind on the breath as in the first exercise and practise the following six affirmations by repeating them half a dozen times each, alternating with a deep feeling of the absorption of their meaning, while breathing naturally, without concentration. After a month, add retention of the breath, with the repetition of the relevant affirmation and concentration on the heartbeat.

KEY TO SUCCESS

- Inhale: peace. While retaining the breath, repeat “profound harmony” and exhale conflict.
- Inhale: love. While retaining the breath, repeat “spiritual fullness” and exhale resentment or ill-feeling.

Likewise:

- Inhale: generosity; retain: charity of heart; exhale: selfishness
- Inhale: understanding; retain: patience; exhale: intolerance
- Inhale honesty; retain: truth; exhale: insincerity
- Inhale compassion; retain: selfless love; exhale: attachment

One may formulate other auto-suggestions according to the need of the moment. Each of these exercises can be done for a few minutes, sitting in a comfortable position with eyes closed but with the back, shoulders and neck straight without being rigid. When tension builds up or the quality of the meditation becomes shallow, discontinue and resume the following day. A session of half an hour daily, preferably in the morning before breakfast or in the evening before dinner, is recommended. This can be prolonged and done in the morning and evening according to the individual’s inclination. Motivation, quality and regularity are important. As Patanjali says, practice is the key to success.



CHAPTER 5 — MIND & ITS CONTROL THROUGH SELF-EDUCATION

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS

We can know our mind by observing our desires and tendencies, and our reaction to challenge when the security of the ego is threatened. Our inclinations, choices as to books, magazines, TV programmes, places of entertainment and friends give a general indication to our nature. We also know the nature of our insecurity and lack of fulfilment by observing our intolerance, nagging, vituperation, harping on mistakes made by others, and nursing resentment over the years.

To observe the mind well one has to be impartial, that is ego-less. It is as if observing someone else's mind as a silent witness, not getting involved in self-justification, nor self-condemnation. Rather one acts as a patient, kindly and understanding friend trying to help, pointing out that unhappiness is caused by selfishness and self-aggrandisement, dissatisfaction by superficiality and frivolity, and anxiety by attachment and insecurity of the ego. This method is called *sakshi bhava*. Self-observation and analysis should not be overdone. However, in order to overcome the fear of one's negative shadow, one has to face and come to terms with oneself from time to time.

The state of the mind is dependent on the state of the 'I', as it projects itself in the process of its survival and fulfilment, through the archetypal and recent background of race, religion, culture, social influence and education. It gathers experience through interaction, thereby forming layer upon layer of memory. One's own happiness or unhappiness reflects how the 'I' has been treated.

Consciously or unconsciously, one envies those who are successful in their profession due to their motivation, intelligence, endeavour and, above all, through their being more alert and

therefore more capable of learning, more astute in processing and making use of knowledge, and more strong-willed to get where they wish to be. One also admires those who have been able to realise some spiritual ideals and who have gathered a measure of peace and happiness.

However, given the choice, one is likely to pursue material success first and, failing in that or not being fulfilled by it, one turns to spiritual values. The reason is that one is orientated more empirically than philosophically, survival being a greater priority than one's need to be happy through a philosophically induced or religiously consoled state of mind. One is hardly aware of being related to a spiritual origin from which flow security and happiness, the latter being derived from doing something useful and appreciating the good in others.

Since the infinite spirit is imminent in all, the experience of a sacred presence within through meditation and as a bonding link with those we can identify with through a loving relationship of caring, sharing and understanding, is the only way to lighten the weight of selfishness and loosen the strain of pride and vanity. This can never be done by meditation alone, but by identifying the good in oneself with the good in others with whom we share our lives.

SELF-EDUCATION

The following guidelines for self-education may be useful:

- *Watch your thoughts:* When you find yourself thinking badly of someone, immediately remember the good that person has done to you in the past. Then think of someone you love. This is one way of overcoming negative thinking.
- *Avoid the sin of generalised aspersion:* The individual alone is responsible for his or her guilt or fault. It is uncivilised to accuse an entire race or nation for the misdeeds and deficiencies of individuals.
- *Watch your behaviour:* If you are lying, remind yourself to be truthful and then make the correction, because trustworthiness is more important than the dubious advantage of the moment.
- *If you are angry,* ask yourself to be patient, and then explain to the person your problem and what you expect, saying that you would expect the same from yourself.
- *When you attempt to pass the blame to others,* correct yourself and accept your share of responsibility. Otherwise, you will never learn.
- *When you think of another as a sexual object,* ask yourself if you really love and care for that person. Then be reminded that it is the human qualities that determine the durability of happiness in a relationship, not the passion of the moment, nor physical attraction.

The following ways of coping with our problems through self-education may be tried:

- Identify the basic problem rather than generalise and say that you are overwhelmed by so many problems which is a mental trick to avoid dealing with one, as the mind knows that it cannot solve all at the same time.
- After identifying a problem, such as unhappiness or frustration or anger or intolerance, locate the main cause. You will find that most probably it is self-centredness or egoism or selfishness, whichever way you look at it.
- Then identify some of the lateral causes which arise from the main cause. For example, in the case of unhappiness, these could be: a) self-pity, b) too many expectations, c) too much attachment or possessiveness, d) self-importance, and e) lack of spiritual goals.
- Match each with a counterpart in the following way. This is called the *pratipaksha* method in *Raja Yoga*.
 - a) Think more of others than of your own problem. Be considerate. Listen more and be helpful.
 - b) Expect more from yourself than from others. Expect only what you deserve, having made it clear what your expectations are in a given situation. Also, expect only after having taken into account the limitations of human nature.
 - c) Excessive attachment or possessiveness is caused by insecurity in love. Therefore, it is necessary to think of the good of someone you love rather than your loving. Understand that such a good is best achieved in the way that the loved person wishes, rather than on one's own terms. Ask yourself if you are doing anything good or merely proclaiming your love. Are you concerned about drawing the attention of others to the good you are doing? Unselfishness overcomes the insecurity of love and lessens attachment or possessiveness.
 - d) If you are vain, know that there is a lot to learn and that you do not know enough. If you wish to be regarded well, your nature needs to improve a lot. Control self-justification and indirect self-praise as well as eulogising your children or spouse to others.
 - e) Write down the following in bold letters on separate cards and keep them only where you can see them. This is to remind oneself of some worthy goals such as: *Be just. Love mercy. Do not be false. Be unselfish. Control passion. Be modest. Think positively.*

Even if these may sound rather old-fashioned, they have a timeless value. The Buddha said, “Do not accept a teaching just because it has been given by your teacher, but find out if it is valid in your own experience, and only then accept it”. All these steps are arduous and need a lot of faith, discernment, patience and practice. But who has ever progressed and achieved anything worthy without toil?

CHAPTER 6 — THOUGHTS TO PONDER FOR MEDITATION

Most of us are creatures of beliefs that are convenient to justify our desires and longings, allay our basic fears and uncertainties, and fulfil a sense of belonging. Their usefulness depends on the extent to which they help to make us better human beings and bring a deeper meaning to our lives.

Lofty words like altruism, transcendental truth, God, and eternal love are only indicative of how inadequate our life is and how insecure our identity in relationships. Their ability to lift our spirits is in their translation as duty, honour, and a feeling for an understanding of one another.

Philosophy is meant to form principles and to shape criteria. If you have no principles, then you have no philosophy.

Religion is meant to promote spiritual fellowship among people, not merely within a particular faith. This is possible only through an understanding heart and freedom from prejudice. The bigot can never be religious, much less spiritual.

Justice is meant to promote respect for the rule of law and a law can be respected only when it gives equal legal protection to all, while striving to promote mutual responsibility for social security and welfare.

Moral norms are not merely social habits but spiritual ligaments in the body of society, and represent not just the outlines of social behaviour but are meant to appeal to the better side of human nature. They are not merely to hold people together through a balance of self-interest, but to sustain spiritual responsibility to each other.

People should ask themselves the following questions:

- How can you expect respect from others if you have no self-respect in your own eyes?
- How can you have self-respect if you lie, deceive and act as a coward and a weakling, if you are arrogant, vain and selfish?
- How can you have peace of mind if you are self-centred and have no basic integrity of character?
- How can you be happy if you are a slave to passion and keep being attached to those who do not really care for you?
- How can you expect the love of others if you are selfish and full of yourself?
- How can you expect success if you do not work hard and try to acquire the necessary talents to get what you want?
- How can you have inner harmony if you have no devotion to spiritual ideals?

What worth is all the effort to keep yourself and your family in material comfort if you have failed to find harmony in your heart and failed to give peace and love to your family and friends?

Spiritual life does not consist in singing to the glory of God and in chanting *mantras*, but in the practice of integrity, compassion, the fulfilment of duties and obligations, the acceptance of personal responsibility, selfless service for a common cause that does not enhance the ego of anyone in particular, and in the sublimation of passions.

A tree can remain standing in spite of stormy weather only if it has deep roots. Likewise, the tree of life can be stable only through the deep roots of actions motivated by love, a sense of justice tempered by compassion and understanding, and unselfish support of those you care for when they are in need.

The tree of life can have many branches of knowledge and many leaves of prayers but, without its deep roots, it will fall down along with its branches and leaves when the storm comes.

CHAPTER 7 — JUST FOR TODAY

Resolve to yourself:

- Just for today, I will try to live through only this day, putting down the load of the past and worry about the future.
- Just for today, I will try to adjust myself to life as it unfolds, my work, my family, the circumstances as they come, and try not to be upset if they do not conform to my desires, but accept them as they are, while gently talking over if there could be a better way of getting things done.
- Just for today, I will exercise my body and read something to improve and stimulate my mind and lift my spirit.
- Just for today, I will seek out my soul in meditation and feel its inner calm and expansiveness and thus transcend little conflicts and pettiness that life is heir to.
- Just for today I will try to be kind to everyone I meet or work or live with.
- Just for today, I will try to rise above resentment if and when it rears its ugly head, by thinking of the good I have received, even if this is as a painful lesson, from someone I resent.
- Just for today, I will try to be attentive and helpful to someone who needs my attention and help.
- Just for today, I will try to hold my temper, even displeasure, if and when provoked, and by cool indifference put off the offender.
- Just for today, I will not tense up thinking of someone who has hurt my ego but, like a duck, shake off the droplets of the egos of others which have sprayed over me.
- Just for today, I will refrain from criticising or speaking ill of others, reminding myself that I have so many deficiencies to overcome.
- Just for today, I will desist from being a coward and be true to my principles.
- Just for today, I will speak less about myself and listen more to what others have to say.

- Just for today, I will try to be a little less selfish and find a way to do a generous deed.
- Just for today, I will try not to feel sorry for myself and think of how I may alleviate the suffering of another.
- Just for today, I will try not to be self-important and recognise the merits of others.
- Just for today, I will programme the day and set out what things are to be done and when, and to avoid the two big pests: indecision and hurry.
- Just for today, I will not be afraid to be happy and to enjoy what is good, beautiful and graceful and, with the sunshine of the positive, melt the fog of the negative.
- Just for today, I will try to love those that I can, drawing from the infinite love that is God.
- Just for today, I will tell myself that there are two days I should not worry about: yesterday, with its mistakes and aches, and tomorrow with its uncertainties and apprehensions. Instead, I should live today as well as I can, as mindful of my duties as I can be, and as committed to my ideals while the inner spirit guides me along.
- Just for today, I will try to practise some of the above as best I can.

For yesterday has gone forever and I have no control over it. All the regrets in my heart cannot make it any better. The only good it can teach me is not to repeat the same errors.

For tomorrow the sun will rise and it will be just another day over which, likewise, I have no control. I shall take it in my stride as it dawns and, until then, I shall not worry about it, unborn as it is.

That leaves only today and that is surely enough to fill my plate. For one can only deal with one day at a time and it is foolish to fight again yesterday's battles or try to tilt against the rolling of tomorrow's windmill.

So, let me live one day at a time only.⁴

⁴ Adapted and enlarged by Swami Shivapremananda from an anonymous text published in a bulletin of Faith House, New Brighton, Merseyside, England run by Pam and Gordon Smith.

CHAPTER 8 — THE MYSTIQUE OF CHANTS

There are three principal reasons for chants: to feel, express and relate. Life is ruled by instincts and emotions. Reason helps to understand and direct their expression. Instincts are basically for self-preservation and emotions help one to relate with both the tangible and intangible.

A human being is both body and spirit – the tangible and intangible. It functions by means of physical consciousness, grasping, analysing, demanding, giving and relating on a level one can comprehend while at the same time reaching out into another level of subtle consciousness which one does not quite understand but which one knows to exist deep within oneself. One tries to fulfil this through a sense of the transcendental, such as in inner peace, a higher form of love and being part of the infinite.

Nature expresses itself through energy forms, sound being one of its most expressive means. Thus, there has been music on earth from its very earliest history: leaves rustling in the breeze, brooks gurgling through beds of stones, waves breaking on shores, and the wind whistling through fields. On the animal level, sound becomes a means of communication with many different kinds of expression. On the human level, it finds its vast dimensions.

The history of chant is as old as human beings. Conscious of the surrounding nature and feeling part of it, man learned to communicate his needs among his fellow beings through words, that is sound forms. Then he began to feel a lift in his consciousness by expressing his emotions through songs when he was happy, as well as when he felt the burden of sorrow. He sang when he had a good harvest and wanted to share his happiness with others, and sought to relate his gratitude to nature. He also poured out his laments when he lost a dear one, so as to

hold on to the memory of the departed and find some relief from sorrow and wish the vanished soul well, which he thought must have gone to a strange and unknown world.

There must have been traditions of prayers, chants and other forms of music in the proto-Dravidian culture of the North-western part of the Indian subcontinent when the Aryan people arrived there between 1800 and 1500 BC, but hardly anything is known about these. The earliest references to Sanskrit chants can be traced back to about 1500 BC, when nomadic Aryans had settled down in this region of India. There were bards of tribes who sang and recited before their chieftains the compositions that came to be known as *Samhitas*, the first books of the *Vedas*.

ODES TO NATURE

These were in adoration of nature and expressed a fascination for natural forces, both in fear and gratitude. Poets thought that behind the brilliance, heat and consuming nature of fire, there must be a supernatural power which they named, *Agni*. Fire burnt and destroyed, and was feared. Fire also was used in cooking and providing heat in cold weather, and so was appreciated. The poets felt the breeze and related it to the breath and to life itself. At the same time, they were aware of the destructive power of storms and named the element air, *Vayu*. They slaked their thirst with the water from springs, saw how the rain nourished the earth and made the land bloom, while at the same time being terrified of the power of flooding. This force was called *Varuna*.

In this way human life connected with nature. Odes were composed and chanted to various nature gods, such as the elemental forces mentioned above, along with many others. The anthropomorphic variety of gods had not yet been developed, nor was there a monotheistic idea of God which came later on during the age of the *Upanishads*, after 1200 BC. These nature gods were forces of nature and were worshipped as spirits with superhuman attributes.

In the course of time, the poetical compositions called *Samhitas* were created in verse and prose, each with a marked cadence. These were meant to be chanted in specific ways, especially so in the *Sama Veda*. Later on, a sense of spiritual identity was further developed in the liturgy of books called the *Brahmanas*. When a still higher sense of belonging to the infinite arose in the *Upanishads*, there came a different variety of chants which had greater dimensions.

The tradition of chants indicates two distinct needs in human nature: security and fulfilment. These arose against a background of a profound sense of inadequacy. Physical security is sought with the desire to be protected from all kinds of threats, including disease,

natural calamities, economic difficulties, wars and whatever posed a danger to life. Following on, there was the need for psychological, emotional and spiritual security.

NEED TO BE FULFILLED

The other dominant need also begins on the physical level with the desire for anything that would gratify the senses and make the body happy. There follows the need to be fulfilled mentally, such as through curiosity, a search for knowledge, the longing to be fulfilled emotionally by human love and to be fulfilled spiritually through a sense of belonging to one's subtle source even though one does not know what this may be. Yet there is an awareness in life of the immanent infinite through which feelings, emotions, knowledge and life itself manifest.

This is how the ideas of God arose, be they crude and fanciful or sublime and wondrous. This is also how chants and hymns came to be created in their various forms: whining and dithyrambic, supplicant and contrite, fearful of harm and longing for love and truth. All indicated the two basic needs in life: wanting to be protected and to find fulfilment.

These needs start very early with an infant crying for nourishment and a child begging their parents for something which would give it physical gratification. The fear of parental punishment is soon imprinted on the child's mind, and later in life the fear of the tribal chief and his cohorts. In this way the dual basic needs came into being: clamouring for favours and being terrified of punishment by the physically strong. From this arose the strange, slimy thing called flattery which was later to be specially reserved for God.

Parents were soon discovered not to be so powerful after all, either in their ability to reward or punish. The tribal chief who had a wider authority over his followers learned that there was a better way to deal with complaints brought by those under his care and which he could not handle, by deciding to get rid of the pests currying for favour as well. This he did simply by asking his bards, who later became priests, to tell them that there was someone else, in fact a number of 'gods' to whom they could approach with their difficulties and also hanker for favours. Later, a personal, monotheistic God fulfilled such a social need.

OTHER FACTORS

Another motivational factor was also at play: the need to raise the people to superhuman efforts in times of stress and danger. This was done by invoking a belief such as God being on their side who would protect them and bring death and destruction upon their enemies if only everyone

were to do his or her best. When natural calamities arose, these became ‘acts of God’ because people were not good enough and could do better. It also helped people to bear their misfortunes stoically. So, keep praying and sing all the hymns you can.

There was yet another factor, also based on the need for security. This was the fear of death, the terror of the unknown. This shows how humans increasingly could not accept the fact of their extinction as their consciousness evolved. It also shows how the belief arose that there was more to life than the body and that there was something within that would not die. Thus, man clung to a belief in the existence of a soul. The reality of physical death was well known, but there was an increasing preoccupation with what might happen to the unseen, subtle entity, the psyche (Greek for soul) or *atma* (Sanskrit term) after the body passed away.

Little was known about this soul, but there was some knowledge about the mind and full awareness about the body and physical instincts. However, there did exist an inkling of the presence of something subtle within which was displayed through the longing for peace, fulfilment in human love even though this was often elusive, and the need to find spiritual fulfilment. The path to this goal was unknown. However, since the body was known, physical instincts and ideas about life were transferred to the soul, with the desire to achieve its continuity under ideal circumstances in a place called heaven.

The fear of death was, therefore, due to an excessive attachment to physical existence. The fear of the unknown was actually a fear of losing the known, for one cannot really be afraid of something one does not know, just as a child would not realise that fire burns until he had experienced it. This special kind of fear of extinction or uncertainty about the continuity of one’s existence, played a dominant role in religions and gave birth to ideas about heaven, becoming interwoven in hymns and chants. Since no one could be saved from death in the world that was known, the only recourse was to ask an all-powerful spiritual deity to bestow eternal life. In the *Kathu Upanishad*, life in heaven was itself considered inadequate, the ultimate destiny being seen as the merger with *Brahman* or infinite spirit.

This fear of death did not arise, of course, so long as life continued normally. However, the explicit fact behind the chants and prayers was that, in a desperate situation, when no tangible help could be found or was inadequate, the human heart cried out for help and sought to relate itself to a source of power for support, peace and consolation. The spirit of man rose from the

limited vehicle, his body and mind, and reached out to the limitless sky and tried to revive itself by relating to the universal spirit.

This is the mystique of chants, in fact, of all prayers.

ATTRIBUTES OF LIFE

Gods and goddesses are attributes of life itself through which one seeks to relate to the infinite which the *Upanishads* call the impersonal, transcendental *Brahman*, a term representing monism. The same purpose of relating to one's spiritual source through the adoration of the best qualities of life is served by the Judeo-Christian concept of a personal God. This is called *Ishwara* by Hindus, a term denoting a monotheistic fusion of all gods and goddesses while sublimating their shortcomings such as divine wrath and an addiction to praise and power, through the idea of an all-encompassing love and forgiveness. The God of relentless justice becomes the God of mercy.

In fact, the various concepts of God are shapes of spiritual aspirations of the individual and group, superimposed upon the infinite spirit. The purpose of chants is just that: the movement of one's heart relating to the infinite, to one's spiritual source, in various shapes of ideals and longings.

Chants are of a religious nature not only in their content but also in the significance of their cadence, intonation and rhythm, integrating individual consciousness with higher levels of consciousness. This gives rise to a feeling of inner peace and a sublimation of the emotions. It can even give rise to a sense of a collective unconscious, such as in feeling one's roots in the primordial vibration of the universe.

THE PRIMORDIAL UNCONSCIOUS

The primordial unconscious is represented in nature by the principle of cohesion in the molecular structure of an element, in the rustling of leaves, the distant rolling of thunder, the murmuring of a stream, or in the slow sinking of dusk into night and of dawn emerging from darkness. The many facets of nature may be related to the many unknown or little-known variety of human emotions. By humming a tune, listening to music, singing, playing a musical instrument or singing devotional chants, one is expressing such a relationship.

The universe pulsates with energy. Human consciousness constitutes its highest form known so far. Divine consciousness, transcendental infinite consciousness, the universal mind,

are all conjectures of the basic human longing to widen the horizons of one's perception, the desire to burst out of the limitations of instincts and memories, and to experience a relatedness with the cosmic whole.

Since sound is energy and energy is movement and movement is in relationship, both with the tangible and intangible, the purpose of chants is to fulfil this basic longing. This is especially true when they represent soaring harmony in sound forms. Chants manipulate the emotions, exercise and move them, meander and lift them, attenuate and diffuse them.

In their primitive form, the rhythm of chants is more prominent. Being repetitive and alliterative, rhythmic and exuberant, they release pent up emotions and produce a hypnotic effect. There are some who go into a trance by listening to or taking part in such chants. By themselves, their spiritual value is doubtful.

Chants also serve another purpose, that of providing a group identity and a sense of collective security which is used in many religions. However, their spiritual aim is not to confine people into groups or to divide them, but to give a sense of unity and inter-relatedness of life, of joys and sorrows, light and shadow, microcosm and macrocosm, man and God.

CHAPTER 9 — KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INQUIRY

The first step to knowledge is by observation. This is done in two stages: an immediate assessment and a relatively long-term perception. For example, we know the nature of our mind and character by observing our reaction to challenge: cowardice or strength, self-importance or self-confidence. The ego is easily provoked in an insecure mind. The gut-reaction of being defensive reveals one's insecurity within.

One who is secure in a premise of knowledge would not enter into an argument when that premise is challenged after having made one's position known. Religious intolerance is very much indicative of the unconscious insecurity in one's own faith. If you are secure in your belief, no-one can take that away from you.

The second stage is to observe what is going on in one's mind over a period of time, say a couple of days or a week: the occurrence of waves of resentment, day-dreaming without any intention to act upon one's day-dream, shirking work, gossiping, making up stories, and the lying habit, are just some examples. All these point to our character pattern, the load we carry on our feet of clay, mostly half-baked. In the furnace of life, instead of baking them well, they only seem to get singed.

We have a very short history of seeking knowledge about oneself and about the universe from which we have evolved and by which we continue to be influenced. The quirk of the recombination of particles of energy, beginning as early as three billion years ago on this planet, through trial and error of the aeon-old evolutionary process and the atomic interaction of chemistry and biology, have resulted in our modern human form. Our brains have evolved

sufficiently to question the make-up of these particles, where they come from and what is their purpose. It is good to recall that only 50,000 years ago, we were grunting savages!

PSYCHOLOGY BEGAN LONG AGO

Psychology did not begin with Sigmund Freud, but some 3,500 years ago, first through oral tradition and, nearly a thousand years later, in written form in the *Vedas* and Old Testament. It began as an insight into human nature. One has only to read in the *Samhitas* (the first part of the *Vedas*) how people sought to alleviate insecurity and feel protected by trying to propitiate the forces of nature through chants and invocations. One can similarly read of Samuel warning King David of God's displeasure due to his succumbing to flaws of character.

Human nature, in terms of character traits and the workings of the mind, is graphically portrayed in the Bible, Buddhist scriptures, Confucian and Taoist texts, as well as the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Panchatantra* and the *Puranas*. This is achieved mainly by observation rather than investigation and analysis, as is done in modern times. Neuroscience had to wait a long time. However, the soothsayers, shamans and priests seem to have done their jobs fairly well, considering the record of present-day well-meaning shrinks, despite the chemical aids at their disposal.

The mind is a particular field of energy, also called individual consciousness, which inhabits two spheres of grey matter known as the brain. As I do not have any training in neuroscience or modern psychology, I will keep to the yogic point of view as indicated in the old Indian texts while also being guided by current understanding, personal observation and experience when dealing with people under psychological stress.

One cannot say that something is true or real without the necessary evidence. As with any energy field, the mind has its positive and negative wave lengths, as well as neutral or quiescent states. The term 'positive' is intended to mean harmonious, while 'negative' implies that which leads to conflict. The emanation of this energy is visual, such as in one's facial expressions and body language, as well as being verbal. However, it has only a short range outside the brain, such as two people conversing together, or one relating to another how they are feeling.

There is no evidence of a collective consciousness, although our behaviour can be predictable under specific circumstances due to cultural influences. The atmosphere in a place

can be palpable, of course, such as the difference between an active or inactive church. This is due to contributing factors such as wax-burning candles, incense, sonorous chanting, and the devotional imprint of those who worship there. But to call this a collective consciousness is a misnomer, for consciousness is individual and cannot be collective.

In the same way, there is no collective *karma*. *Karma* is a consequence of a particular action. Collective suffering due to war or a group of people dying in a plane accident, cannot be called collective *karma*, but plain bad luck. Good or bad luck is a term used to describe an event the cause of which is as yet unknown. That is a more honest way of looking at it. To attribute an unverifiable cause would be dishonest.

IS THERE AN AFTERLIFE?

Let me digress briefly into the topic of after life, because it relates to the nature of our mind. Since the beginning of human history, there has been speculation about life after death. The *Upanishads* write about a transition to higher planes of existence called ‘different grades of heaven’, or to lower ones popularly known as ‘hell’. This transition occurs according to one’s meritorious or wicked deeds, before one reincarnates on this planet to resume the evolutionary process until the individual soul finally merges in *Brahman* or the transcendental spirit.

Some texts speak of direct rebirth here on earth after the individual consciousness has slept for a while in a disembodied state. The worst kind of speculation and the most pagan or superstitious one, is that of an ultimate reward in an eternal heaven, or eternal punishment in an ultimate hell after having waited in limbo indefinitely for the day of final judgment. This indicates two characteristics of the mind: the extremes of greed and vengeance. Having invented a merciful God, such an attitude becomes an oxymoron.

A mundane judge punishes a murder with a 25-year life sentence, subject to one third remission for good behaviour. How can God be worse? Astrophysicists presume that out of two hundred billion stars in our galaxy, one in a hundred thousand may have a planetary system, but we do not know if there are evolved forms of life, either higher or lower, than that on earth. Then there are a hundred billion galaxies of all kinds in the universe, according to British physicist Stephen Hawking. Why are we so primitively self-important in our religious thinking?

The existence of heaven and hell is, indeed, academic. It is for the scientists to determine the nature of the universe, and the laws that govern it. What really matters to us is what we do

with our life, and how we understand and cope with what life brings us. In a pure heart, with compassion and integrity, love and the warmth of kind feelings, decency and fair-mindedness, we experience heaven within. By expressing them in our relationship with others, we create a similar heaven around us. In their opposite, we suffer from hell both internally and externally.

REINCARNATION

We can deal with the subject of reincarnation in the same way. This also relates to the nature of our mind. Among Hindus, or those who practise the Hindu faith, this is almost a universal belief, just as the belief in an eternal heaven and hell is commonplace amongst practising Jews, Christians and Moslems. However, as an individual consciousness does not carry its memory from one lifetime to another, for all practical purposes what really counts is the life as we know it. Reincarnated or not, every life is a unique experience. Why speculate about something that we cannot verify, purely on the basis of hearsay?

However, the theory of reincarnation is a far better postulation than any of the following:

- The caprice of chance or dumb luck, whether good or bad, in which free will is irrelevant. Why bother about something in which we have no say?
- The will of God who knows what is best for his creation. His mind is beyond human comprehension. A divine mystery should not be probed into. So, do your best and accept your destiny without complaint. If such a mystery cannot be understood, then that is not helpful. It can also be used to deceive people.

During the past quarter of a century, physics and chemistry have made giant strides in comprehending the laws of the universe, of genetics and biology, unlike religion. True science is modest enough to recognise many areas of knowledge that remain to be explored. Religion has done little to improve the spiritual quality of life.

Speculation about reincarnation is an attempt to explain the inequality and inequity of life with a logical sequence, even if unverifiable.

We are all born with a different quantum of intelligence. Like the ligaments binding the knees and the pelvic joints, we can stretch our intelligence by mental exercise only up to a point and in a limited way. This inequality is due to our self-effort, or lack of it, in past lives. The same rule of recycled self-effort holds good for inborn talent in audio-visual arts, poetry and mathematical excellence, and a genius being born in unfavourable circumstances.

In a poverty-stricken family, a child grows up emotionally rich and with sound character on account of their marvellous parents and does not grudge their material deprivation. Another child grows up emotionally stunted and morally rudderless in a wealthy family. Why this inequality of birth? An honest person tries to live a decent life of upright conduct, but runs through a series of bad luck. A wicked person, on the other hand, seems to be rewarded by fate. Is there justice in life? Reincarnation theorists try to explain this inequality by the idea of unrealised retribution and the compensation of a debit or credit balance in one's past life being repaid in this. Our present *karma*, likewise, will have its consequence in due course.

As we cannot relate the present with an unknown past, the philosophy of reincarnation is just a philosophy of life. It is a doctrine of redeemable accountability, of assuming responsibility for one's fate. It is meant to enable one to pick up the haversack and soldier on, rather than to pass blame on to one's parents, society or God for one's bad luck. It offers a way of reconciling with an unjust world and to come to terms with fate. It is a philosophy which makes God a constitutional monarch and oneself the author of one's destiny.

Accountability to an invisible God after death does not deter evil deeds and has little meaning in shaping our actions in contrast to accountability to our fellow beings and to the social institutions defined by law and, ultimately, by our conscience. In the same way, the hope for a better life in one's next incarnation as a result of one's good deeds is meaningless since the memory of our present one will not be carried over.

The theorists of reincarnation were psychologically perspicacious. The preference of choice inclines to the known. Given an option between returning to an imperfect world which one knows, and having a passport without the certainty of gaining a visa entrance into heaven from St Peter, the human mind would surely choose the former!

Personally, I will be quite happy when my body is reduced to ashes and dissolved into the sea or river (*apas*) and my last breath has mingled in the atmosphere (*vayu*), and if my soul then merges in the infinite spirit, its individuality gone forever.

FIVE ASPECTS OF THE MIND

There are two main classifications of the mind according to yogic tradition. One is called the inner (*antar*) formation (*karana*); the other, the five (*pancha*) sheaths (*kosha*).

In the inner formation, the inmost content of our being is the I-consciousness (*aham*). Identifying with its spiritual source, it is known as the soul (*atma*). The Bible calls this the image of God in Genesis in which we are said to have been created. When identified with the body and mind in connection with the surrounding world, this is called the ego (*ahamkara*).

Yogis thought the soul to be located in the heart, as did Christians. This is because the fluctuation in emotions is felt in the palpitations of the heart, although this is due to the strong muscular pumping of blood in order to circulate it around the body. The soul can be characterised as the life-principle as well as the spiritual side of human nature. It is an energy field within our mind and body. *Gyana Yoga* refers to the soul as a spark of the infinite spirit in a state of embodiment (*jivatma*).

Whereas both the *Bible* and the *Vedas* give an exclusively divine nature to the soul as being in the image of God, the Greek term *psyche* refers to the unconscious which includes both its spiritual and material propensities. Modern psychology and psychiatry follow this definition.

The second layer, which is mostly dormant, is the principle of transcendental wisdom or spiritual enlightenment (*buddhi*). The title, Buddha, was given to Gautama, meaning Enlightened One. We now know, of course, that there are no layers in the brain. Rather, it consists of billions of neurons which function through electro-chemical interaction. The word *buddhi* is also used as a general term signifying intelligence. Intuitive perception takes place both in the fields of *buddhi* and the unconscious.

The third and fourth layers are called *chitta* or the base of consciousness (*chit*). The word *chitta* is sometimes used to signify the entire mind. The inner (*antar*) part of *chitta* comprises the field of basic instincts or *samskara* (deep-rooted impressions). The modern term is the unconscious. The outer (*vahir*) part of *chitta*, or the 4th aspect, serves as the field of memory (*samriti*). The modern equivalent is the subconscious.

Our education takes place in the subconscious, primarily by registering experience through action, experimentation and calculation and, secondly, through the study of books and by observation. Whereas the unconscious never sleeps, the subconscious pulsates from time to time in the dream state (*swapna*), releasing tension caused by stress. The yogis fantasised that some *gurus* gave *mantra* initiation in the dream state to a selected few.

The fifth or outermost layer is known as *manas*, or the conscious level of the mind. The term *manas* is also generally used to refer to the entire mind. It functions through the senses

(sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) in conjunction with memory. The role of *manas* is to think, evaluate, select, make decisions and exert the will to act.

THE FIVE SHEATHS

Another classification is to wrap the image of God, or spark of the infinite spirit, within five sheaths (*pancha kosha*).

The outermost of these sheaths is the physical body or *ana-maya*, that which is sustained by food (*ana*). The word *maya* (made of) should not be confused with *maayaa* (illusion). It is similar to the Christian concept of the body being the tabernacle or temporary habitation of the soul.

Inside this is the *prana-maya* or sheath comprising five vital functions which keep the body alive. These are: breathing (*prana*), assimilating nourishment (*samana*), circulating this nutrition by means of the blood stream (*vyana*), eliminating toxins (*apana*), and sustaining the mind (*udana*).

Within the vital sheath is *mano-maya* or a shroud consisting of three sub-layers of the mind: the field of instincts (unconscious), of memory (subconscious), and of thought (conscious).

Inside the mental sheath is the dormant *vignana-maya* or microcosmic field containing the knowledge of the macrocosm. This is presumed to contain all the laws that govern the universe. Any new scientific discovery is said to be attributed to this *kosha* (sheath).

The innermost sheath, *ananda-maya*, is also dormant and is known as the soul-consciousness or state of blissful union with its spiritual origin, or God within. It is replete with transcendental wisdom and gives rise to spiritual intuition.

The paranormal or psychic propensity arises from the unconscious layer of *mano-maya*. The term spiritual should not be confused with psychic. Spirituality consists in the inculcation of moral values such as integrity and compassion, self-restraint and altruism, decency of conduct and goodness of heart, freedom from malice and humility of spirit.

The source of spirituality is in the *ananda-maya*. The spiritually evolved mind may not have psychic visions, and the paranormally inclined mind may fail to meet the standards of spirituality. Both are unrelated.

Intuition has two aspects. The subconscious mulls over on its own initiative a spiritual value or scientific problem which has been considered by the conscious mind over a period of time. In a quiet moment, there is a sudden flash of insight. This is called intuition arising from the subconscious. However, yogis spoke of another kind of intuition which arises in the *ananda-maya* or the *vignana-maya*.

Rare foresight of events through divination is said to take place in the latter. The success rate is miniscule but the fact that it does occur gives credence to the theory that an event occurs in the astral plane before actualising itself, just as an architect draws up a plan for a house before building it.

FIVE BUILDING BLOCKS

The mind is the product of five factors. Yogis presumed them to be the building blocks which create the mind. They are referred to as *karmas*, both the consequence of action as well as the process of acting.

The first of these factors is called *adrishta* (unseen) or *avyakta* (inexplicable) *karma*. This is said to be the residual effect of *karmas* created in one's previous life or lives. These shape our inborn nature and potentialities, as well as deciding on the kind of environment in which we are born. Charles Darwin spoke of the former as inherited traits of character. At present it is called genetic inheritance from one's parents and grandparents, perhaps going even further back.

The second factor is *griha* (house) *karma* or the kind of household in which we are born and the kind of parents we have. In the first six months of infancy, and even earlier during the latter period of gestation, we are indelibly influenced by one's mother due to close physical and emotional contact, one's father playing a secondary role.

During the following three years, parental influence or the influence of those with whom we grow up, is still very strong. After the third year, a child is able to vaguely remember events, with the memories becoming clearer as he or she gets older. This process of absorption continues with diminishing indelibility through adolescence.

We grow emotionally and in terms of character development in the field of *griha* or *karma*, through the security of love and moral guidance by the forthright example of what we are asked to obey. If the feedback is negative, we grow up emotionally and morally insecure.

The third factor is *samaja* (societal) *karma*, or the surroundings in which we grow up, the types of schools we attend, the character of our teachers, family members and friends who influence us, and by the kind of neighbours we associate with. Environmental factors which shape our personality help to fulfil some basic needs: the desire for approval to strengthen our sense of honour, the fear of rejection or disapproval, guidance to make decisions, individual identity honed through role models, and group identity such as belonging to a particular cultural tradition.

The fourth factor is *swartha* (*swa* – oneself, *artha* – interest) *karma* or action motivated by self-interest, self-indulgence, cutting corners to one's advantage, exploiting those who are vulnerable, abusing the weak and deceiving the gullible.

The fifth factor is *purushartha karma* or actions motivated by spiritual (*purusha*) ideals. It is the building block that enables the transformation of our character (*charitra*). The word *charitra* means to graze (*chara*) or to cultivate such traits that help us to be ethically upright, emotionally stable and to have peace of mind.

Life is what we make of it by coming to terms with our mind. It depends upon our coming to terms with life around us and in the kinds of relationships that we have at home and in our place of work. In any bonding relationship, the requirements are an acceptance of what we and others are and then working on ourselves through self-effort, and on our relationship with others through better communication, thereby improving mutual understanding. By sharing of ideals, we learn to grow together. Mutual respect due to a common motivation gives us self-confidence. This is, indeed, a lifelong process.

INDIVIDUALITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Aham is the principle of the individuality of a spiritual essence called *atma* which is intangible in the sense that it cannot be measured by an instrument and cannot be duplicated. Once it departs, the body and mind cannot be revived.

The physical home of the mind, the brain, is material and is sustained by food as well as by prana which relies on both food and also the pulsation of *aham*, or the 'I', wishing to exist. The mind is not self-luminous. The pulsating 'I' gives rise to the instincts which in turn generate a desire in relation to objects through an outward projection which is registered inwardly as a memory of the experience which can be accessed later on.

One thinks because the ‘I’ is in the thought. No thought can be sustained without being interested in it. The seer and the seen come together externally with the objects by means of the senses, and inwardly through memory, causing a ripple in the mind. This is called *vrutti* or that which conduces the experience of pleasure and pain. When the ‘I’ feels detached, the thought processes cease momentarily and, as it relates with a subtle feeling of peace and harmony to a spiritual source in meditation, it is able to gain control over the mind. As Patanjali says in the second aphorism of his *Yogasutras*, yoga is the control of the mental ripples or impulses (*yogachitta-vriti nirodhah*).

The psychic materials of the mind are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, by which the character is formed. They exist in a state of disequilibrium, *tamas* dominating *rajas*, or vice versa, and *rajas* overbearing *sattva*. And so, the need arises for control of the mind which in turn gives rise to action. *Tamas* is characterised by lethargy, negativity, selfishness, self-pity, hatred and depression. *Rajas* is characterised by passion, egotism, pride, vanity, ambition and restlessness. *Sattva* is characterised by peace, love, integrity, a positive outlook, spiritual aspiration and inner harmony. When *sattva* dominates, *tamas* is absorbed in *rajas* and *rajas* in *sattva* and, thus, they co-exist in a state of sublimation. This is the goal of yoga, the purpose of mind control.

CHAPTER 10 — CRITERION AND INNER BALANCE

The word criterion is derived from the Greek *krites*, to judge, meaning to “judge or assess a situation”. To act well, we must judge the circumstances and formulate a criterion. To relate well, we should judge a person’s values and character without saying so. In fact, we are doing this continuously. To judge means to evaluate which is fundamental to making a decision. It does not imply sitting in judgment with a condemnatory attitude. Hence the saying: “Judge not others”.

In Sanskrit, criterion is *lakshama*, an outlook, or *adarsha*, an ideal, both of which are formed by *vichara*, enquiry. *Adarsha* means towards (*aa*) a vision (*darsha*). *Chara* means to graze or masticate, that is to think and rethink (*vi* meaning ‘re’). The Sanskrit for science is *vigyana* or research through investigation. In Latin, *scire* (the root of science) is to know. It is derived from *gnoscere* which in turn is derived from the Greek *gnosis*. This is very similar to the Sanskrit *gyana* or knowledge which arises from the union of outer and inner, or empirical and evaluative perception. *Lakshana* derives from *laksha* or seeing.

The word *charitra*, character, is formed from *chara*, that is to inculcate in oneself moral values. The Greek root for character, *charassein*, to engrave, has a similar meaning. The criterion of character is formed from such qualities as:

- Integrity, trustworthiness and loyalty,
- Duty, honour and responsibility,
- Moral courage, will and commitment,
- Fidelity, discretion and fairness.

The purpose behind criterion is to cope with and channel the primordial urges to survive and be happy. These energy impulses which swirl in the mind can only be dealt with in three ways: by indulgence, repression or sublimation. Indiscriminate indulgence leads to error and suffering. Repression leads to tension and complexes, while sublimation, through a higher motivation, leads to a more satisfying inner experience and self-expression. This is the criterion of discipline.

Amongst animals, life is a biological process arising from instinctual behaviour patterns. Animals are not vain enough to give the impression of a struggle except when fighting against the odds. In contrast, humans do so even when they are not really struggling. This is due to self-importance, laziness or self-pity which seeks to dramatise a situation. Just look at our habit of grumbling!

If we merely functioned through our instincts like animals, we would probably make fewer mistakes. Since we live by our fancies as well as instincts, we are prone to suffer from mistaken judgment.

No-one can live without criterion because we have to work and deal with each other, whether we like it or not. The question is whether we have good or bad judgment as this is intimately connected with our state of mind: harmonious or perturbed, happy or unhappy.

INSTINCT, IMPULSE, DESIRE, AMBITION

Survival occurs through instinct. Instinct is an impulse which becomes a desire through a thought process trying to make survival agreeable. Any desire is oriented towards personal happiness, even in the process of making others happy. Criterion is a means to satisfy this very reasonable desire to be happy.

When a desire does not have a vision beyond its immediate results, it is only an impulse for self-fulfilment and, therefore, lacks criterion. Thus, criterion is a desire with a vision to express ourselves. All actions, in order not to be impulsive and thus capable of causing harm, must have a criterion.

One cannot and should not be without desire in action, but try to be free from selfishness so that an action guided by good criterion can lead to a long-term positive result. Because of that interest in a positive result, one is taught how to act better in the future and to be responsible for one's actions. Acting with indifference as to the result will only guarantee inefficiency.

Criterion is, therefore, not an intellectual luxury but a daily necessity. It is needed to prevent mistakes and, thus, suffering to oneself and to others. It is also needed in order better to understand the meaning of life, helping one to plan for a better future and to progress towards desirable goals.

The criterion behind ambition, for example, is to create a healthy motivation for one's untapped talents, to combine intelligence with effort and to find out the limits of possibility in making life progressive and useful while not neglecting the need for inner peace through spiritual values.

To have no ambition at all means to vegetate. Ambition is negative when it is sought at the expense of others or by denying one's time and attention to those for whom we are responsible. Ambition plays a greater role than mere ego-fulfilment. It means to be more useful to one another, to be creative and efficient in work and thus successful in one's undertaking. With selfish ambition, no one has found happiness, nor indeed has the person who lacks any ambition and who has only managed to make his or her mind opaque by indifference.

Since everyone likes life to be agreeable, we make fanciful assessments of a disagreeable situation in order not to face reality. We accuse others of the defects from which we suffer ourselves in order not to have to face them. We like to live in a world of our fancy, all for the sake of avoiding suffering. However, we cannot do this through illusion, even by regarding the world itself as illusory. So, the question is not between a choice of having or not having a criterion, but between whether that criterion is good or not. Just look at the errors of judgment our leaders make!

The birth of criterion can be found in a saying attributed to Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus Christ. "The essence of the *Torah* consists in not treating others as one would not like to be treated by others; the rest is a commentary". Thus, the first step is consideration for others.

DISCIPLINES WHICH FORM CRITERION

Such disciplines refer to the means by which we educate, control and sublimate the ego which expresses itself through selfishness, self-centredness, self-importance, self-pity and vanity.

- Generosity counters selfishness or meanness.
- Consideration for, and attention to, others counters self-centredness.

- Facing the fact that one has a lot to learn and improve counters self-importance.
- Not blaming others and recognising one's own faults counters self-pity.
- Modesty and learning how to be useful to others counters vanity by filling the emptiness (*vanus* meaning empty).

If one practises these ideals and qualities of character mentioned earlier, it will not be difficult to improve one's judgment which is based on the adages:

- **Do not be false.** Do not be a hypocrite and do not respond instantly by denying that one is either of these. The truth will shine on the image however much it is polished by pretence.
- **Avoid self-justification.** This does not mean that you should not defend oneself. If truth is on your side, it will speak for itself. If you are in error, you cannot afford to justify yourself. This is but a bad habit and bad manners.

The formation of criterion is assisted by the following:

- **Do not fail to learn from your experience.** There is an old saying: "The wise learn from the mistakes of others, the intelligent from their own mistakes, and fools never learn from their errors but keep repeating them".
- **Base your evaluation on facts, not wishful thinking.** Remember the first premise of truth is evidence, *veritas*, or verification.
- **Relate your choice of what you do by its long-term effect, rather than a short-term result.** A quick gain derived by short-sighted selfishness makes a long-term loss inevitable.
- **Do not expect from others what you are not yourself willing to do or to be.** Make sure you communicate your expectation rather than being silent while still expecting it.
- **Any good action performed with good judgment is like a capital investment.** In other words, it should be able to sustain itself and allows one to help oneself. A good action with bad judgment is like helping one to be dependent and irresponsible and creates a sequence of unreasonable expectations.
- **Anything that is secretive has a built-in possibility of deception,** whether in a teaching, an action, or a relationship. Avoid it.
- **Respect the opinion, feelings and needs of others** when you relate your own to theirs.
- **In forming a close relationship, look beyond external charm and appearance,** such as whether a person possesses an adequate measure of compassion (is not hard-hearted), authenticity (is not two-faced), responsibility (can be counted on), is not too self-centred, self-important and prone to self-pity.

- **Have an open mind, a disposition to learn, because we do not know enough.** Pride and superficiality are impediments to learning.
- **Avoid negative thinking.** When a resentful thought about someone arises, think of a good deed he or she has done to you, thus countering a negative ripple of energy with a positive counterpart. Remember that resentment harms you rather than the person resented.
- **Try to be free from prejudice and infatuation.** Both are blinding energy to be cast off: prejudice through fairness and objectivity, infatuation by reason and being mindful of the character traits of the person with whom one is infatuated.

FINDING INNER PEACE

No-one has found inner peace by closing the eyes and trying to forget the world, or by meditating on the fiat that God alone is real and that the world is unreal.

Inner peace is realised by the practice of the guidelines given above. Then be mindful of the basis of inner peace:

- Lowering your level of expectation.
- Managing your desires.
- Setting a priority of choice in your values, having determined which are the most important.
- Practise detachment, not indifference. Abstain from possessiveness. Don't take yourself too seriously or be heavy-laden with self-importance. Sooner or later someone will make you fall flat on your face.
- Keep the mind occupied with something interesting to learn.
- Engage yourself in some useful project, some work to do, some places to visit.
- Recognise and accept the limitations of circumstances and the people around us. Adapt, adjust, accommodate, without losing your bearing.
- Measure what you can do with what you have within and without in terms of capacity and motivation.

Peace is neither exclusively within, as being united with God, nor without, as having come to terms with life. Rather, it is a mixture of both.

Spiritual exercises such as loving God in prayer and meditation, repeating a mantra or affirmations as to what is our real nature in a divine relationship (*Tat twam asi, Soham*), will create a temporary state of elevation, peace and harmony and, possibly, some inner strength.

What will actually help is to keep in mind the above disciplines and guiding principles in order to be able to love and practise them and to make them one's constant companions.

Spiritual exercises such as concentration techniques do not by themselves improve human nature but sincerity which underlies the application of their practice can help to make us wiser and better people.

VALIDITY OF BELIEFS

What is the ultimate cause of this cosmos with billions of expanding universes? Is there a creator, as religion claims? If so, what is his nature? Is there a great purpose, a supreme wisdom, behind creation? For the formation of criterion, these questions cannot be answered merely by scientific investigation, even if modern physics has arrived at a point of origin of the cosmos well over ten thousand million years ago and is beginning to understand the basic material forces which govern our galaxy.

The question about a creator enters the world of speculation and serves a very specific need for protection, such as praying to a deity, in the pursuit of survival. It also points to the need for a moral order through celestial commandment for social peace at a time when there was little access to humanitarian education. It also helps to provide the strength to be able to bear our burdens with patience and equanimity through the belief in a divine wisdom which sets our destiny.

The validity of such belief relies not so much on whether it can be proved but, rather, if it helps to serve these very obvious human needs.

Any speculation to be meaningful must make life more agreeable and provide the motive power of inspiration. Religion provides a set of beliefs based on legendary stories. If they fail to inspire, they remain sterile. Apart from conformity to boost group identity and cohesion through customs and observances, belief actually relates to hope on a personal level. Hoping for anything only makes sense when it is related to what is plausibly possible. It loses meaning if the goal is too far-fetched and, thus, unattainable, or if one does nothing in order to realise the ideal behind that belief, thus remaining forever in the realm of hope. Similarly, faith implies a commitment to ideals which represent the premise of faith: God. This is the criterion of belief and faith.

There are no revealed truths, only an individual perception of reality through spiritual aspiration which must prove its validity through collective verification over a long period of

time. A prophet's claim to a God-given revelation was designed to make a teaching more acceptable in earlier times.

Does God exist as an entity? Are there *bodhisattvas*, heavenly beings, residing in superior planes of existence? There is no possibility for verification. However, as a life-giving principle, it would be foolish to discount the existence of a transcendental force behind material forms of energy. That would be tantamount to saying that there is nothing beyond what we are presently capable of determining through our relatively recently acquired level of intelligence.

One does not find evidence of the rule of an omnipotent power by observation, nor indeed that of a transcendental wisdom. You only have to look at the amount of suffering in the world, the extensive physical misery in which a fifth of human beings exist, and the pervasive psychological unhappiness of both rich and poor. There is evidence, however, that by believing in and attuning to a source of strength and wisdom, one can discover an inner poise and guidance which was lacking before.

SPIRITUAL REALITY

By observation we know there is a universal preference for good over evil, truth over deception, love over hate, harmony over conflict, purity over impurity, and knowledge over ignorance, even though we can see that the opposite often dominates our lives through force of nature. This evidence indicates that there is a spiritual reality to our being, above the physical, and that spiritual reality is universal and transcendent. This is the best definition of God as a tangible truth in human existence rather than a deity.

The foundation of wisdom is personal experience. The principal means to evaluate an experience is through reason, that is to relate effect with cause, action with reaction, theory with result, and a consideration of one's own interests as being equal to that of others.

Some teachers decry dependence on experience due to one's tendency to be influenced by other people's experience. But one has to be really stupid to do so.

Then there is the frustration within the limited horizon of experience which gives rise to the speculation of there being direct perception, free from individual view or any superimposition. One is to wait in utter stillness for the pure light of awareness to dawn. But what guarantee is there that what arises is a shaft of perception arising from the subconscious or unconscious workings of the mind over a period of time?

Progress occurs as a result of searching, appraising, applying, experimenting, understanding and constantly trying to improve and learn.

Experience is both empirical like heat and cold, and psychological as in happiness and unhappiness. Reasoning helps one to understand why one is happy or unhappy and, thus, serves as an instrument of choice. The main purpose of reason and, therefore, having a criterion lies in determining one's security and welfare in relationship with others, and how one is motivated in pursuit of desirable goals.

The ultimate purpose of criterion is the cultivation of conscience. To be conscientious is to be close to God. To be close to God is to develop an understanding of spiritual values and their absorption in our conscience through their application in human relationship. A well-developed sense of right and wrong, without self-righteousness, and the ability to choose the positive, result from this absorption.

Imperfect as we are, having been created as much in the image of the devil as God, it is a long process to overcome generations of acquired human nature and genetic character imprints, by means of education. It is only through our early education at home and school and by personal effort to hone our character that we develop our conscience and capacity to choose.

It is thus silly to say that God gave us intelligence, the instrument of choice and that we are to be blamed for the mess we have created. Firstly, intelligence is genetically unequal and in part moulded through environmental influence. We are, of course, responsible for our fate. But what a brutish start and what an enormous price to pay for the progress and happiness we long for.

Blame the devil for the mess in creation! He made his first appearance in the Old Testament's *Book of Chronicles* which is said to have been written in the 4th century BC. Christians picked him up and have kept the holy spirit struggling against him until Christ returns to establish the kingdom of heaven, clothing this understandable mindset which belongs to earlier times.

LOVE OF LIFE

We need to survive because we love life. In the process of survival, we go through agreeable and disagreeable experiences and the love of life makes us choose what is agreeable only. Thus, the necessity of criterion.

All forms of existence are made possible through the interaction of different forms of energy. When these are relatively harmonious, there is a prolonged cohesion. When not, there is decay and disintegration. This interaction also occurs in humans, through the interaction of different aspects of our nature such as *sattva* (goodness and harmony), *rajas* (competitiveness and passion), and *tamas* (inertia and negativity).

The experience of perfect love and harmony can never be continuous but is interspersed with less than perfect sides of our nature. The question is how well we can reduce the widely varying fluctuations through a better direction of our energies for greater creativity and balance. For this we need motivation or a love of ideals and good judgment to be able to fulfil these.

The most intense form of psychological suffering is caused by irrational attachment which is actually a form of self-love. The more acute our attachment for a person, the sharper the pain due to disappointment. This is caused by selfishness which is expressed in the form of possessiveness, an unwillingness to accept the fact of having crossed the point of no return. To a lesser extent, this is also the case in our relationship with material objects.

Selfishness is an inborn trait caused by the need to survive. When excessive, it makes our life empty, preventing the flowing in of other peoples' love and our ability to give to others. The cure for selfishness is to be considerate and useful to others, to restrain from being hypersensitive through tolerance and detachment, and to think of and listen to others more than one thinks or speaks about oneself. These are the first steps needed to educate and purify the ego.

Selfless love, even if imperfect but made real through deed, gives a sense of spiritual relatedness. This is what gives a sense of meaning to one's life, enabling us to rejoice in the happiness of others, to share our values, to do some useful work and to try to be a better person.

HAPPINESS AND HARMONY

No one can experience a prolonged state of harmony within oneself, the dullness of indifference yes, but no real depth of happiness, even of momentary euphoria and temporarily profound meditation. Happiness and fulfilment depend on the realisation of spiritual goals such as purity of heart and the sublimation of the ego, always in relationship to the welfare of others.

Happiness also arises in the widening of the horizon of one's mind through the study of the experiences of humanity that is available in the form of well-crafted literature, not pulp fiction without the ring of truth. This helps to clear and stimulate the mind allowing one to

acquire a depth of understanding conducive to a personal involvement with ideals and contentment.

Occasional disharmony will inevitably arise because there is an element of unpredictability in human nature, but it is up to oneself as to how to handle such a situation and control one's reaction and so avoid being unduly upset due to wounded vanity. Little disappointments are only to be expected and should be accepted as part of one's education.

Second only to attachment, irrational expectations of others, usually on account of self-centredness, perturb our peace of mind. Firstly, it is necessary to be deserving before expecting anything and then one should look into the nature of the person from whom something is expected before complaining of being disappointed.

Satisfaction should be sought within oneself through selfless love, devotion to duty, work ethic and the pursuit of understanding. It is not true that happiness can only be found in non-expectation, nor is a person without desires really happy, at best resigned and indifferent. Life is an onward movement, to be better than one is, to do better than one does. Without a motivation to achieve useful goals, life becomes stagnant and dull and can easily fall prey to unhappiness.

Motivation for irrational goals, such as to be free from the cycle of birth and death or attaining the eternal life hereafter or enjoying an ever-blissful state herein, can neither be sustained nor fulfilling, because the hereafter cannot be verified nor its promises. In reality, one would choose what is tangibly attainable and rationally viable. Likewise, the aim to achieve psychic powers cannot last long because the effort required is too demanding. There has to be an inborn predisposition. In any case, the result is too dubious to justify a useful purpose. Motivation sustains itself on feedback and the attainability of a goal in the near future.

Religions have guided an understanding of life and its problems, projected its goals, and prescribed moral codes in the name of God. They are actually structured and restructured by well-crafted teachings of intelligent, fallible men, revealing the light of their understanding of the conditions of their times, of human nature and its anxieties and hopes.

Religions reveal the story of life that shaped the identities of many peoples. We are to learn from them and re-orient our criterion in the process of adapting to changing times. Scriptures represent the search for truth and the experiences of their authors. Their aim is to stimulate our own search and to deepen our understanding of life.

Otherwise, without the benefit of personal and collective verification of what is said to be God's revelation in the light of our own experience, religious teachings become artificial superimpositions and often lead to hypocrisy. To progress one has to be receptive to both old and new ideas, to think for oneself, to form one's own criteria of values, and to verify their truth by practical application.

PRAKRITI AND PURUSHA

The dignity and autonomy of the individual and of his or her corresponding obligations to society are the basis of civilisation. The philosophy of a nation is the cream of its culture. It is a conglomeration of ideas about life which pulsates in socio-political institutions and individual and collective aspiration to improve prevalent conditions.

Criteria are formed by institutions such as the church which teaches a way of life dedicated to spiritual values, by universities which promote scientific research and humanitarian ideals, by business organisations which are devoted to material welfare and gain, and by political and workers' institutions which represent and protect their members' interests and aspirations through consensus, as occurs in democracies, or by dictatorial imposition, as occurs in totalitarian states.

An individual's life, however, is dominated by the need for survival and the attempt to cope with one's ego which expresses its insecurities through all kinds of emotions in its search for happiness. Human nature is expressed through the interaction of two kinds of energies, material and spiritual. The former springs from *prakriti* and the latter from *purusha*. It is a product of both forces. We are neither made in the image of God, nor the Devil, rather a hybrid of both.

Purusha as a spark of pure light, the content of one's soul, tries to express itself through the longing for unselfish love, beauty, harmony and truth. It is, however, encased in several layers of the mind, a product of *prakriti*, in which vibrate the primordial instincts for survival: dense, heavy, crude, choking and clashing. The pure light gets distorted. Seeking companionship with another soul, it becomes sexually oriented and expresses itself as passion between male and female, for ego-gratification, as also between friends.

The energy of *prakriti* takes over and passion turns into possessiveness, attachment and infatuation, which is confused as love. When rejected, this turns to hatred. When encroached

upon by another, it turns to jealousy. The pure light trying to focus understanding in the mind becomes distorted as a dogmatic opinion, the orientation of the ego or I-consciousness having shifted from soul to mind.

The ego is a product of both *purusha* and *prakriti*. It seeks to resonate with other egos by means of love, knowledge, goodness, and in sharing life's spiritual values. This urge is filtered through the mind and becomes distorted by the energies of selfishness, aggression, doubt and anxiety. Thus, the ego is in constant need of education, because it resides mostly in the mind and is a creature of its moods.

It is in the mind that all education takes place. This occurs by the process of learning and thinking, uniting other people's experiences with one's own through the study of their books. It also occurs by seeking harmony within and identity with *purusha* or the spiritual content of the self. This reorientation alone and the consequent refinement of the mind can lead to inner balance and harmony in relationship with others.

LOWER AND HIGHER NATURE

The *Vedanta* says, "the self is raised by the self", meaning that there are two sides of our nature, the lower relying upon the higher. It is a constant struggle which occurs more in those who are conscientious and less in those who vegetate through inertia. It may be seen as an interaction of light and shadow. The I-consciousness or ego forgets itself when identified with and purified by the light of *purusha*. In this way it spontaneously acts with wisdom and harmony, expressing *buddhi*.

When related to the mind, the *antar chitta* or field of *samskaras*, deep-rooted impressions called the unconscious, and the *vahir chitta* or field of *smriti*, that is perceptible memory called the subconscious, cast long and often distorted shadows. In the subconscious, the pulsation of memories causes the ego to feel elated or depressed, flying high with excitement through success and praise, or sulking gloomily due to failure and censure.

The ego thus becomes dogmatic, haughty, self-important and puffed up due to identity with a race, religion, national culture, regional vanity, family name, educational titles or social status. Whether these have any real worth is not the point. The ego likes to be king or queen in his or her own castle, the subconscious. In a raw state, the ego is despotic. Through education, the ego is transformed into a constitutional monarch. In relationship with others, it is

argumentative, pretentious, throwing its weight around, becoming delirious when massaged on the right side and vicious when scratched on the wrong side.

In the unconscious, the ego becomes impulsively infatuated, jealous, possessive, narcissistically passionate, neurotically depressive, resentful and hateful. In relationship with others, it becomes abusive, threatening, violent, and suffers from immense insecurity. In this way, the ego falls prey to the primordial instincts of survival and libido.

Society becomes progressive by virtue of a freedom of spirit, the freedom to learn, think, teach and express oneself. It is reflected by a sense of responsibility to others and a freedom to be a non-conformist, an atheist or monist, an idolater or monotheist, at liberty to oppose violence, dogmatism and hidebound ideologies in the search for truth, using evidence as a guideline rather than religious fiat. In this way the quality of life is improved both materially and spiritually.

EDUCATION IS SALVATION

Social peace results from such freedom out of which come leadership, political responsibility and wisdom. The basis is education by which one develops a moral consciousness, personal sense of duty, obligation and accountability. Through education one nurtures a boundless curiosity to learn whatever is under and within the sky and whatever is within oneself, developing and utilising one's talents.

Personal peace depends upon the education, refinement and sublimation of the ego. It is derived from the ability to manage our attitude and conduct and to come to terms with changing circumstances guided by the philosophy “Even this will pass away, so balance the mind in pleasure and pain”. “We came with nothing and will depart the same way, so why make a mess of ourselves in between?”

Raw human nature grows like a jungle. Life can be savage if our untutored nature is allowed to run wild. The idea of a noble savage is a throw-back to the myth of wanting to be spontaneous and unhampered by over tutoring, or free from repression due to bad tutoring, and to remain blissfully irresponsible. There is nothing noble in a savage who is only spontaneously expressing his or her brutish nature. The value of spontaneity is in what one is spontaneous about.

Life can be cultivated like a garden so long as the desirable plants are tended, cultivated and the undesirable weeds are removed. Like a garden, individually and collectively, it needs constant care and renewal. Otherwise, within a few generations the descendants of a gifted people can become, like the Romans, decadent and subjugated by barbarians or, like Germany, taken over by home grown Nazis.

Education is a mental, moral, technological and cultural preparation of an individual leading to a better understanding and control over the direction of his or her life. A just society makes this possible through democratic means on the basis of intelligence and aptitude through autonomous institutions of knowledge and culture without the control or interference by state or religion.

Education and personal experience are the father and mother of criterion. They should prepare the mind like a vast unbounded land where generations of philosophers and saintly souls can guide and inspire; where scientists, architects and engineers can investigate, invent, innovate and build; and where statesmen and idealists can promote justice and our sense of worth. In such a land, poets and musicians recite and sing; painters and mystics sketch their view of life as to how it is or could be.

Education is to make our potentialities come alive, to motivate and to fulfil. For in a work well done, a duty well executed, a love well sublimated and an ideal well realised, lies our inner peace. Society's progress depends upon the amount of investment given in the research for the best and brightest, and in tapping and offering vocational training to the masses, thus making optimum use of human resources.

St Paul said that truth should make us free. We can add 'free from' our capacity to harm ourselves and others on account of ignorance of our spiritual resources. A prayer in the *Vedas* urges "Lead me on from the unreal to the real and from darkness to light". This search for truth, to free the mind from ignorance is, after all, the goal of education.

Replacing anarchy with order and passion through reason is the purpose of knowledge. Love of and commitment to the ideals that represent the object of devotion are the purpose of faith. Knowledge and faith are the two wheels of the cart we ride – knowledge that is understanding and faith that is a deep striving for the best in ourselves. The failure of knowledge lies in intellectual vanity and self-righteousness; that of faith, in superstition and emotional theatre. The failure of philosophy and religion lies in their inability to differentiate.

The highest meaning of our existence resides in what we invest in it. After birth we grow psychologically by receiving from others, such as the protection of love and guidance from our parents, if we are lucky enough, and from others later on in life. What makes life's journey meaningful is not whether we have been sufficient beneficiaries but whether we are willing and capable of passing on what we have to others.

This meaning alone transcends the inevitable death of an individual because we continue to live in the memories of those we have associated with and left our marks on, such as our surviving relatives and companions. The more gifted among us leave their traces in works of art and literature, science and technology, social reform and welfare. Even on a modest scale, the meaning of life consists in what we have meant to each other within the family and amongst our friends, through love and understanding, care and protection, help and consolation. Life is, indeed, what we make of it.

EDUCATING THE EGO

The culture of a person resides not so much in their knowledge of audio-visual arts or architecture, but in his or her day-to-day behaviour. It consists in the education and sublimation of the ego. This is a lifelong process.

Some teachers write about the necessity of being free from ego and some even theatrically exhort one to annihilate the ego. If you observe them closely, you will find in them enormous egos clothed in false gestures of humility.

It is neither possible nor wise to demolish the ego, but being devoid of ego in the sense of not being selfish or egotistical is, of course, a virtue.

The ego is a product of the individuality of consciousness. It is what motivates survival and, through ambition and competition, enables progress and achievement. In a refined state, it forms and expresses the best of criteria. In a repressed condition, it leads to indifference and irresponsibility. In a weak-minded person, it becomes vulnerable to exploitation by stronger and cunning egos.

The mind is a field of energy. Generally speaking, it has five aspects:

- **Ahamkara** or the consciousness of ‘I am a body, mind and soul’. This is also called the ego or *id*.
- **Antar-chitta** or inner mind, the stratum of basic instincts, including the archetype. This is also known as the unconscious.
- **Vahir-chitta** or subconscious contains the stratum of memory to which the conscious mind has access and where one dreams.
- **Manas** or thinking principle, otherwise known as the intellect, consciously evaluates, determines, desires and wills.
- **Buddhi** or higher intelligence, is generally dormant. It intuitively perceives deeper spiritual values when awakened. It is also called the superconscious or soul-consciousness.

It is *ahamkara* or ego that makes any movement in the mind possible. In deep sleep, it enables *prana* (autonomous vital functions) to pulsate and keep the body alive. Through dreams it releases the tension of anxiety, trauma, unhappiness, desire and passion.

In the unconscious, it gives impulse to the instincts. In the subconscious, it is the participation of the ego that makes thinking possible. Consciously, it gives zest for life by willing and acting out its wishes. In the depth of our soul, it experiences the purity of heart, unselfish love and the “peace that passeth understanding”.

Energy pulsation caused by the ego can be treated in only three ways: by indulgence, repression and sublimation. Through indulging in a ripple of anger, for example, the ego becomes more aggressive. By repression, it develops complexes. By sublimation through the love of ideals such as patience and tolerance, peace and understanding, the ego gets refined and becomes wholesome in a yogic way.

MANY FACES OF THE EGO

The ego has many faces. Among them the following are easily recognisable.

SELFISHNESS

The raw instinct of survival makes one selfish. One forgets that it is easier to survive, and one can more agreeably do so, with the mutual support of each other. This is only possible by being less selfish.

The feeling of rejection and isolation is due to selfishness, whereas frustration and disappointment are on account of unrealistic expectations from equally selfish and irresponsible persons. Therefore, try to be less selfish, thinking of the good of others and helping those who need your help, while encouraging them to help themselves. Expect less from others and more from yourself.

A selfish person is spontaneously irresponsible and has no sense of duty, although duty and responsibility can be found in a selfish individual as acquired qualities due to childhood training. The first step is to be considerate of others. Cultivate a personal sense of responsibility and fulfil your obligations. In this way, you will learn what is your duty.

Repeat to yourself silently many times: “I should have consideration of others. I should not be selfish”. Before going to sleep, repeat this phrase again and again. When you find yourself acting selfishly, repeat this phrase.

Avoid the company of selfish people, as far as you can. Practise generosity to those you think that you ought to. Tell yourself not to be a miser. Miserliness is unhealthy to your spirit. It constricts your heart. No-one likes a tight-fisted person.

SELF-IMPORTANCE

This is a product of the instinct of aggression. It is also a sign of an inner insecurity. It is generally known as ego. When one brags about oneself, this is called egotism. It shows typically in a person who likes to throw his or her weight around. In a heightened form, it is called arrogance. When crudely expressed, it makes one insufferable. Only a fool is smugly pleased with himself.

Generally speaking, we like or dislike others, not because of their values but to the extent they fulfil our ego. We like to be with hypocrites and favour them if they massage our ego, rather than with honest people who do not cater to this weakness.

Instant liking or disliking a person is due to a reflection of some qualities we cherish or despise in ourselves, or to being unconsciously reminded of someone who has inspired us as a role model or from who we have suffered in the past.

Self-importance is the main reason that we clash with others or get into unnecessary arguments. If you are sure of a premise of knowledge, it is enough to make your position known

and then treat its contradiction as a difference of opinion, rather than get into an argument over it. It is little knowledge that makes a lot of noise.

There is no need to justify your position if you are not wrong, after having made yourself clear, whereas you simply cannot afford to do so if you are wrong.

Remember that we have a lot to learn, that we do not know enough to be able to justify being vain about what little we do know. Remember that we are not sufficiently good and have a lot to improve upon and to evolve to justify being self-important.

Fulfil the ego by learning what is useful to you and to others, by doing something worthwhile, and by carrying out the work that you like. Practise humility of spirit and modesty, while avoiding exaggerated gestures.

Restrain your reaction when the ego is provoked, thinking of the ideal of tolerance. Intolerance and impatience are the by-products of self-importance. Repeat to yourself silently many times: “Tolerance is my real nature, not intolerance”. “Patience is my real nature, not impatience”.

Try to improve your relationship through a better level of understanding and being useful to those you care for. Be considerate of the feelings and opinions of others. Speak less about yourself and listen more to what others wish to say.

SELF-PITY

This is a product of injured vanity, self-importance and also selfishness. Resentment is its consequence. On account of selfishness, we expect more from others and, thus, are disappointed when they fail to measure up to our expectation. The result is self-pity. Being selfish, we are unloved and, being unloved, we feel sorry for ourselves.

We not only wish our left hand to know what good the right hand does for others, but everyone else around as well. When gratitude is not forthcoming, we indulge in self-pity. When unkindly treated, we fail to ask ourselves what it was in our nature that provoked such treatment for which we are, thus, responsible, or to consider the circumstances in which we allowed our vulnerability to be exposed.

Nothing goes wrong in a relationship without oneself being partly responsible. If you accept your share of responsibility and try to correct yourself, there will be no time to indulge in

self-pity. When slighted, instead of feeling resentment, practise detachment and resolve not to lead yourself into a situation again in which you can be slighted. Learn from experience.

Self-pity is a corrosive form of the ego. It is due to parceling out the blame to others and feeling oneself to be a victim, while failing to accept personal responsibility. It makes one unloved because no one likes a person who feels sorry for themselves.

Habitual self-pity leads to depression. By thinking of others, the mind can be turned away from one's problems. It is by distancing oneself from them that one can have a clearer perspective. By moving away, you can see yourself better. But you can't see yourself well if you move away too far. This would be like avoiding a problem so as not to have to tackle it. One should cultivate a sense of proportion.

Resentment, a by-product of self-pity, does not harm the person resented, but only oneself. It is a negative wave of energy and should be treated with a counter-positive wave. When a ripple of resentment against someone who has hurt you arises in the mind, immediately remember a good deed he or she has done for you in the past and feel grateful. Then try to think of someone you love.

I do not believe in loving an enemy but in the need to be free from resentment. Love is not a figment of the imagination. You cannot order someone to love another person, let alone an enemy. Love entails contact, communication and understanding. If the enemy is accessible and would appreciate your positive gesture, only then will it be possible to love. In that case, the enemy will no longer be an enemy.

Repeat to yourself: "I should practise detachment and rise above resentment", "Understanding is my real nature, not resentment". Affirmations alone will not cleanse your heart, of course, but will help to cut the grooves motivating you to love those you can communicate with and share your values. The practice of selfless love will eventually give you spiritual fulfilment. It is like washing a garment first in order to be able to dye it well.

The opposite of conflict is peace which comes through love. A loveless person is more resentful than someone who has received love and learned to love others. Repeat to yourself: "Peace is my real nature, not conflict", "Love is my real nature, not hate".

SELF-CENTREDNESS, VANITY

Self-centredness: This form of the ego is somewhat different from selfishness. A self-centred person can be generous to those he or she cares for, but would want to be a centre of attention, appreciation and flattery. There is little interest in listening to what others have to say or knowing about others' problems, rather one speaks about oneself and one's own difficulties. Wanting to be a centre of attention, such a person's observation is poor. Being self-absorbed, there is little consideration for others.

As we do not like to be disliked, we should be attentive to others, for self-centredness deprives us of their good will. Attention is the first step to consideration. By being considerate, we relate better. By relating well, we understand better. Repeat to yourself: "I shall be more attentive to others, and not speak about my problems". "I shall try to be more helpful, and not draw attention to my needs".

It is a truism that those who live for the sake of others are happier than those who live only for themselves. Be sure, however, not to impose on others. Do not give unsolicited advice to those who are not very close to you, for only fools do so. When a person is in an obvious need for help, before helping do not fail to ask first if you may do so.

Vanity: As the Latin root *vanus* or emptiness indicates, only a person of little substance is vain. It is also an indication of an insecure ego. It is a problem of image, wanting to look better than one is, both physically and characteristically. There is nothing wrong, of course, in making oneself aesthetically presentable, such as through proper grooming and a subdued style of dressing.

However, the best form of make-up is to make it the least obvious. A face pan-caked with make-up looks more like a cake than a face. On the other hand, the inverted snobbery in dressing in torn clothes and looking unkempt, is another form of vanity of the non-conformist.

The motivation is to attract attention, but it is the eyes that really attract. A wholesome state of mind expressed through a natural, kindly gaze that is focused through a gentle smile is what makes one really attractive. When there is love in the heart, it flows softly through the eyes and makes the face likeable, just as bitterness, hauteur, hard-heartedness and self-centredness make even a physically beautiful face look ugly.

Beauty is both physical and spiritual, whereas charm is mental. A symmetrical balance of line and contour, a harmony of shape and accent, determine the physical nature of beauty. The inner state of peace and serenity, compassion and love, purity of heart and a wholesome, kindly disposition, expresses the spiritual content of beauty. Charm exudes intelligence, a sense of humour, quickness of mind and a gallant repartee.

Pretentiousness is an ugly form of vanity, so too is pomposity. However much one tries to polish one's image for the eyes of others, the reality will sooner or later be reflected. If one is intent on cultivating inner graces such as positive thinking, a sympathetic attitude, decency, compassion and integrity, there will be no time to be concerned about one's image.

Mentally repeat: "Truth is my real nature, not untruth". "Honesty is my real nature, not deceit". "Simplicity is my real nature, not vanity". Try to be natural and simple, for simplicity is not ordinariness but a synonym of grace and beauty. Human beings appearing like peacocks only look well in a carnival.

PRIDE, SELF-CONFIDENCE

Pride: This is an acceptable emotion only when we are proud of the virtue and success of those who are dear to us. However, being proud of the success of one's children is one thing, while singing their encomium to others is in bad taste. When introverted, it becomes a bloated form of the ego. Pride is similar to self-importance and expresses a shallowness of mind and also of character. I find the Spanish phrase, *hidalgos bufones* or gentleman buffoon, quite appropriate for those who suffer from the sickness of pride.

When extended to a national scale, it can do immense harm to others and one's own kind, goading nations to war, such as in the delirium of greatness of being *uebermenschen* or a racially superior people. It is an instinct of aggression combined with an insecurity complex which one seeks to overcome by decrying and trying to dominate those who are considered inferior.

Superiority as a goal to excel through self-effort and a healthy sense of competition, while trying to overcome inferiority by diligent endeavour, are a part of life. They have to be accepted and dealt with without being proud or ashamed. It is also a truism that one who is conscious of his or her virtue is not virtuous. Thus, one who possesses worthy qualities is not proud of them. They dwell within gracefully without one's being aware of them.

Repeat to yourself from time to time: “Modesty is my real nature, not pride”. “Humility is my real nature, not hauteur”. “I have a lot to learn so I must be modest”. “I have a lot to improve, so I must be humble”. Before going to sleep, such affirmations should be repeated, adding, “I shall expect less from others and more from myself”. “I shall practise detachment when needed”. “I shall be more attentive to others and help those who need my help”.

In a working relationship, if you cannot get along with your partner, do your share of duty, keep cool, speak less, ignore barbs, while holding your position. Do not try to ingratiate yourself to those who try to exploit you.

Avoid the company of lazy, irresponsible, false, egotistic and negative people as far as you can. Surely there are some around you who are less selfish and false, more decent and caring, more positive and honest.

Higher and lower instincts, expressed through emotions, are inborn. Come to terms with yourself by self-examination, but not overly so. It is counter-productive to take your spiritual temperature all the time. First accept yourself as you are, without developing a complex. Non-acceptance of the lower instincts conduces complexes and does not permit self-improvement. Work on yourself by cultivating their opposite, in other words higher instincts.

As an individual, if you wish to be trusted and have self-confidence, you have to possess the qualities of character such as integrity, responsibility and loyalty. The agent of motivation is the ego. Only when this is refined, will achievement be wholesome. It is like those who seek God out of frustration inevitably carry their complexes into their spiritual life. That is why one meets so many depressive, self-absorbed (read self-centred) people in religious orders. One should seek God or spiritual values with a healthy ego.

Self-confidence is an essential part of inner security. It does not come by itself. It has to be cultivated by the love of the ideal behind what you wish to achieve. For that you have to have an interest in life in order to make it worthwhile and satisfactory. Then you have to apply that love by the practice of the ideal in order to substantiate it. Through practice one gets experience and, through perseverance, it is strengthened. The accumulated experience gives self-confidence and, thus, inner security.

Although generally seen in a negative light, the ego is the agent of progress. In a gross state, it is a cause of great suffering. Through its education and sublimation alone can one find happiness, and by feeling its identity with the spiritual content of our being.

CHAPTER 11 — GUIDING VALUES

PEACE AND LIBERTY

By definition, peace is a state of calmness, a sense of harmony, and an experience of tranquillity. However, peace is essentially the consequence of a philosophy of life in which one comes to terms with oneself and the rest of the world. It is the result of how we manage our egos in relationship with each other, how we cope with our expectations and desires. Real peace is not attained through renunciation but through fulfilment if it is not to be confused with a mental opacity or indifference. It is an inner serenity cultivated through a deep understanding of life and a sublimation of the passions through a sense of spiritual identity.

Peace is a product of security: spiritual, psychological and physical. Security can never be found in self-centredness but in the integrity and balance of perspective, altruism and compatibility of values within relationship. Security arises in the capacity to love, in a deed meticulously performed, in a duty well carried out, and in a responsibility fulfilled with painstaking care. The result is an inner spiritual satisfaction called peace.

Life is hardly static but rather a continuous movement. That movement is either due to the exigency of circumstances or ambition, by the stimulus of desire, or by a sense of deficiency. Peace is a pause, not merely to rest but to feel the meaning in the movement of life. As such, peace is creative only when sensitive to the movement – in love and compassion, in striving and aspiring, and in caring and understanding. If peace were merely to rest, this would become dullness when prolonged. Movement without an experience of its meaning is restlessness. Peace without sensitivity is laziness.

Peace is not a virtue in itself but a vital need to recuperate from mental and emotional activity, in as much as one has to drink water in order to quench thirst. Yet life cannot be sustained by something as subtle as peace, just as one cannot live on water alone. Peace is an after-effect of the fulfilment of one's spiritual goals. An individual cannot grow without struggle and society cannot progress without challenge. If one seeks to avoid challenge and hide from the problems of life, the result can be mental inertia, insensitivity and self-centredness.

Peace, to be spiritually renewing and effective, can never be continuous, either individually or collectively. All talk about eternal or permanent peace is wishful thinking. You can be eternally peaceful only when you are dead. Whereas absence of war and subjective awareness of an underlying poise are desirable goals, individual and social ferment from time to time are nature's means of renovation and progress.

MEANS OF PEACE

Some basic means for personal peace are:

- **Spiritual security:** such as in a religious faith, not fanciful beliefs, but faith in the power of spiritual ideals that give strength of conviction and therefore self-confidence. Such a faith is totally free from dogmatism because it is a continuous search for the truth of what one believes in and loves. Belief, in order not to be a sheepish conformity or unproductive wishful thinking, has to be inspired by the love of the ideal it represents. Its realisation brings peace, even when working towards it.
- **Psychological security:** such as in the understanding and discipline of desire or ambition, so that we learn to approximate our wants with capacity and effort, to relate expectation with a knowledge of human nature and with what we are willing to give in a relationship, and to try to live by the philosophy that doing what we believe in and love is by itself ample reward. However, no action should be unmindful of its result, because how else can you know if a deed has been well done?
- **Emotional security:** such as in the health of the ego, so that we are not overburdened with a sense of the self, that there is freedom from hatred and resentment, that we do not suffer from dependence or infatuated love. It is selfishness that destroys love and, thus, inner fulfilment. Self-love quickly turns into self-pity, and thus one lacks peace. Love is not only caring but sharing, sharing not only what we value materially but also for what we spiritually aspire. In such a compatibility there is emotional security.

Some basic means of collective or social peace are:

- **Security of justice** or the rule of law based on fairness which means freedom from fear of permissive or random violence or demagoguery of one group over another, or exploitation of the weak by the powerful. Social peace is a result of easy access to justice, its promptness, its impartiality and effectiveness for all concerned.
- **Economic security:** or the absence of degrading poverty and uncertainty of material needs. Dogmatic harping on distribution of riches quickly becomes distribution of thin air without productivity, ingenuity, work ethic and good management. These cannot be materialised out of an ideological hat but by universal education vocationally geared, encouraging talent and motivating initiative by appropriate reward.
- **Security of rights:** by educating people to equate the rights of others with one's own, cultivating a sense of duty and responsibility, doing honest labour with efficiency, and making it evident in public service. This results in good government and stable democratic institutions. It is a fundamental right of the public to expect from democratic institutions efficient management and integrity without which social peace is inevitably disturbed.

MEANING OF LIBERTY

Liberty basically means freedom of the human spirit. We like to think that we are born free, but we are not. We bring with us innate, rudimentary instincts of self-preservation and, therefore selfishness and possessiveness which leads to aggression and exploitation. Through education in our childhood and adult life, we learn to channel these basic instincts into creative forces. It is the nature of our spiritual self to long for the limitless from within the moorings of our spiritual self. That is why we aspire to liberty and do not like restrictions.

However, freedom means expression, and the validity of expression is in what is expressed. Thus, the health of liberty depends on the quality of individuals who express themselves so that freedom does not mean a licence to cause discord or to bring out the worst in us but encourages us to give our best to society for the sake of general benefit. The reality of liberty is, indeed, in its usefulness.

The bases of liberty are:

- Individual responsibility
- Respect for what is generally accepted as permissible, and
- Submission to the interest of the majority arrived at by consensus.

Freedom is to deepen our experience of the quality of life with a sense of “justice towards all and malice towards none”. When the mind is free from dead habits, warping prejudices, corrosive passions and suffocating egotism, we experience the freedom of our inner spirit.

The fundamental rights of liberty are:

- **Mental freedom:** to think freely without being bound by ideological or religious dogmas, to speak freely without the fear of reprisal, and to express freely in arts, literature and media without censorship.
- **Social freedom:** to live and move and work without discrimination and to make use of public utilities without apartheid.
- **Physical freedom:** freedom from indignity inflicted on one’s person by a powerful individual, party or state, such as through physical abuse or arbitrary arrest, and from the indignity of hunger, inadequate clothing and shelter.
- **Psychological freedom:** the right to live without fear, either of a secret police or of organised or random violence and expropriation of material possessions by theft or decree, which means an effective rule of law in society.
- **Spiritual freedom:** the liberty of religious beliefs and the right to worship, including the right to be an avowed atheist, or to disbelieve in an established theological or political dogma.

Like everything precious in life, liberty cannot be taken for granted. It must be nursed, sustained and protected. It is an individual and collective responsibility, a product of a moral sense. It is essentially a mark of spiritual strength. In order to be effective, it is an ideal to which people have to raise themselves. By the fiat of ideology, without checks and balances, it becomes licentiousness.

Peace and liberty are our basic spiritual rights, without which the human spirit suffocates. It is foolish to expect someone to transmit peace to oneself. It has to be cultivated within and in one’s relationship with others. It is also foolish to expect a lasting peace in the solitude of nature or in a sanctuary, because even there one has to cope with oneself in the long run. Likewise, the libertine has no right to have the freedom to harm others. Liberty without responsibility is only

conducive to chaos. There is nothing called infinite peace or total freedom in life. One can only strive to widen their dimensions in this imperfect world⁵.

⁵ Based on an interview given on Channel 13 of Television of Catholic University, Santiago, Chile.

CHAPTER 12 — MEANING OF CULTURE

The word culture is derived from the Latin root *colere* which means “to cultivate” as well as “to adore”. Thus, culture is primarily cultivation of the mind through love of ideals.

Just as the Latin meaning of culture is to cultivate and adore the subtle, its Sanskrit meaning of *samskriti* is to create a sense of the whole within oneself and society, freeing the mind from narrow concepts, prejudices and passions. Even though the purpose of culture is to cultivate the mind and to acquire a deeper insight into the soul of a tradition, people and nation, its goal is an integral vision of life, self-knowledge and strength of character. It means to sublimate our emotions, to free our lives from fears and superstitions, to make us better human beings and to create an active individual and social conscience.

Personal behaviour is a measuring factor of individual culture. How society treats its members does, indeed, determine its cultural level. Bursts of talent in arts and architecture represent the aspirations of a culture. Democratic institutions, the relevance of rights and responsibility, social justice, a collective moral sense and commercial integrity are all pertinent to the cultural maturity of a people.

Culture is, thus, a better expression of the spirit through the vitality of a creative conscience, for without conscience there is no culture. Its five principles are:

- **Tolerance:** that is discipline of the ego and of gross passions.
- **Understanding:** a breadth of vision and depth of perception.
- **A feeling heart:** sensitivity, compassion and refinement of emotions.
- **Sense of duty:** responsibility and spirit of service.
- **A wholesome conduct:** integrity in human relationship.

INTEGRATION AND EVOLUTION

Without a desire to learn about and experience the depth of life, there is no culture. Life is an experience and expression of relationship – in feelings, ideas and actions, with nature, people and spiritual values. The ‘I’ seeks security in the body through sensation and acquisition, in the mind through the exercise of opinion and involvement of feelings and, in the spirit, through its sense of being a part of the whole in the consciousness of the infinite. As the first two bases are inadequate, one seeks fulfilment in the spirit. As this is not sufficiently tangible, one returns to the body and mind for reassessment. The purpose of culture is, thus, an integration of the material and spiritual.

The determining value of the term “material” is the principle of possession because what is concrete can be captured and, therefore, likely to become an object of attachment. The term “spiritual” is characterised by freedom due to its subtle, interpenetrating and transcendental nature. In the same way, the term “positive” is a state of inner freedom from passions, an experience of peace and tranquillity out of which comes fulfilment. From fulfilment, arises happiness and, from happiness, the capacity to relate and integrate. The term “negative” is a state of isolation of the self in justification of the ego, either through self-pity or resentment.

When a lack of fulfilment of the ego fails to awaken the mind to reason and, therefore, to think, feel and relate with a deeper understanding, it is called a state of prejudice and rejection. Thus rejecting, one becomes rejected. Self-loving, one begins to hate oneself unconsciously. It is the self that experiences the innate instincts through memory-oriented desires, either in preference or rejection, from which arise the desire to possess and the passion to hate the dispossessor.

Introspection, devotion to spiritual ideals and discernment lead to clarity of mind helping us to understand the nature of things and their inter-relatedness. This comprehension helps to subdue passions, leading to inner harmony. Thus, to be positive is to be free, to be negative is to be bound. Truth is positive because it is a rhythmic, symmetrical interaction of perception in which balance is the uniting principle of the perceiver and the perceived. Love is positive because within its fulfilling interaction there is the transcending principle which frees the individual from isolation and dependence upon self-gratifying passions.

The purpose of culture is to move our life from darkness or ignorance (*tamas*) to desiring, experimenting and asserting (*rajas*); from mass to force and from force to balance; from inertia to movement and from movement to order; from inhibition to desire and from desire to sublimation of desire; from laziness to restlessness and from restlessness to equanimity; from mental opacity to discussion and from discussion to profound silence.

The ideal of culture is essentially the education, refinement and sublimation of the ego through self-effort. For the searching self is the feeling self, the feeling self is the knowing self, and the knowing self is the fulfilling self. Fulfilment may be found in doing what we can to the best of our understanding of one another. In such a process there is the diminishment of the gross self and improved spiritual integration.

RELATIONSHIP AND CHARACTER

We are all individuals formed and reformed through relationship. Our happiness and misery are a product of relationship. However much we may talk about individualism and personal independence, our life is influenced by collective structures such as the family, place of work and the general fabric of society in which we live. Relationship means inter-response and inter-response is communication. Most of our problems arise because we have little integrity or genuine representation in communication other than gratification of the ego-sense.

Relationship between two persons begins with the awareness of each other. We have, of course, no problem with sense-awareness but it is the awareness of each other's feelings and needs and the willingness to care for these that enables communication to be meaningful. In relationship we throw ourselves at each other with our views, physical and emotional demands, and thus fail to communicate. In the family unit, although physically related, we fail to communicate because the gratification of our expectations and our egos becomes more important than responding to one another's feelings, problems and needs.

Self-centredness is the basic cause of our feeling isolated and not being understood. Through selfishness we push ourselves on to, or run away from, one another and thus fail to communicate. How can we communicate when by loving we mean to gratify self-love through another person? Being concerned with the protection of our image in a relationship which is indicative of insecurity, we tend to be hypocritical. It is this lack of character which vitiates relationship.

Strength of character never hurts another, rather a lack of tact which means an excessive awareness of the rightness of one's position vis à vis another's and, as a consequence, impatience or outright contempt through self-projection. However, self-righteousness is not strength of character. Character is not temperament either, as the Latins make it out to be when referring to the good or bad character of a person by his or her benign disposition or aggressiveness, regardless of moral values. A man of integrity is surely a man of good character, whether aggressive (*mal character*) or not. The criteria of character are due to the following factors:

- **Integrity of knowledge** as to what I may know and how I may know it, which is not wishful thinking.
- **Integrity of feelings** in what I care for and how. Love is blind when one is in love with an image superimposed upon another and is therefore unable to see clearly.
- **Integrity of action** in what I may do and how I may act. The reality of a relationship is measured by what is done within it.
- **Integrity of self** or the truth in the expression and functioning of our individuality.
- **Integrity of relevance** so that the validity of a hope or expectation approximates to our capacity and effort in realising it.

DISCIPLINE AND SENSITIVITY

There are two basic factors in culture: discipline of raw physical nature and spiritual sensitivity. Discipline is based on the fact that life is expressed through energy and our egos are thrown at one another by the drives of our passions and emotions. The purpose of discipline is not to repress life's energies. Energy implies movement and discipline means to direct those energies. Thus, discipline is really a process of attunement through understanding.

Attunement gives health to discipline. Repression leads to us hurting each other through its by-products: intolerance, resentment, peptic ulcer and a hardening of the arteries. Discipline means to cultivate a sense of integration, to be sensitive to and aware of life. Without attention there is no understanding, thus no attunement. One does not gain attention through justification, condemnation and dogmatic conclusion. Without the ability to inspire interest and to feel related to life around, there can be no attention and thus no discipline.

Spiritual sensitivity, one of the bases of culture, is to appreciate the immanence of the transcendental spirit, the cohesive principle of life, such as we experience in the common longing for truth and love, security and a sense of belonging. Spiritual sensitivity implies:

- **A creative conscience** meaning a movement of mind in the clear spring of reason, and a movement of heart in the refreshing breeze of faith. Faith does not mean an unquestioning belief in an authority or institution which promotes dependence and retards initiative, encouraging fanaticism, a by-product of ignorance, fear and insecurity. Faith means wanting to know, to feel, to unite and to experience the essence of life. Conscience is the result of this movement of heart. Conscience is that which makes this movement tangible through a grasp of reality by effective discernment and fulfilment of responsibility by productive action.
- **A creative will** wanting to test one's beliefs, and to experiment with ideas and ideals in the field of action so that one learns their relative validity. After all, an ideal or a dogma is useful to the extent that it serves a human being and promotes commonweal. Tradition is meaningful in the sense that it gives one an identity in the present and direction for the future, not turning one into a fossil. It offers a scaffolding upon which to build one's life rather than make it a prisoner. A doctrine should encourage initiative in thought and action, not create dependence upon a religious order or its interpreters. A human being is not meant to be a sycophant to unseen deities or super-egos on earth but a participant in the life process.
- **Integrity in relationship** begins with the family structure. Life is emulative and the formation of a sense of values begins in the family. If parents cannot communicate the strength of truth or of character by their example, they have already defrauded their role of parenthood. A new life can flower best where there is mutual communication, not in dark niches of the mind hidden from one another; where one does not use another for self-love or ego-gratification; where to love is not to create dependence but to instil dependability, security, loyalty and to require these very qualities from the ones one loves.
- **Civic consciousness:** a sense of duty should not merely be confined within the family but be extended to include a wider circle so that one learns to respect another's rights while protecting one's own and has a collective sense of responsibility and regard for public property as much as for one's own. This naturally means self-discipline and a sensitivity to life around, for an enforced social or theocratic discipline without individual initiative becomes a dull, collective conformity. In such a case society loses its creative vitality through over-dependence on group directive and security. A civic consciousness results from the respect for the right to live. To live is to experience and to express. To experience means to participate and to communicate. To participate means to share, to give and to receive, to be responsible and to make others responsible. To communicate means to be genuine, not a fraud either to oneself nor to others, to believe in what one says and to be attentive to what is said. On the animal level, communication takes place through the instincts. On the human level, it takes place by the interaction of reason. On the spiritual level, it takes place through the purity of feelings. The purpose of culture is to give a better expression to the higher levels of our nature.

The quality of individuals reflects the quality of society's values. Social patterns are based on precedence and set and inspired by leadership. Leadership arises from the people. Thus, the primary concern of society should be:

- To make people think for themselves, to encourage the element of curiosity to seek and to learn, and to show interest.
- To promote initiative by the delegation of individual responsibility and to motivate through a sense of belonging, thereby opening up creative urges.
- To generate a sense of relevance that all rights relate to specific areas of responsibility and fulfilment of a corresponding obligation and that no special group in society can dictate its interests over those of another.

It is the abdication of responsibility that leads to the loss of freedom. It is the loss of individual perspective and capacity to communicate and share and give a collective viability to such a vision that leads to disorder, stagnation and dictatorship. It is not so much what one says or believes that matters but what one is able to do to make culture an individual and collective experience in the institutions of society.

To put it simply, the relevance of a person's culture is not so much in his or her knowledge of the arts but is displayed by his or her behaviour, especially in relation to their underlings. In the same way, the relevance of a nation's culture can be seen not so much in its artistic background but in the fairness of treatment of its citizens under the rule of law, especially of its minorities.

CHAPTER 13 — HOW TO COPE WITH HUMAN NATURE

The main cause of dissatisfaction in our relationship with others is selfishness and egotism or self-importance. From selfishness comes attachment which is a form of self-love through the means of another person. From selfishness also comes irresponsibility which is a lack of consideration for others. One can, of course, be selfish while yet being responsible, an inculcated sense of duty at least restraining selfishness.

The ego impedes attention to the opinion and sentiment of others due to the reason that one feels full of oneself or is vain. This is due to a lack of real substance, the Latin root *vanus* meaning empty. This in turn leads to pretention and, therefore, being false.

Pride is another form of egotism. It blocks learning and so a self-important person remains stupid. National vain glory and pride about past greatness without any relevance to the present reverses progress and leads to national backwardness, inefficiency and, therefore, poverty.

Self-pity is a major cause of our dissatisfaction because, when something goes wrong, we tend to pass the blame on to others and feel victimised rather than take personal responsibility.

Another cause of our dissatisfaction is weakness of character. This is caused by being false both to oneself and to others by the lying habit and by a deceiving nature. It not only corrupts oneself but, when it takes on national characteristics such as manipulating information, hiding facts, an unwillingness to face unpleasant realities and wishful thinking, it corrupts the nation. As a result, the people suffer.

Shrewdness without a basic integrity of character is indicative of spiritual poverty. A short-term material benefit through deceit or exploiting the weakness of the circumstances contributes to untrustworthiness of the individual and leads to public cynicism and social resentment in the long run.

Weakness of character also means lacking in loyalty and constancy, or being only a fair-weather friend and an opportunist. The root cause is selfishness. Weakness of will is due to laziness, a tendency to shirk responsibility and to depend on others, postponing hard decisions for as long as possible. Will is a product of the experience of persevering action and action of motivating interest. Will without consideration of others is merely obstinacy.

Cowardice is due to a lack of self-esteem, hypocrisy and self-indulgence as well as not having strong convictions. Through self-justification when something goes wrong and pretention, one remains false in the eyes of oneself and of others. Deceit is a primary cause of losing friendships. An excess of selfishness, arrogance, vanity, unreliability and irresponsibility are other contributing factors.

TWELVE DISCIPLINES

We may give ourselves the following dozen disciplines when coping with our problems with others:

- Do not be impulsive. You can avoid many errors of judgment and conduct in this way.
- Think, discern and determine the cause of the problem.
- Decide what should be done to solve the problem, such as making a gesture of understanding and expressing a wish to communicate when tempers have cooled.
- If there is no response, think again as to what appropriate action should be taken such as patience while remaining firm, keeping an open mind free from prejudice, and not repeating a mistake which may have caused the problem. Then go your own way while respecting the right of another to do the same.
- Reduce your expectations and accept the limitation of human nature. Adopt different ways of relating anew with those you can relate to.
- Do not forget to fulfil your obligations to others before expecting others to do the same. Also, make it clear what is required in a mutual relationship, life being a two-way street. If there is no success, go your own way and have as little to do as possible with irresponsible persons.

- Through contemplation and meditation, generate inner peace and a sense of belonging to the spirit of God within, sublimating the ego and dependence upon others.
- Express this inner poise in your relationship through patience and understanding.
- Have some useful interests to occupy the mind such as in the world of books, learning about different cultures and their historical development, geography, literature, biographies and languages.
- Learn the work ethic and have something creative to do, not only to keep the mind occupied but to gain self-confidence and a sense of being useful, and express this security in your relationship with others.
- Do not look backwards and lament a lost friendship for there are others who need your attention, understanding, sympathy and friendship. Lamenting is a useless sentiment. When the line of no return is crossed in a relationship, nature automatically casts it asunder. Accept the reality gracefully and do not lose your dignity.
- Keep the body active through some form of physical exercise, including brisk walks, not only for physical health but also to make your thinking less rigid and more lucid through improved breathing so that you can have a clearer perspective and relate better with others.

Friendship of mutual convenience can never be deep, satisfactory and long-lasting. It is only in the compatibility of attitude and values such as integrity, care, helpfulness, freedom from prejudice and unselfish love that true friendship endures.

CHAPTER 14 — THE BUDDHA’S WAY

Just as Jesus was born a Jew and died a Jew, Buddha was born a Hindu and died a Hindu. In the same way that Jesus tried to reform Judaism, Buddha tried to reform Hinduism. Paul formed a religion around Jesus the Christ; Sariputra and Maudgalyana formed a religion around Gautama the Buddha. Jesus said to Peter, “You are the rock on which I shall found my church”, but the word he used for church in Greek translation was *kyrios* or God, meaning relationship with God. There is no evidence that Buddha intended to found a religion but he named his teachings the Middle Way, avoiding the extremes of rituals and asceticism.

His teachings are based on four facts of life:

- 1 Suffering exists and is inevitable in human experience. One should learn to prevent it as far as possible rather than meekly accept it.
- 2 Ignorance is its main cause, especially ignorance of human nature, and ignorance thinking that happiness is found through desire for power and enjoyment of the senses, as well as attachment.
- 3 There are ways to avoid suffering and it is mainly through an understanding of life and how to apply that understanding that one can attain a balance of experience.
- 4 This balance is achieved through the practice of the Middle Way or Eightfold Path. This consists of:
 - a) Positive thinking
 - b) Speaking the truth
 - c) Constructive action
 - d) Right conduct
 - e) Sane disposition or attitude to life
 - f) Intelligent effort for self-betterment and general welfare
 - g) Honest occupation in which no deceit or lying or harm to any creature is involved
 - h) Effective meditation or spiritual aspiration. No indulgence in psychic experience or mysteries.

The above is not a literal translation of the *Tripitaka* but my interpretive rendition. In the spirit of yoga, Buddha says:

- Do not accept a teaching unless it is in accord with reasoning
- Do not accept it merely because it is sanctioned by usage, custom or tradition
- No one is noble by birth
- One is noble by one's own deeds
- One is ignoble by one's own deeds
- By oneself is evil done
- By oneself is evil avoided
- By oneself alone one is purified
- Purity and impurity depend on oneself
- No one can purify another
- By oneself one must walk the path
- Teachers merely show the way.

For students of yoga, it is good to imbibe this spirit of *Vedanta* philosophy, although Buddha does not identify the above lines as such.

CHAPTER 15 — YOGA AND CHRISTIANITY

There are dozens of parallel ideals in Christianity and yoga. Christianity started as a universal religion (*katholikos*, meaning universal in Greek). However, the two words are oxymoron as no religion can be universal.

Idea is a Greek word adopted in other European languages which means to see or to have a conceptual vision.

Ideal is to make that concept real by its realisation through inspiration, acting upon it and consequently experiencing its meaning. Ideal means to perfect an idea in the process of its fulfilment or embodiment.

The popular idea that a practical person is less idealistic and that an idealist is impractical is silly. If an ideal is unattainable and, thus, not meant to be attained, there is no point in having it in the first place. That would defy logic.

The moving spirit in doing something worthwhile is similarly driven by its underlying ideal which gives inspiration. An ideal is the goal of an idea, a standard of perfection. To have an ideal leads to realising it, thus making it real.

The Sanskrit word for ideal is *adarsha*, meaning towards (*a*) a vision (*darsha*), or the aspiration to realise a goal. *Drik* means direction, *drishta* view, and *darshana* philosophy. Thus, in Sanskrit, philosophy means a conceptual vision.

Religion in practice serves the purpose of strengthening tribal identity, emotionally linking the flock (read folk) to the supernatural for protection and succour through common

rituals and hymns of adoration. This identity of liturgy and moral codes which spills over into social habits, provides group security.

Thus, sets of dogmas or rules of belief are inevitable in any religion, helping to keep the flock in line and to conserve tribal identity for the sake of group security. Even at the dawn of the third millennium, for the vast majority of people, this seems to be the case.

Yoga, on the other hand, is not a particular religion but a philosophy of life guided by spiritual values, a state of mind freely chosen and individually formed. Thus, it has no set dogmas but universal moral ideals and holy aspiration. It shares the same goal, spiritual union. The word religion literally means *re-ligare*, to reunite oneself with one's divine source.

There are dozens of parallel ideals in Christianity and yoga. One should not exaggerate external differences between dualism (Christianity) and monism (*Gyana Yoga*), but seek common ground such as in the saying of Jesus, "My Father and I are one" and *Bhakti Yoga's* vision of God as the Father of all humanity. In the same way, Christ said, "You are the children of God".

As long as the individual consciousness is in a state of evolution seeking unity with its origin, the universal spirit or God, there is duality. When there is a final merger, there is no more individuality and the goal of monism is reached.

There are three basic ideals common to yoga and Christianity. Firstly, Christianity envisages a spiritual origin of humankind and of creation. Yoga also perceives a common spiritual origin of life (*purusha*) that becomes the universe, while being transcendental, by the pulsation (*spandana*) of its material energy (*prakriti*) through the process of creation, sustenance and dissolution, finding its heightened expression on the human level. There is no difference between the biblical and yogic view in this regard, if one ignores the literary image of God making man out of clay and breathing life into him.

Secondly, in yoga and Christianity, it is the presence of the spirit within the individual consciousness that enables evolution. In yoga this is called *jivatma* (individual soul) which is identical with *paramatma* (supreme soul). In the Old Testament it is the image of God (*Genesis*) and, in the New Testament the Kingdom of God within.

Soul-consciousness or *atma-gyana* in yoga and Christ-consciousness in Christianity are expressed through such higher emotions as selfless love and goodness of heart amidst the powerful survival and libidinal instincts, the higher nature appealing to the lower.

The law of substitution is paramount to overcome anything that hinders one's happiness and progress. It is achieved by the awakening of the soul-consciousness. In order to be successful in desisting from what is wrong, it is not enough to keep within the circle of admonition of what should not be done. One has to come out of that circle by the impetus of what should be done and then apply oneself to that.

Repression distorts the mind and sublimation alone clears it and gives inspiration for creativity. The mind being a field of energy can be treated in only three ways: either repression by the fear of punishment, indulgence through hedonism, or sublimation through the help of the positive.

In Christianity, appeal is made to a higher nature, such as the injunction of returning good for evil, and not seeking revenge such as in the adage of taking an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, but rather seeking to purify the heart by love and forgiveness.

In yoga the appeal is the same, such as in the words of the Buddha, "Hatred does not cease by the retribution of hatred but by the response of love".

IMMANENCE OF GOD

The third ideal is the immanence of God or universal spirit. It means that life can be improved, that human nature can evolve through seeking and fulfilling the spiritual presence within (the image of God) and respecting its existence at least on the level of humankind.

That God created all people equally can only have meaning on the basis of His common presence within all souls. Nothing else is equal in life. On the basis of the recognition of this common spiritual element, there can be the preservation of human dignity and the possibility of forming a just society.

Apart from providing a balance of mutual interest, all ethical principles or moral laws are based on the recognition of this common spiritual presence. In modern democracies, the system of universal franchise is based on this principle without a spiritual prefix.

Some Christians find it difficult to accept the immanence of God because of their orientation to his exclusive existence in heaven. Being in the universe is a threat to his diminution. But God is not a material being and his immanence as spirit does not affect its transcendence, just as space remains the same whether confined to a structure of walls and roofs or not.

When Jesus says to seek the kingdom of God, this means to find a spiritual meaning in life and to practise such ideals as truth and love which are inner representations. To seek and to serve this image is the Christian way.

In yoga, the presence of God as universal spirit is explained on five levels.

- 1 In matter as a cohesive principle or energy that gives it substance.
- 2 In all living organisms, including vegetation, as a life principle.
- 3 In animal forms, as individual minds conditioned by life-supporting instincts.
- 4 In higher forms of life, such as on the human level, by the power of reason and determination.
- 5 In an evolved human level, as soul-consciousness through spiritual aspiration and moral idealism.

It is because of God's transcendental nature that there is no limit to the understanding of truth and the feeling of love, even on a human level.

A common ground about the vision of God in yoga and Christianity can be found in the words of Christ to the Samaritan woman at the well, "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth". (*John IV:24*)

By worshipping in spirit, Jesus probably meant through spiritual aspiration, and in truth by a life of truthful conduct in accordance to the teachings of the *Torah*.

In yoga God as spirit can be defined by five mystical terms:

- 1 **Universal** and therefore immanent or present everywhere.
- 2 **Infinite**, thus without form or being limited spatially, or confined to a house of worship or place of pilgrimage or heaven.
- 3 **Eternal**, thus not bound by time or subject to change through the influence of time.
- 4 **Transcendental**, that which alone as a principle assists the evolution of consciousness and, thus, our perception of truth and love, laws and ideals, in an ever-expansive way.
- 5 **Inner light**, that which enlightens the mind with reason and wisdom and elevates it by holy aspiration.

TANGIBLE VALUES

These mystical qualities attributed to God cannot have sufficient meaning, however, without some tangible means of their realisation. Thus, the five paths leading to him are:

- 1 **Truth** which is determined by evidence, consequence and the principles of equality such as in the common good, liberation (truth shall set you free), and independence (not needing any support).
- 2 **Love and devotion for spiritual ideals** in a general sense and regard and affection for loved ones on a personal level.
- 3 **Beauty** which means subordination of lower passions in order to experience the depth of pure love, grace and harmony, to refine our perception of outer reality and expression of the inner spirit.
- 4 **Goodness or purity of heart** which is to try to be free from resentment and hatred, prejudice and pettiness, wickedness and fanaticism.
- 5 **Justice and fairness for all**, identifying our interests with those of others and not treating others as we would not like to be treated ourselves.

In Christianity, these values are overwhelmingly present. The essence of the teachings of Jesus can be said to be, “Love God (or spiritual ideals) with all your heart, love your neighbour as yourself, and do not be a hypocrite”. Peace and love, forgiveness and renunciation of worldliness are the cornerstones of Christianity.

The basis of yoga can be said to consist of:

- 1 Dedication to, faith in, and love of spiritual values such as integrity and compassion, altruism and duty, responsibility and loyalty, self-improvement and humility of spirit. That is the real meaning of loving God. Emotionalism is not love, rather devotion and dedication.
- 2 Based on these, one develops a keen sense of right and wrong and guides one’s conduct accordingly. The basics are simple: it is wrong to harm and right to heal; it is wrong to take part in action which leads to disharmony and right to promote peace; it is wrong to cheat and right to be honest; it is wrong to be crooked and right to be straightforward.
- 3 To consider life as a gift of God rather than a punishment, as something precious in order to make it useful and creative, with the purpose of making others happy and, in the process, to find happiness oneself.
- 4 Our journey through life can be made comfortable through faith and knowledge. These are the two wheels upon which life moves. If they are well constructed and kept in good working order, the jolts along the way which are inevitable can be better absorbed and thus our suffering will be less. Faith means a deeper sense of values and love of ideals through which one matures emotionally and gains a measure of freedom from human bondage. Knowledge means to liberate the mind from superstition and fear through the search for reality and a better understanding of life around and the universe in which we live. It also pertains to our inner nature, the psychological layers of our being, through which we free the mind from prejudice and fanaticism and the ignorance of our spiritual roots.

- 5 The most fundamental of all is the sublimation of our earthly nature. This means to discipline and overcome common human weaknesses: selfishness, pride, vanity, anger, hate, jealousy, deceit, greed, envy, covetousness, lust, aggression, hypocrisy, deviousness and backbiting.

CONCLUSION

The yogic way of life consists less in doing postures (*asanas*) and breathing exercises (*pranayama*), or following dietary preferences, than in our effort at self-improvement, *Karma Yoga* or selfless service, and to attain inner strength and harmony through meditation.

In the Christian way, Jesus advises, “Do not pray in the market place so that others can see you, but in your room so that God can hear what is in your heart. Ask not God for mundane things, for he knows what is good for you, but ask rather what he wants of you”.

This simply means to base your life on spiritual ideals and to overcome your weaknesses. Carry the cross (at least having a measure of self-abnegation) and follow me (be inspired by his example to do what is right as best you can and in the best light of your understanding).

Life is what we make of it with our inner resources, with self-effort, and in relationship with the circumstances which are, in part, our own creation, with an element of the unknown. In Christianity, this is called God’s will, in yoga the consequence of a past, unseen *karma*.

What we are is the result of what we have tried to be or do not try to be and what we are doing now or failing to do.

We are true or false to God in direct relationship to whether we are true or false, just or unjust, kind or unkind to each other.

In the yogic spirit, worship of spiritual ideals is the worship of God as spirit, without form which the individual can also personify as Jesus or, in the Hebrew tradition, as *Adonai-Elohim*, a supreme fatherly figure in heaven.

Prayer is a movement of heart through the feeling of spiritual love. It is an inner communion. The real meaning is the movement of our life through deed, inspired by that love.

Christian beliefs, such as those expressed in its mythology, will remain empty if the ideals mentioned above and which pulsate through the teachings of Jesus, do not find adequate expression in Christian life.

The British author, G K Chesterton, said that Christianity has not failed. It has simply not been practised as it was found too difficult to do so. I do not entirely subscribe to this view.

Christianity has had a violent past, quite contrary to the spirit of its initiator. It is still a narrow-minded religion, rather than *katholikos*. Yet there can be no denial that Western civilisation is founded on Christian values with deep roots in the Old Testament and the enlightened ideas of the Hellenic civilisation which were revived in the age of reason at the end of the eighteenth century.

Yogic ideals went to sleep in India centuries ago. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy initiated a revival process which is still on-going. As in any civilisation, birth, flowering of growth, decay and phasing out are followed by rebirth. Rebirth needs adaptation according to the needs of the age and cultural environment.

As such, both East and West, can learn from each other without either losing their roots.

CHAPTER 16 — YOGA, GOD AND RELIGION: WHAT YOGA MEANS

Yoga is first of all self-discipline. A state of oneness with one's spiritual source, which is a goal, comes much later. As the root *yuj* or yoke suggests, the aim of Yoga is to discipline the mind with the love of spiritual ideals and to direct one's effort towards their realisation. It is only then that 'union', its purpose, becomes meaningful.

A person sitting cross-legged with eyes closed high up on a mountain top (good for taking a photograph) is only a romantic idea of uniting oneself with God, whatever is meant by that word. Mostly, it is an escapism leading to mental atrophy.

Discipline is not an imposition of will or mind over body, nor is it repression on account of fear. Rather it is a process of learning inspired by the love of the reason why. The Latin root *discere* means to learn, not to impose.

Yoga as physical culture consisting mainly of *asana* and *pranayama* constitutes only one small part. *Asanas* are good for physical health but have little influence over the mind in the sense of self-discipline. They help to relax the nervous system of course and, for a short while, the mind stays peaceful. By themselves, they are not conducive to peace of mind.

Yoga is a state of mind, a way of life, that seeks to integrate the material and spiritual aspects, to unite faith with reason, to refine the emotions with devotion, to discipline and sublimate raw instincts through moral values, to improve human relationship through ethical conduct, to cultivate equanimity in pleasure and pain, success and failure, and to seek out wider dimensions of life.

Various techniques of meditation play a great role in self-cultivation. Meditation on peace and freedom and on one's spiritual identity are the most important themes. This is done in combination with the experience of the breath and also with the litany of a mantra. Affirmation of phrases is meant to cut grooves in the subconscious to motivate attitude and action.

ETHICS IS THE BEDROCK

To be more honest, decent and useful, to appreciate more the happier moments and to take in one's stride the unhappy ones without bitterness and complaint, is the yogic way. To be mindful of the present and to look forward optimistically to the future, is the yogic way.

The mind of a practitioner of yoga should have wide open windows so that the fresh breeze of knowledge sought from multiple sources may flow in, to clear the cobwebs of bias and bigotry, sectarian dogmatism and malice, self-absorption and egocentricity.

One does not become a yogi merely by practising *asana* and *pranayama*. Being a yogi indicates a high level of evolution through spiritual aspiration, self-control and selfless service. In the West, the words 'yoga' and 'yogi' are generally debased due to vanity, lack of knowledge and commercial motivation.

To live as best we can, to think and act positively, and to consider life a blessing rather than a burden to grumble about, not to be judgmental about the faults of others, oneself not being free of them, to have charity of heart, not to be stingy in one's feelings for others, is the yogic way.

Not to be dogmatic about anything, to learn the relativity of things in determining what is more important and what is less so, to know when enough is enough, never to think one is the possessor of truth, to know that one's understanding can always be improved, never to lose the capacity of wondering and learning anew, is the yogic way.

WHAT GOD MEANS

The idea of God as an anthropomorphic supreme being high up in heaven does not fascinate me. I do not need his sitting in judgment over me, dishing out reward and punishment. Accountability to an invisible deity beyond the tangibility of time is spurious and has not helped anyone to be a better person. Accountability, to be meaningful, has to be in relation to one's fellow beings and to one's own conscience.

Belief in original sin is likewise meaningless, since one cannot relate to something which occurred at a time when it was of no fault of one's own. Neither do I need to be saved, for no-one is threatening me. It seems ridiculous that I am damned for no fault of mine and then offered the holy grail of salvation but only if I believe in the saviour. The Hebrew name of Jesus, *Yehoshua*, means 'Yaweh saves thee'.

Salvation means that I have to save myself from my own errors, from the deficiencies in my character which happen every day of my life. 'By the grace and help of God' means through faith in the spiritual resources within me and by my own self-effort.

Life eternal does not fascinate me either, for the life as I know it and have to cope with is more than enough! What happens after death is a speculation that is a waste of time. I have a strong suspicion that the notion of immortality is a consequence of an attachment to the body and all that is required to sustain it and keep it comfortable.

Heaven and hell are here within and without in the state of my mind and the surrounding circumstances. In peace and understanding, with compassion and kindness in my heart, with integrity and decency in my conduct with others, with a clear conscience and freedom from resentment and prejudice, I am in heaven. In their contradiction, I am in hell.

Why speculate about something which you cannot verify? Imagine a transmigrating Chinese encountering a Caucasian looking deity sitting on a throne in heaven, or vice versa. And imagine a European Christian finding a middle-eastern Semitic looking Jesus Christ!

A rational vision of God, although contradicting the word '*theos*' itself, is the universal spirit which is eternal, infinite and transcendental. This formless spiritual essence of the ever-changing universe is called eternal, not being a captive of time, and thus changeless.

It is infinite as it surpasses space, and universal as it is the immanent force giving life to all forces in existence. It is transcendental, as it rises above and beyond all and through such a magnetic pull, makes evolution possible. No one can deny the existence of the various patterns of energy out of which life has evolved as we know it, and no sane person can say that this is all there is to know.

A MENTAL IMAGE

A personalised God as father in heaven, loving and benevolent, is an idealised and mystical form created by one's devotion and aspiration to relate to the infinite spirit when one is in desperate

need of spiritual help. It is a mental image shaped by one's cultural environment and tradition. It also serves a need for spiritual fulfilment when disappointment arises.

It is more honest to say that humans created God in his or her own image rather than that God created us in his image. God being jealous of a rival, being vengeful, being susceptible to being propitiated by praise, not to mention requiring an unquestioning submission to his will, speaks more of our human nature as it is. God being merciful, forgiving and full of goodness, relates to how we should be.

An atheist is a person who does not believe in a particular heavenly deity. In reality, however, no one can truly be an atheist if by God one means the essence of all spiritual values in an ever-increasing sense. No one can deny the fact that we feel happy with the positive and unhappy with the negative. We are happy when there is peace in our heart and we are at peace with each other. By displaying compassion and integrity, by being responsible and helpful to one another, we are happy.

The word 'atheist' is a stick to beat those who do not agree with a limited vision of a heavenly deity, devised by the scriptures. It suggests one should approach that person with apprehension as not being God fearing and therefore unsafe company.

The universe emerged from an original energy particle which began to vibrate. From its forces evolved the human consciousness which invented the images of God with all kinds of fantasies: a god who will not fail us, a god who will not stop loving us, an almighty who will protect us because we need to survive, and also because we need a role model to help us to evolve and feel fulfilled.

The image of God in which we are supposed to have been created (*Genesis 1:27*) is an ideal, not a reality. It is designed to shape our moral and spiritual values, our conscience, and to assist our constantly evolving understanding. Thus, God to me is a supreme symbol of my conscience in the best light of my comprehension, always humbly expectant that it can be clearer, fairer and purer.

My soul is a spark of the infinite spirit in a state of embodiment. The same spark twinkles as myriads of God's light in the souls of humanity, awaiting individual discovery and realisation.

WHAT RELIGION MEANS

It is said that in polite company, one should not talk about religion or politics because of the tendency to get emotional about such topics. Whether we practise a religion or not, we are tagged by an immediately identifiable one, such as by how we are named. Religion has always shaped social habits and customs as well as a moral code of conduct defining a way of life. I cannot deny that I was born a Brahmin even though I despise the Hindu caste system which ranks people by birth alone.

As the word ‘religion’ indicates, *re-ligare* in Latin means to reunite us, imperfect and therefore unfulfilled as we are, with our mythically perfect creator, thus enabling us to regain Elysium. In its enlightened form, religion can inspire the deepest longings in a pure heart: unselfish love, compassion, fellowship, altruism, a moral sense, duty, responsibility and integrity.

Yet, in an unenlightened mind it can be a dangerous instrument by which one manipulates the primitive instincts of fear and insecurity, the need to survive being a primal cry. When the source of security provided by religion through a god or messiah such as Jesus, or a set of beliefs, is challenged, fear born of ignorance takes over. Fear begets intolerance and intolerance, violence.

No religion has been more responsible in shedding blood in the name of one almighty God than the three monotheistic ones: Christianity in the Middle Ages, Islam throughout the ages, and Judaism in its inception immediately after Moses. The partition of India after British rule was forced by the sword of Islam to carve out Pakistan or ‘the land of the pure’ with inevitable retaliation.

Religion tried to improve a human being by making God the measure of his or her destiny. It generally failed in this by manipulating one’s fear and insecurity by a supernatural promise of reward and threat of punishment on the basis of a mandated rule of conduct. The fear of an intangible hell in an afterlife does not prevent crime, nor does the embellishment of an unseen heaven promote good behaviour.

Religion would have had a better result if it had inspired us to be decent and to make our life agreeable now by appealing to our better instincts, making us responsible to others, and to live as best we can rather than emphasise emotional fervour for a mythical deity and salvation through him or by his delegate or messiah such as Christ in the hereafter.

The age of reason at the end of the eighteenth century and humanism in the nineteenth tried to make a human being the measure of all things, taking into account our material needs. It sought to promote social justice through collective responsibility but without God as a model.

This effort also failed because of the assumption that people behave best and work better in a collective role rather than primarily out of self-interest. Modern democracies are devised with a combination of both.

The bottom line of the relevancy of any religion is ethical inspiration. This has been its role since time immemorial when human beings first learned to live together with the advent of agriculture some nine thousand years ago. It began as shamanism to provide succour for physical ailments using herbal remedies, for psychic ills through incantation and the flair of magic whereby the medicine man or shaman combined both.

With the progress of civilisation, religious and spiritual successors of the shaman have continued to fulfil this psychic need for inner security, over and above offering moral guidance. The more one has self-confidence, the less the relevancy of religion. However, for the vast majority of people, the psychic need will continue to be present. Hence, the successors of shamans, the religious and spiritual teachers, will carry on the second oldest profession in the world.

Anyone who loves and practises honesty, kindness and unselfishness, duty, honour and responsibility, sublimating passions, displaying moral courage and modesty, is a ‘religious’ person in the sense of *re-ligare*, whether he or she goes to a church or not, believes in God or not, and carries out any devotional act or not. Real devotion consists in how we relate and are committed to those who are close to us, and how we carry out an act of service with love and care.

CHAPTER 17 — THE PLAY OF THE GUNAS

Nearly three thousand years ago, *Vedanta* philosophy speculated that the universe was composed of three *gunas* or categories of energy representing the primordial forces of nature (*prakriti*), and the pulsation (*spandana*) which is the basic principle of creation.

These energy forms are classified as:

- 1 **Tamas:** elemental matter, particles of dust and their condensed forms such as planets. This pulsates as cohesive and de-cohesive energy. By itself it has no light. Its quality is opacity.
- 2 **Rajas:** this is matter in a state of combustion or fire, emanating energy in the form of light, motion, expansion, attraction (gravity), and magnetism, as in our solar system. Its quality is power.
- 3 **Sattwa:** this consists of invisible, subtle matter called *akasha* or ether which pervades seemingly empty space. Its quality is balance.

Sattwa is the initiating principle of all the elemental forces. *Rajas* represents their creativity, evolution and multiplicity. *Tamas* represents their density and decay as well as the process of reabsorption.

The three *gunas* do not exist independently. They are in different degrees of interaction, one predominating over the other.

In the vastness of space, millions of light years across, *sattwa* begins to manifest as matter and the nascent universe. *Rajas* and *tamas* remain in their latent energy form at this point.

Later on, *rajas* predominates, combining, multiplying, expanding and evolving the elements, giving rise to human beings on earth and, according to Hindu legend, eventually evolving as gods. At this point, *sattva* and *tamas* remain less active.

In another part of space, *tamas* or the decaying and reabsorption process predominates, such as in a dwarf star. The end of the universe is called *pralaya* or dissolution.

THE SOURCE

According to legend, *Brahman* is the source of everything. It is beyond the grasp of the mind but, in order to identify the original atom, the epithet *Brahman* or ‘Great Being’ is given to indicate that it is beyond name. From this is born *Hiranyagarbha* or ‘golden womb’.

From *Hiranyagarbha* in each universe is born *Ishwara*, the presiding being which has three aspects: the creative (*Brahma*), the sustaining (*Vishnu*), and the re-absorbing (*Shiva*). From these three forces combined, *purusha* or the as yet dormant spiritual energy and *prakriti* or material form of energy, are born. The term *purusha* is also sometimes used to refer to a supreme being (*paramatma*).

Out of *Hiranyagarbha*, *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas* are born. Ancient yogic minds speculated that, after thousands of billions of years, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* will fuse together at which point all the universes will disappear. This end of existence is called *maha-pralaya* or the great dissolution. Then, after an infinite time span, there will be another beginning of another megacycle of existence.

Coming back to our planet which has evolved from the cosmic dust or atoms (*anu*) and become dense matter (*sthula*), the manifestation of *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas* is reversed. Here existence began with the predominance of *tamas* while *rajas* and *sattwa* remain latent.

The universe is ruled by the law of *prakriti* which, from the human point of view, is beyond criterion. The stronger atom absorbs the weaker, one nucleus combines with another before dividing and recombining to form various kinds of matter. Out of such particles of cosmic dust evolve countless organisms and sentient forms of life which constantly adapt to the surrounding forces of nature. In this survival process, many have disappeared following the law of survival of the fittest.

Finally, from micro-organisms, have evolved plant life, lower and higher forms of animal life and the cleverest of the animal species, humankind. When did the soul, the spiritual content

of our being as we identify it, awaken in our consciousness? Did it occur when *sattwa* expressed itself as altruistic love?

THE SOUL

Yogic insight recognised this aspect of *purusha* as soul (*jivatma*) on the human and animal level as well as the spiritual content of individual consciousness. Out of the pulsation of the soul, pure felicity in the form of altruistic love (*ananda*) is born, so too is born transcendental wisdom (*chit*) and the consciousness of a deathless state of existence (*sat*). From the soul's pulsation evolves a basic moral sense, assisted by education and spiritual aspiration.

Why is it said that *prakriti* has no criterion? Because such dubious acts of God such as earthquakes and hurricanes are simply undiscerning neutral forces of nature. Those who happen to be present when they occur, deserving or undeserving, suffer the poetic indifference of nature. From *tamas* or dense inert matter surges the pulsation of *rajas* in the form of tectonic and atmospheric forces while *sattwa* remains latent, expressing serenity for a while in the time before sunrise and at sunset when nature is at peace.

Purusha or the spirit within expresses itself as *sattwa* in human consciousness. It informs one that the law of *prakriti* or the right of bigger fish to eat the smaller one should prevail among people. Even if human nature is a product of *prakriti*, the pulsation of *purusha* within makes us struggle against our baser instincts.

TAMASIC NATURE

In the vast majority of people *tamas* prevails and *sattwa* and *rajas* remain dormant. *Tamas* expresses itself as lethargy, a dull state of mind, a lack of curiosity and interest. However, *tamas* can be quite active in relation to lower appetites such as eating, drinking, copulating and sleeping to excess. Such people have to be led, being indecisive, and are fit mainly for manual labour. Only through education, can *rajas* and *sattwa* be activated.

Tamas exudes negative thinking, conniving, wishing to harm others but not having the guts to do so, and waiting for an opportunity to strike when no personal risk is involved. *Tamasic* people run after worldly pleasures if they are available *gratis*, or are envious of those who enjoy them. Their character is subterranean. They prefer to be hidden enemies and are basically selfish and irresponsible due to being self-centred.

Dishonesty is natural to the *tamasic*. They like to daydream without any sense of reality or willingness to realise their spurious ambition. They are quick to criticise and find fault, and tend to be destructive. They are possessive so long as this costs them nothing.

No one is, however, entirely *tamasic*, without the occasional weak ripples of *rajas* and *sattwa*. When a person is called very *tamasic*, what is meant is having a preponderance of that quality. The same is true when one is considered *rajasic* or *sattwic*. All three qualities co-exist in all of us to different degrees of manifestation.

RAJASIC NATURE

Rajas represents an outgoing nature. When *rajas* predominates, one becomes energetic, ambitious, willing to make an effort to fulfil worldly desires, curious to expand the horizons of one's knowledge, courageous and not prone to shy away from risks. A *rajasic* person is partly generous and partly selfish, vain, proud and aggressive and sometimes violent when challenged. Such a person can be shamelessly ego-centred and spontaneously self-important, generally creative but destructive when opposed.

A soldier type is a *rajasic* person who provides business, political and bureaucratic leadership. They can excel as generals but are not necessarily wise rulers. One can recognise them as open enemies. They tend to be dominating and possessive whilst willing to pay the price required. They have A-type personalities and display latent *sattwic* and *tamasic* traits.

The ego is a dominant trait in the *rajasic*. That is why they can sometimes be quite offensive. Without ego, no leadership is possible for it provides the power of motivation. When the ego is educated by the *sattwic* quality of consideration for the interests, feelings and opinions of others, it becomes inoffensive and serves as a positive, creative force. *Rajasics* are proud whilst being clever, whereas the *tamasic* people are self-important whilst being stupid.

Among the majority of *rajasic* people and the relative minority of *tamasic* types, *sattwa* traits can sometimes surface. The *sattwic* type, or those in whom *sattwa* predominates, are very few indeed.

SATTWIC NATURE

The *sattwic* are pure-hearted, free from resentment, incapable of hating others, decent, honest and generous without being calculating. Truthfulness is natural to them whilst taking care not to

cause trouble or to hurt others. Their benevolence is substantiated by altruism and not merely expressed in attitude. They are kind-hearted, fair-minded, compassionate, patient and tolerant without being indifferent. Their modesty is genuine. They are free from any kind of pretention, especially from pretending to be humble.

Sattwic people tend to be rather gullible and therefore cannot provide business or political leadership which requires manipulation. They are never dogmatic. Ruthlessness that is required in business and politics is contrary to their nature. They have a keen insight into the nature of things but their unwillingness to face, and tendency to underrate, a negative reality makes them somewhat gullible.

The predominantly *sattwic* kind can be excellent educators, scientists and administrators, when that role is autonomous and not politically dictated. The philosopher-king being a myth, the *sattwic* type can be at best a persuasive and impartial constitutional monarch or head of state. Being selfless, they can be worthy servants of humanity. Being wise and modest, they can be inspiring spiritual teachers.

The *sattwic* kind are rare among prominent gurus or heads of religious institutions, any role of organisational leadership being subject to the manipulation of circumstantial exigencies. It is also irrational to expect those with a preponderance of *sattwa* to be entirely free from occasional bouts of *rajas* and *tamas*, human nature never being perfect.

Selfishness and the uneducated ego are the main causes of suffering. They arise from *tamas*. As all of us wish to be happy and to avoid suffering, it is in our interest to educate and purify the *tamasic* in us by cultivating *rajasic* initiative, enterprise, work ethic, perseverance and creative self-effort. One cannot jump to *sattwa* from a *tamasic* state but, rather, ascend through *rajas*. The belief that by repeating the divine name alone one will purify *tamas*, is a myth.

Human nature needs a life-long education. Self-improvement needs a mix of *rajas* and *sattwa*. The body needs the discipline of *Hatha Yoga* or any other form of physical exercise. The mind needs the discipline of *Raja Yoga* and the heart of *Bhakti Yoga*. Selfishness in us needs the discipline of *Karma Yoga* and our spiritual aspiration, *Gyana Yoga*⁶

⁶ This article is adapted from a seminar conducted by Swami Shivapremananda on 7th March 1999 at his Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre in Montevideo, Uruguay.

CHAPTER 18 — RUMINATIONS

[Editor's note: The following sayings have been translated by Swamiji from his original work in Spanish, 'Ventana del Alma'. This consists of excerpts from his class-talks given at his Yoga-Vedanta Centres in Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago, in South America.]

KNOWLEDGE AND SPIRITUALITY

Knowledge can be taught but spirituality is a personal responsibility and is cultivated by oneself alone because no one can impart it to another or trigger it by a magic touch. A sudden flash of knowledge is the result of a long search, a long preparation, a long struggle, a long wait, the soul's energies gathering into an unlit ball of fire that explodes at a particular moment. Rarely does it occur by means of a long-expected initiation. However, the light fades in the course of time and has to be nursed back to brightness from time to time through self-effort.

Integrity, compassion, selflessness, purity of heart, freedom from malice and hate, prejudice and wicked thinking, sublimation of passions and humility of spirit are the essential definitions of spirituality and what makes a spiritual person, far more than asceticism and prayerfulness.

No one can measure another's spirituality and appearances can be very deceptive. A husband can be most charming to guests and friends but you have to ask his wife what he is actually like at home. So also, a *guru* can have a very holy appearance in public but you have to ask his personal attendants how he is in private.

Ignorance is the worst pollutant of all. From ignorance comes insecurity, from insecurity fear, from fear intolerance and fanaticism, and from fanaticism violence and destructiveness.

Knowledge is not the determining factor of a person's culture, but rather his or her behaviour. One can be very knowledgeable in the fine arts, for example, but unthinkingly tactless and exuberantly immodest.

Common sense is surely a misnomer. It is rather uncommon among people. The fact that women generally have more common sense is due to their nurturing role, the practical nesting instincts in rearing their defenceless offspring expressing itself in this way.

The inability to understand the difference between the desirable and the possible leads to bad decisions, as does failing to approximate ambition with the talent and effort required to realise it.

If the conscience is clear, there is no need to justify oneself. If not, it will be hard to do so successfully.

The tendency to deceive others leads to deceiving oneself through self-justification.

TRUTH

A revealed truth is only a part of the truth. An insight that arises through spiritual aspiration and deep meditation of a highly evolved soul that is claimed in the scriptures as being a revelation from God, is in effect a personal realisation of its author. One has to discover the other dimensions of truth for oneself. Ultimately, truth is infinite and universal. Our search for truth is a spiritual journey which is very personal, very private and full of trials and errors.

It is ridiculous to speak of God-given truths and to wave the banner of divine revelation. It is better to speak about self-evident truths. The Buddha said that he was not revealing truth but, rather, speaking about truth.

Sat (in Sanskrit) means that which exists and is not an assumption. *Satya*, or that which is based on an existence, has two aspects: the material and the spiritual. The material reality of a house is meant to provide security. Its spiritual reality can be found in the fulfilment through love, integrity, supportiveness and a sense of belonging amongst those who make their home within it.

To speak of material existence as an illusion is not only irresponsible but utterly hypocritical. We need truth first of all for security. Integrity in a relationship is the basis of security.

Universality of truth is another aspect. This arises in so far as it is true for all, even though that may differ to a degree according to the individual, for example in the ability of a medical product such as aspirin to alleviate pain.

Yet another aspect of truth is its transcendent nature. In other words, it can be improved upon. A level of perfection of love, of justice and understanding, can lead to ever greater levels of perfection. That is why truth is called infinite.

Infinity, however, has no focus. In order to substantiate its spirit, one has to have definable principles by which one is guided. To say that truth is pathless is as silly as it is to call the universe an illusion.

Freedom is the consequence of truth. It enables the mind to be set free from anxiety. By contrast, bondage is the outcome of untruth.

Independence is the nature of truth. In other words, it can stand on its own, while untruth is always reliant on a series of lies to prop it up.

No one can reveal the truth to us, but only speak about it in the light of their realisation. Psychic experiences have nothing to do with spirituality or the realisation of truth.

Self-realised or God-realised souls are institutional creations, in much the same way as are saints. They are no doubt highly evolved but to claim that they are perfect beings is to go against the evidence.

WHO ARE WE?

The content of our soul is transcendental love and truth, beauty and goodness, peace and harmony, purity of heart and clarity of wisdom: in other words, reflections of the universal spirit within our consciousness. Thus, the individuality of the consciousness of the spirit within can be called a soul and the content of it, the universal spirit. As such, if God is the ocean, a drop is the soul. If God is the sun, the soul is a spark of light.

We are a contradiction. We are both spirit and matter, light and shadow. The pure light of our soul is veiled by many layers of our personality, revealing it in various hues according to their transparency while sometimes obscuring it. We are in this world to cleanse these layers, not

to deny them. We need to harmonise and sublimate them with the help of our inner light, not repress them and make them atrophied.

Until the day we die, we will be both spirit and body, the mind serving as a bridge between the two. We are happy when the consciousness is closer to the spirit, in and through and beyond our relationship with others. We are unhappy when it suffocates inside the ego in the relativity of its negative feedback from others.

We cannot understand the world if we reject and curse it. To regard this world as an illusion is like brushing the dirt under the carpet rather than cleaning it.

We cannot learn from the mistakes of a past life even if we believe in reincarnation, because the memory of a past mistake is not carried over to the present life. We can only learn from what we do now and what we remember.

TREE OF LIFE

All of us on earth differ from each other in the same way that each leaf differs from another leaf while still belonging to the same tree. Thus, individually apart, we all belong to the common tree of our species, drawing the psychological sap from the same mixed source of creation, from the reservoir of good and evil, positive and negative. God and the devil co-exist within us.

Our fears and anxieties, hopes and disappointments, desires and frustrations, have a common streak within all of us. They well up from the same primordial psyche that is shaped and reshaped, refined and tarnished, anchored and let adrift for a while by the forces of history. Religions and ideologies serve as handmaidens, popping up a litany of ideas, some intelligent and some pure bromide, as to who we are, what we want to be, where we have come from and where we want to go.

If you ask me where I have come from, all I can honestly say is from my mother's womb. Each of us should grow according to the law of our own spiritual growth through personal effort in the light of our best understanding. A human being is not like a clod of earth to be kneaded into shape by the *diktat* of an ideology, religious or political, neither by a *guru* nor a messiah. One can only inspire the heart and mind by the purity of idealism and clarity of reason so that an individual may learn to choose, be personally responsible and walk his or her own path. Society may do likewise by consensus. Let there be guidance by all means, imposition never.

Freedom of thought is a basic right to be encouraged. No one has the right to impose on others a straightjacketed belief or ideology. But one should learn that every right imposes an obligation, every liberty a responsibility, personal freedom a self-discipline and individual choice a consideration for others.

Religious scriptures represent the vision of their authors trying to ensure tribal identities, their minds reflecting the shape of values and thinking of their times, their souls searching for common spiritual roots. Yogic texts such as the *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita* do not escape the play of light and shadow. Krishna threatens to hurl the sinners to hell and the author of the *Upanishads* prays for a fair skinned son when the Aryan invaders have already mixed with the brown-skinned locals.

Wishful thinking does not even elude Patanjali in the *Yogasutras* when he speaks of the yogi attaining omniscience and omnipotence (so much for modesty!), or attaining *siddhis* or occult powers making the body as light as a feather or as heavy as a mountain (what for?). The pathetic syndrome of eternal bliss (too much might unhinge you) or the world being a figment of imagination (*maya*) only shows how escapist the mind can be and its reluctance to come to grips with hard reality. Life is what you make of it.

ROOTS ABOVE, BRANCHES BELOW

In the following free rendering of the opening verses of Chapter XV of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Sir Edwin Arnold in his *Song Celestial*, Krishna speaks of the symbolic tree of life:

“Men call the *ashattha*, the banyan tree,
Which hath its bough beneath,
Its roots above, the ever-holy tree ...”

“If ye knew well the teaching of the tree,
What its shape saith, and whence it springs,
And then how it must end,
And all the ills of it ...”

“New growths upspringing to that happier sky,
Which they who reach shall have no day to die ...
For to him come they from passions
And from dreams who break away,
Who part the bonds constraining them to flesh.”

HEAVEN AND HELL

Heaven and hell are within each of us and in our surroundings. When truth and love, goodness and kindness reign in our relationship with each other, at home and in the community, we experience heaven and the presence of God. When justice and commonweal, understanding and tolerance, clarity of reason and purity of devotion rule our lives, we are indeed in heaven and in the company of God. In their contradiction, we are in hell, both within and without, suffering the absence of God.

In the work ethic, in the aftertaste of a duty well carried out, an obligation well fulfilled, we experience heaven. In nourishing and tending carefully a loving relationship, in the inspiration of trying to realise a spiritual ideal, we are in heaven. Whereas, when our hearts are ruled by passion and prejudice, and contort with resentment and malice, we are in hell. When our heads simmer with anger and the nerves tense with bitterness, when words and looks are used as daggers, and actions plotted and executed to harm each other, we are in hell.

Eternal heaven and hell are wishful thinking. The roots of *satchidananda* (pure being-awareness-felicity) in our souls give an elusive awareness (*chit*) of an eternally existing (*sat*) heaven (*ananda*) within us. Did not Jesus say, “the kingdom of God is within you”? But, due to our attachment to physical existence, we like to make heaven an abode of happy denizens enjoying forever rivers of milk and honey. How cloying that would be! You might as well throw in a few *houris* and their masculine counterparts.

DESTINY

Destiny is what you have within and without, tapping inner resources, potentialities, and making the best use of the circumstances. Thus, destiny is in a large measure what we do with what we have, notwithstanding an element of the incognito. Destiny is not sitting around and saying that it is my *karma* as to what little I have and how I suffer, but through self-effort trying to overcome

suffering, deficiencies, and better yourself and the circumstances. It is only after doing so, you accept with fortitude what cannot be overcome. You do not know what is your destiny without trying to find out what it can be by self-effort.

Get hold of the first opportunity for anything good that comes by. Do not wait for a better one to appear the next time for there may not be a next time. Be alert, have initiative, keep looking for opportunities. If you have found a friend or a teacher of integrity, do not let that person move away through your selfishness or indifference, but sustain such a friendship by sharing the best in you.

POVERTY AND SUFFERING

Suffering by itself does not purify. Otherwise, the majority of us would be saints. Only when we are willing to correct the cause of suffering can we learn from it. By sharing the suffering of those while helping to alleviate it, we purify ourselves. When suffering is prolonged, we become anaesthetised to it and, therefore, cannot learn from it. Overcoming suffering is an obligatory goal and only when suffering cannot be avoided should we accept it stoically.

Poverty is degrading and dependence demeaning. Economic freedom is the first freedom because it gives one the freedom of choice, autonomy. Money is not the root cause of evil but attachment to money can lead to many problems. Poverty and wealth can both be bondages from which we should try to free ourselves. It is not true that the poor will sail to heaven through the eye of the needle of misfortune and that the rich will stay behind with the camels.

Believing is not conforming. Generally speaking, believing means hoping in relationship to what is plausible. But if we do not try to realise our hopes with diligent effort, we will be forever hoping. Without searching, testing and substantiating, we cannot know whether what we are asked to believe is true or not. We can only really accept and assimilate what we know. Thus, to know, we must search.

It is sad to see those who claim to have a revelation through meditation cut corners, lack integrity and indulge in ‘spiritual’ theatre. There being so much unhappiness in life, spiritual teachers should never be merchants in human misery but be all the more responsible due to the gullibility of the people. There is an old Indian saying: “The ochre robe hides a lot of dirt”. It should never be worn light-heartedly as a mark of swami-hood.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Emotionalism in *Bhakti Yoga* experienced by singing devotional chants and odes, by itself does not purify the heart, although they can be momentarily uplifting. Nor do long hours of reciting the rosary mechanically, or getting up before dawn to practise concentration and meditation as per *Raja Yoga*, or contemplation of the *mahavakyas* (great affirmations) and metaphysical themes of the *Upanishads* according to *Gyana Yoga*.

The above are only helpful when combined with a spiritual discipline that consists in leading a life of ethical idealism and altruism, watchfulness over one's motives and trying to be free from hypocrisy and egotism, passion and prejudice. Spiritual life is more a process of how we think and express ourselves in attitude and conduct and our sense of values and corresponding action, rather than through devotional acts by themselves. Without a moral basis, spiritual exercises are like pouring water into a leaking pot.

If anything goes wrong, you are at least 50% to blame. So, accept your share, learn from your mistakes and do not pass on the blame to others and wallow in self-pity. Not only does that weaken you but it also makes others dislike you.

Worse than feeling sorry for yourself is to let people feel sorry for you. Keep your suffering to yourself. Others have enough of their own load.

Those teachers who tastelessly brag about performing 'ego-dectomy' on their disciples, have themselves an enormous ego.

If politics is the art of the possible and philosophy of the impossible (some sayings can be really stupid), why bother about philosophy at all? The purpose of philosophy, any philosophy, is to motivate and guide the individual and society towards recognisable goals, and to fulfil needs and aspirations.

As an itinerant teacher, I feel like a rolling stone gathering no moss. I fail to understand why stones should gather moss at all. I rather like them smooth and clean!

To be emotional and demonstrative in public, such as boys and girls spooning in the open, is the mark of poor breeding. Emotions and intimacies should be strictly private.

Appreciative exclamations such as 'smashing' and 'terrific' are indicative of society's fascination with violence. Exuberant greetings to a casual acquaintance like 'how wonderful' or 'marvellous to see you' (wouldn't have given a damn if that person had lived or died five minutes earlier or after) speak of superficiality and an addiction to hypocrisy.

Saints are made on earth but they actually live in heaven. Haven't you heard the joke? Two women met in a park. One remarked, "My husband is an angel". The other replied sombrely, "You are very lucky, mine is still alive!"

In my 60 years of observation, I have found that a spiritual teacher is really great if he or she practises some 50% of what he or she teaches. For most, it is only 10%.

In a religious institution, when titles, social standing and material riches of others become a major consideration for treatment, its integrity is compromised proportionately.

REALITY AND APPEARANCE

In 1964, I was on a Vienna-Zurich overnight express. My companions in the compartment were two rather prosaic men for the upper berths and, on the lower, an Austrian actress in her early 30s with finely chiselled features who gushed forth to make small talk with charming effect. As I said *Gute Nacht*, I saw her powdering her nose in a vanity mirror and wondered whom she was trying to impress other than her insecure self. She would have looked naturally pretty without the affirmation of obvious make-up.

As I woke up in the morning nearing Zurich, the men had left and the lady cheerily greeted *Guten Morgen*, sitting near and looking out the window. Her face was a sight! The paint on the plucked-out edge of the right brow had raised itself into an askance accent and the eyeshadow had stretched on to the right temple like a kitten's paw. The false eyelashes were slightly askew and the washed blue of her irises looked more faded in the morning light. She suddenly got up and said, "You mustn't look at me until I have done my toilet" and left for the washroom at the end of the corridor. I asked myself if a Vedantin, dismissing airily her previous evening's appearance as an illusion while trying to uphold the reality of Brahman in his mental fog, would have thought the same way of that morning's empirical reality of her looks.

Jawaharlal Nehru and John Kennedy, both endowed with good looks and sparkling intelligence, both married to beautiful women and having risen to the *apogée* of their political careers, complained that life was unfair to them. From my observation and personal experience, I know that barring some 26% of humanity (according to a United Nations report) who live in abject poverty and go hungry, life treats us generally more fairly and kindly than most of us deserve. We should count our blessings before complaining.

Some years ago, reading about the suspension of the Swiss Hans Küng from teaching Catholic theology at the Tübingen University by the Roman Curia, I remembered the saying of Mark Twain, “A man is admitted to the Church for what he believes and expelled from it for what he knows!”

Once I knew a prominent spiritual teacher who greeted visitors with exaggerated gestures of humility and yet was fond of saying what an expert he was in doing ‘ego-dectomy’ on others. One has to have an enormous ego to excise the egos of others. Endowed with many virtues, he was also a paragon of vanity. In all of us, light and shadow shimmer and hide in our nature.

PAST AND PRESENT

A knowledge of our past, our roots, is essential to understand the problems of the present, to know how our societies have been shaped, even deformed, by the institutions, philosophies, religious myths, attitudes and thinking habit inherited from the past. The evaluation of the good and bad harvest of seeds sown in the past should have a direct bearing on deciding what kind of harvest we would like to have in the future.

The relevancy of the past is to learn from its errors rather than being proud of something which is no longer valid, such as “those yon glory days of the empire” or the “wonder that was India”. Instead, we should try to make our tomorrow better than today with the help of such ideals that have helped the evolution of our civilisation.

In interpreting the mindset of the past, the mentality of the present projects itself to suit its self-interest. Those who indulge in the delirium of past greatness which is no longer there, show the decadence of their character and their unwillingness to face what is unpleasant in the present and are, at best, expressing a primitive urge for survival. Unless they are shaken from such torpid frivolity, their society will have no better future.

An individual’s character is first of all a genetic product of his or her immediate ancestors and their influence in early life. The genes themselves are shaped by the strengths and weaknesses of the society in which one grew up, either struggling to reform by personal effort or by the force of circumstances, or simply not caring and thus being swept along according to the raw instincts of survival. This lesson should never be forgotten by the present generation. An individual must decide what to be and what not to be.

Evolution is not a continuous process. Through one or two centuries of effort, civilisations burst out in different regions then declined into decay and slumber for a long time. Some civilisations die out completely, while others are reborn in different shapes. Millennia ago, in Assyria and Egypt, it became possible to see speech rather than to hear it through the invention of writing. The vision of the infinite spirit as God without form, being immanent in all whilst yet transcendental, that dawned 3,000 years ago in India, still sustains tolerance of all faiths in Hinduism.

The seeds of civilisation sown in the classical age in Greece still dominate western culture. The invention of movable printing blocks 1,100 years ago in China gave universal access to learning. Decentralisation of Church education through the Protestant reformation made the industrial revolution possible. Recognition of the common spiritual dignity (image of God) in all, gave birth to human rights and democracy.

IDEALS TO CHERISH

An open-mindedness, that is a readiness to learn what life is about, the nature of the universe, to know our mind and its deceptive ways, to separate illusion from reality, to think by facts rather than self-serving presumption, are ideals to cherish.

To be aware of one's own and society's deficiencies and to believe in the capacity to change, to take personal responsibility and never to pass on the blame to others, to have an obligation to search for evidence to support anything that is claimed to be true, are ideals to cherish.

To know that envy and avarice are corroding acids to be cleansed by self-effort to achieve what is envied and, if lacking the ability to do that, to strive in other areas of achievement; to relate one's own good to the common good, are ideals to cherish.

When the mindset that encourages the pathology that ours is the best society, the best nation of all, the only true religion or God, the ultimate leader or guru, from that moment the decline of such a presumed status sets in, even if it seems optimum as to one's preference in comparison to other options.

I would like to quote here a wise and fair saying of Pope Paul VI, "There are other ways to God than the Christian path, but for Christians it is the best way".

Repentance is not synonymous with contriteness alone but its reality consists in acts of recompense that should follow as a result.

To love one's enemy is only a psychological process of overcoming hatred and a desire for revenge. Retaliation when one is stronger than the opponent and cowardice when one is weaker, are intrinsic to nature. That being so, loving one's enemy is not to be regarded as a virtue, rather to purify one's heart of malice and resentment. In reality, you can love your enemy only when he or she lets you and, if so, the enemy is no longer an enemy.

There is nothing divine in pardoning someone who has offended you. When something goes wrong in a relationship, at least 50% of the fault lies with oneself for causing the provocation or not taking precautions, thus allowing the situation to get out of hand. Such being the case and having accepted your measure of responsibility, what is there to pardon? Self-importance lies at the base of being offended.

When weakness becomes synonymous with goodness, hypocrisy prevails. When personal opinion becomes public policy at the level of leadership, unfairness prevails.

Goodness does not come naturally but is a result of education and conscious effort, such as being honest when there is the opportunity to be dishonest, not to think negatively and not to be self-centred.

The insecure individual seeks security through group identity. Group identity means being different from other groups that do not look like them, thus creating an *us* and *them* mentality. When the *us* becomes insecure due to social anomalies such as unemployment and inflation, hating *them* serves as the demagogue's instrument to bring out the worst in ethnic or national majority groups.

The greater the ignorance of others, the more we are apprehensive of them. Fear makes us insecure, and insecurity leads to intolerance. Intolerance sickens to fanaticism and fanaticism leads to violence. Thus, fear is the mother of violence, oppression and injustice, and ignorance is their grandmother.

For society's ills we always need some scapegoat, some group to blame, while ignoring such ills are a result of the inherent deficiencies of our own culture and poor leadership, for which we are individually and collectively responsible. Instead of trying to correct them on a personal level and by leadership through improved education and policy direction, we like to create foreign devils.

When it comes to prejudice, majority opinion is not only unjust but destructive. Intelligent leadership alone can appeal to the better instincts in human nature and prevent society from harming itself.

The habitual stereotype of the ugly image that we impose upon a racial or religious minority speaks of an intrinsic weakness in our cultural and religious background. The more honest we are, the better we can come to terms with and overcome our deficiencies and the less we will need to blame minority or external enemy groups.

Distortion of the truth comes from the imperative of blind obedience to laws given in the name of God or else by superegos, rather than exercising one's free will in order to seek truth within or outside the laws which religion or political ideology have devised to maintain power over people.

SHAPING OF CONSCIOUSNESS

*“Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
Who covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?
But, after all, who knows, and who can say,
Whence it all came, and how creation happened?
The gods themselves are later than creation.
So, who knows truly whence it has arisen?”*

An unmanifest, transcendental force became the original *anu* (atom). Then, “the one became many” (*Rig Veda*). The many interacting gave birth to the universe, the immensity of which we have only come to know this century. It is the pervasiveness of this transcendental force that makes the existence of matter possible by means of energy that science has learned to measure. Its interaction in atoms, fusing and dividing, enables the cycles of existence: *purusha* through *prakriti* becoming *vishwa* or the transcendental spirit, through the primordial force, before finally becoming the universe. In the process, the spirit does not change.

The spirit in a state of embodiment through the individuality of consciousness or the principle of becoming, is called the soul. Thus, matter is shaped into a body within which is a mind, expressing itself through the 5 *pranas* and 5 senses, forming a personality.

Originally our soul (individuality of consciousness) must have been oriented to its content, the transcendental yet immanent spirit. This explains our insatiable hunger for love and truth and our longing to transcend the relativity of experience. In a state of balance, the mind experiences the spirit through the subtle emanation of spiritual qualities such as peace and harmony, unselfish love and fulfilment, purity and goodness, truth and enlightenment.

The common experience of individual consciousness is through its orientation to *antar chitta*, the inner mind or the unconscious, to sustain and protect the body and extend it to the next generation. Thus, the ego is under the impulse of primordial instincts surging from the inner mind.

The ego is then oriented to *vahir chitta* or the subconscious, the field of experience above the unconscious, where it determines its welfare through a sense of right and wrong. In this way it avoids errors caused by impulses and develops personality traits. It is here that the education of the ego takes place, in other words the shaping of consciousness.

The ego is also consciously active in its orientation to *manas*, the determining and choosing aspect of the mind which functions in relationship to the subconscious, sifting through the flood of influences from one's surroundings and checking and restraining impulses surging up from the unconscious.

At times happy and at times unhappy, sometimes active and sometimes pensive, the ego seeks repose in sleep but cannot altogether escape the experiences which swirl irrationally in dreams. Then, in deep sleep, it comes close to the spirit and remains for a while in opaque peace.

In meditation, the ego seeks out its spiritual identity when *buddhi* or soul-consciousness reflects in its awareness, moving from deeper and deeper states of peace until it attains a state of transcendental oneness. For a while it is no longer aware of itself, nor of its vehicles of mind and body, nor its surroundings. Coming out of deep meditation, the ego feels thoroughly cleansed and is at peace with itself and the rest of the world until its multiple identities emerge once again and envelop it anew.

The saga of the ego is played out in the mind and expressed in philosophy and religion, arts and literature, architecture and science. The instinct for survival and the need for protection

gave birth to religion, seeking individual and group security. Identical beliefs and customs, communicated through a common language, engender group security. In this way, the mindset of a culture is formed.

However, the ego is not really satisfied. It is happy for a while in the fulfilment of its desires but, before long, fatigue takes over due to the ups and downs of life's journey. Wisdom is developed amongst those who have tried to educate and sublimate the ego, while resignation takes over for those who have not.

The ego as a liberated soul seeks to dissolve in the infinite spirit for those who have risen above their worldly desires when the body is discarded. For those who have not done so, the ego as a bound soul is depicted in the myriad images of the afterlife, reincarnation, and meeting God in heaven or the devil in hell.

Rest in peace while you live, for life is burdensome enough without the additional preoccupation with an afterlife. If you try to sort out what is with us now and make a good job of it, the hereafter will sort itself out when it is time to go.

WE ARE WHAT WE MAKE OURSELVES TO BE

As we like to improve and renew an object we associate with, such as a house, so we should try to improve and renew a close relationship. As we need to wash and bathe, so does our character need constant purification.

More than the influence of genes, people leave the mark of their character in those they closely associate with: their strengths and weaknesses, integrity and deceit, courage and cowardice, selflessness and egotism, responsibility and carelessness, trustworthiness and unreliability.

Before departing, when death would separate one another, we should leave our mark of pleasant and warm memories of love and care, understanding and support, guidance and dependability. That is what people feel grateful about, not so much material inheritance.

As life is impermanent, as the things of the world are transitory, it is all the more important that one should make the best use of all that is good, be wholeheartedly involved in the evolution of ourselves and the society in which we live, because there is not much time to lose

by being unconcerned, careless, irresponsible and selfish, indulging in the fantasy about the unreality of the world.

Instead of worrying about the problems of life, it is better to worry about doing something useful.

Love of God is actually a love of spiritual ideals. God-realisation is a process of realising them. Fear of God is ridiculous in whatever way one might interpret it, for fear by itself is a cowering instinct and, therefore, negative. You cannot love someone you fear.

Common opinion is not necessarily common sense, just as common sense is not that common at all.

Apart from learning a vocation, education means helping to develop oneself, to tap and develop all that is best within and to make use of the best around, as per the circumstances. Education is to motivate, to inspire, to discipline and to guide. A true scholar should be eclectically erudite and polymathic in his or her interests.

What people presume to be God is what religious leaders in the past have chosen to make of him, and what they themselves choose. Whatever the vision, it has served and helped to provide a psychological prop for strength, solace and hope in moments of despair.

That humankind was made in the image of God means that we should aspire for the realisation of (and measure up to) highest spiritual ideals, as progress is possible only through identity with role models. What I find unconscionable, however, is that having botched the job, God decided to liquidate his creation *en masse* by deluge. He failed again in spite of those saved in Noah's ark from the results that we can see.

God created the universe in six days and the great work fatigued him so much that he needed to rest on the seventh day. If one observes the conditions in the world, he seems to be still resting!

When God evicted Adam and Eve from heaven with spare fig leaves, Adam turned to Eve and said, "Look what has happened to us?" Eve responded, "But, darling, we have each other". Adam said, "Oh!" and kept quiet.

Cause and effect are in a state of co-existence, maintained by the constancy of change, such as a cause leading to its effect and the effect, adapting to circumstances, transforming into a cause for a further effect.

The existence of anything is a consequence of an underlying essence. But this essence can also be eternal rather than a specific substance. The immortality of the soul pertains to this essence rather than to its form, for when the individuality disappears, so does the soul. Can it be that the idea of a spiritual essence being eternal, call it God or some equivalent, is an offshoot of attachment to the individuality of consciousness faced with the fact that it is dealing with the transitory?

LIFE IS PRECIOUS

Life is too precious and the focus of human relationship too transitory to be sullied by little grudges and pettiness.

The main reason for incompetence is self-centredness, either in a state of foggy satisfaction with oneself or being too preoccupied with self-interest and personal problems so that the mind is oblivious of others and incapable of taking the initiative. Another major reason for incompetence is that one thinks too much of oneself and is predisposed to self-delusion and, therefore, incapable of learning by clear observation and objective assessment.

Nothings hurts a nation more than a topsy-turvy view of reality, both on the spiritual and secular levels of leadership, which inevitably infiltrates into people's mentality. You can see the harm done by ideologues and those who boast about past greatness.

A person's character is measured not by how peace-loving or amiable he or she is but by their trustworthiness, integrity, moral courage, responsibility and a sense of duty.

[Speaking about a close friend] What I liked about him was his unpretentious nature and that he was not a glory-hopper. [In the ashram] He was too honest to be a court panegyrist and never performed to the galleries for self-enhancement. He was level-headed enough not to be afflicted by the peculiar disease of saving humanity, for this is a posture of arrogance and betrays a shallowness of mind. He never fell for god-incarnates and regarded them as paragons of vanity. It was distasteful to him to indulge in such glorification by fiat, since history can have a perspective only after a sufficient lapse of time and biographies are misnomers anyhow if they are bereft of the evidence of serious research and balanced scrutiny.

The bodyguards of half-truths and untruths are often employed to protect the reality of a person wishing to be seen in a better light in history.

Vanity and arrogance are twin companions of renown and power, even if they are deodorised and dressed up in presentable forms. Some swamis are like performing holy men and little else and so also some holy women

[Writing to a devoted student about to be married] I wish you and your future husband all the blessings that life can offer in the process of building two lives together, because marriage is like a career (whereas a mistress or a lover is only a hobby), in the sense that you put so much into it: commitment, loyalty, patience, understanding, forbearance of each other's deficiencies, sharing of mutual values and also interests. Above all, it is a journey into the unknown which can be successful and rewarding only if both try to be better human beings and stay spiritually intertwined in fair and adverse weather, knowing well that you love and therefore can count on each other for comfort and support. Best of luck and God bless!

As a physician knows, there is no basic order in the universe even though the physical laws of nature have an orderliness within a limited space-time dimension such as in the trajectory of a comet. However, as to the fate of humanity, the predictable co-exists with the unpredictable. The will of God or divine plan is a speculative palliative to bear adverse conditions with equanimity.

You may not know what God looks like but would surely know what he sounds like as he thunders in the scriptures.

After searching for God all my life, I found peace in the definition that he is after all a form of my devotion to spiritual ideals which I should try to improve all the time.

The visions of a culture narcotised by the fantasies of a glorious past, cannot serve a useful purpose when they are irrelevant to the present.

Hypocrisy is an inevitable companion of an exaggerated sense of tradition, family and religion. A common fault of a backward society is to be pompous, if not ridiculous, about old-fashioned ideas while not living up to them.

If you dig enough into the lives of those who thump their chests about moral majority, you are likely to find a lot of dirt. People generally are halfway decent, that is up to the way others would let them be, and that is good enough and moral enough, for me. They do not shout about virtue or morality.

One of the purposes of literature is that it serves as a catalyst to release pent up emotions and to stimulate the thinking of the reader.

A primary requirement of fiction is to make illusions convincing, just as a major role of religion is to make God credible.

If design lacks a balance between aesthetics and usefulness, it becomes a bore. The rules of engineering are functional reliability, durability and structural integrity.

According to the Indian tradition of performing arts, the ten emotions expressed are: romantic love, heroism, abhorrence, anger, merriment, terror, wonder, compassion, fatherly affection and holy peace.

The seven facets of our inner being are:

- 1 The individuality of consciousness through which the ego functions.
- 2 One's orientation to a spiritual source, expressed through an inherent hope for selfless love, truth, peace, goodness and purity of heart.
- 3 One's longing for knowledge of the nature of our being and the life around us which makes psychology and the physical sciences possible.
- 4 One's strong subjection to primordial instincts for survival and procreation.
- 5 One's tendency to dwell most of the time in the field of memory and in the subconscious, remembering, desiring, resenting and day-dreaming.
- 6 One's attempts to cope with circumstances and problems by thinking, evaluating, choosing, deciding and willing.
- 7 One's need to act in the process of survival and desire to be happy and to learn from experience, however imperfectly.

The education of the ego which functions through different levels of consciousness is essential to avoid suffering.

Instincts function through the emotions, inducing action and thereby experience, resulting in memory. It is through memory that the ego learns to educate itself by improving motivation and avoiding errors.

Memory results from attention or focus resulting from interest. Intention results from loving an ideal which leads to its realisation through action. Motivation is determined by the premise that truth gives security in a relationship resulting in trustworthiness and a gain in self-confidence by being trustworthy.

Since we do not like to suffer, nor look forward to dying, why not meanwhile regard life as precious?

GUIDELINES FOR EVALUATION

You love a person truly if you can honestly say that, given the chance to start all over again, say in another life, you would choose the same father and mother, husband or wife, son or daughter, brother or sister, *guru* or disciple, without any qualification. If the response is hesitant, that love is rather deficient.

You cannot love a person without liking him or her. Liking depends on qualities such as the goodness of heart, and an unassuming and caring nature. These two, along with the sharing of values such as integrity, trust, loyalty, constancy and responsibility, serve as a bonding agent in a loving relationship.

You can measure a loving relationship by the level of:

- **Acceptance:** Do you still reject the loved one in your heart because of some aspects of his or her past? Acceptance enables communication.
- **Communication:** Does your heart still have some dark recesses you find difficult or are still afraid to talk about? Do you speak freely to each other? Communication improves understanding.
- **Understanding:** It is important to know the depth of feeling and thinking of someone you love as an individual, in his or her own right, rather than in the light of your own involvement or expectation. Understanding helps in the sharing of values which leads to trust.
- **Trustworthiness:** Can you blindly trust each other? It is the compatibility of values that holds a relationship together. Without mutual trust, there is no love. Trust inspires respect.
- **Respect:** If there is nothing to adore, there is no love. That is what makes commitment possible. It is not idealising, but rather the appreciation of some proven qualities of character such as fidelity, purity of heart and integrity.
- Made of clay as we are, it is this spiritual aspiration that helps to make us better human beings.
- Close friends regard each other somewhat better than oneself. It is an honest feeling.
- Soul mates or spiritual companionship fulfils oneself psychologically more than loving God by means of religion.
- It is essential to speak together of difficulties in a relationship before the ego destroys it.
- Marital love is compared to wine. If based only on passion, like a cheap wine, it quickly turns to vinegar. If based on the sharing of ideals, like a good wine, it becomes richer in time.
- Never say no one is perfect. It shows your unwillingness to correct yourself.
- Never say we are all responsible. It shows your avoidance of personal responsibility.

- If you say that you accept full responsibility, immediately define what you are going to do to correct the mistake.
- Think positively. Make it a habit. This is even taught to astronauts and combat pilots.
- Focus on the positive aspects in a relationship and stop feeding the negative side.
- Never take anyone or anything for granted. All relationship needs renewal.
- Life is a two-way street. Forget about loving someone without expecting the other to learn to love. Otherwise, it is a fantasy. Loving is mutually teaching each other how to love.
- Selfless service means you serve a good cause for spiritual fulfilment on a personal level. There is nothing wrong with it.
- In anything you do, you should be fully interested in its result. Otherwise, how would you know if you have done something right or if you can do it still better?
- You need not run after someone who shuns you in order to communicate with them. Practise detachment.
- Anxiety and insecurity are due to a lack of love. A lack of love is due to an excess of selfishness.
- Identify the nature of anxiety or insecurity, determine its cause and then treat it. Get involved in doing something useful. Be interested in others.
- Self-confidence is a product of the experience of doing something right. To do anything well, you need motivation. Without loving what you wish to do, you would not learn to do it well. Interest causes intention, intention causes action, and action leads to experience. Experience strengthens will.
- When you say that you have no will power to do what you wish to, that means that you do not wish to do it strongly enough. No one has learned to swim without wetting one's feet.
- Lack of love in childhood causes resentment. Overcome resentment by detachment and understanding. If you have not received love, it is all the more imperative that you do not deny your love to those who need it.
- It is good to remember the five abnegations for self-education:
 - 1 **Selfishness** countered by unselfish deeds.
 - 2 **Self-centredness** countered by giving attention to others.
 - 3 **Self-pity** countered by taking personal responsibility.
 - 4 **Vanity** countered by remembering that there is a lot to learn and a lot to improve.
 - 5 **Pride** countered by recognising others' merits and developing a humility of spirit.

- The amorphous emotion called love is substantiated by a concern for the welfare of the loved one, helping them and showing them responsibility, loyalty, fidelity, commitment and constancy.
- Faith in God means to show a dedication and commitment to spiritual ideals. It is not emotionalism.
- Belief is a bridge that connects the known with the unknown, projecting from the premise of the known what is possible and plausible. Without trying to realise an ideal, it is only wishful thinking.
- Belief expressed as hope is meaningless if nothing is done to realise it, for you will be hoping forever. To sustain belief there has to be a measure of experience, such as the peace and inner strength found in God's love. It means to be grateful for the blessings in your life.

SELFISHNESS AND SELF-IMPORTANCE

The two metaphorical legs on which people seem to walk are selfishness and self-importance. These two human deficiencies are a natural by-product of the need to survive physically and psychologically. We all need to look after ourselves and to defend our position and self-interest. In the process, however, we forget that we survive better by being mutually considerate and supportive, caring and understanding of others.

The saying of the great Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus Christ, is most appropriate:

“If I am not for myself,

Who will be for me?

If I am only for myself,

Who am I?

If not now, when?”

Being selfish, we feel isolated because no one really likes a selfish person. It is enough to carry one's own load of selfishness, rather than having it added to by another. Selfishness and self-importance can be traced back to be the two basic causes of psychological suffering. Being disliked and isolated, we become unhappy and lacking the nourishment of love, we fall back into self-love and self-pity.

A selfish person automatically becomes irresponsible, failing to think of others and becoming used to only thinking of themselves. Responsibility is an acquired rule of conduct, so too a sense of duty, which help to restrain selfishness to some extent. Without these, the human spirit remains very primitive. Irresponsibility leads to being distrusted, while distrust leads to a lack of self-esteem which in turn leads to insecurity and unhappiness.

The ‘me-first’ syndrome and loving oneself guarantees one to be selfish as opposed to gaining self-esteem which is justified. First of all, you have to have something lovable in you in order to be able to love oneself. Loving oneself does not need any encouragement. We are all intrinsically primed to do just that.

Self-esteem is the result of self-effort in the cultivation of qualities for which one can be proud without at the same time being vain. Self-esteem without substance is mere vanity. *Vanus* means emptiness. If you have substance, you are not vain or inflated.

Of course, we should all be good to ourselves, while being careful not to forget those around us for whom we are responsible. It is a truism that those who live for others are much happier than those who live only for themselves. It is such a motivation that steers the mental focus from one’s petty problems and makes life more meaningful.

Do not fall for such sayings that you can find happiness only within or in God alone, as no real happiness can be found in this material world. Happiness is not to be found entirely from within or without. It is both: an inner state of harmony attained through a harmonious relationship with others and coming to terms with oneself in the process of managing one’s desires and trying to be a better person.

Happiness is found in an action efficiently executed with dedication and commitment. It is to be found in a loving relationship fathomlessly made deeper by unselfish devotion, in a duty fully accomplished, a responsibility well met, and an obligation well fulfilled. Happiness is not found by closing one’s eyes and getting blissed out for a while. Rather, it is to be found by trying to overcome a deficiency such as intolerance, by developing patience and understanding, countering resentment by detachment and forgiveness, and prejudice by fairness and objectivity.

The fat ego, especially when lacking the physical and mental strength to defend itself, becomes the target of others’ aggression by getting into unnecessary arguments with stronger egos. This leads to self-pity, thinking that others are to blame and that one is a victim, which only further weakens oneself.

Selfishness with irresponsibility, self-importance with ingratitude and a cowardly nature combined with laziness and hypocrisy with a character debility, all lead to an unhappy life. Selfishness is the product of the instinct of survival and is physical in nature. The ego or self-importance is an offshoot of the need to survive psychologically. It is inevitable that life has to move on these two metaphorical legs.

Foolish indeed is the teaching which tries to cut them off, destroying selfishness and pulverising the ego. If you try to do so, others will walk all over you and you will fall victim to stronger egos. The ego needs to be disciplined, educated and guided as well as psychologically purified and sublimated.

A self-reliant person becomes less selfish in this way. Being secure in an area of knowledge, there is no need to get into an argument. Being self-confident, one does not throw one's weight around. Avoiding wishful thinking and evaluating the facts, one learns to be fair and realistic.

There is great wisdom in the Talmudic saying that the essence of the *Torah* consists in treating others as one would like to be treated oneself. Do so, however, after one is sure one knows how other would like to be treated and not on your own terms alone.

CHARACTER, HONOUR, PATRIOTISM

A person of character is one who has moral principles such as integrity, trustworthiness and courage, an adequate sense of duty, responsibility and honour, and the will to act. Will without ethical values is merely obstinacy. This is a sign of lacking in character as it consists in being inconsiderate of others. It is generally the weak who are obstinate.

A civilised society is known by its sense of justice tempered by compassion; individual and collective responsibility; the way the public is treated by the authorities; the state of maintenance of public property and the respect given to it by individuals; the status of minorities and women; religious, political and cultural freedom; and a constant effort to better itself.

Passion is neither faith nor knowledge. It cannot convey understanding, only fanaticism. Infatuation is not love but rather an irrational form of self-love. Blind faith is infatuation with a self-serving belief and a self-centred emotionalism which leads at best to fatalism and, at worst, to fanaticism and violence.

The honour of a person lies in his or her being worthy of honour. When honour and vanity become synonymous in a person, he or she looks ridiculous. And, by posturing about his or her country, s/he makes the country also look ridiculous.

Patriotism should arise from hope rather than pride: hope that ideals cherished by a country may be realised. A patriot is a person who represents the virtues of his or her country rather than its ugly side: being lacking in ethics and responsibility, having the tendency to blame other countries for its problems, being pretentious about an imagined glorious past which now appears backward, and wishing to be prosperous while being lazy. A patriot should try to be a better person rather than feel good about him or herself. Samuel Johnson once said that patriotism was the last refuge of a scoundrel.

Einstein said that nationalism was the worst form of a virus that a nation can be infected with. Nationalism tries to conceal its fear and insecurity by fanatical ideas of greatness which is assaulted by imaginary devils and problems caused by foreigners. It aims to hide its inferiority complex about its culture by creating a supposed threat of corruption through foreign ideologies whether political or religious. There is also often a move to maintain racial purity.

To love a country, you do not need to beat your breast. If you love a person, you do not need to make a show of it, rather do something useful for him or her. In the same way, if you love your country, ask yourself what you are doing for its good and whether you are showing yourself as a good example.

The image of a country is revealed through its main institutions such as the character and intelligence of its parliamentarians and the executive arm from the President and Prime Minister down to the lower levels of bureaucrats. It is also revealed by the independence of its judiciary and the standards and integrity of its media. A country is respected for the values that these institutions represent and defend.

If religion does not inspire a boundless concern for human welfare, compassionate justice, personal responsibility, duty and an eternally awestruck search for truth, it is little more than superstitious emotionalism and generally ignored moral commandments.

You can force obedience through fear that your neighbours will disapprove of unbecoming conduct, for there is hardly any credence in hell fire. But you cannot force the heart by dogmas. Since religion is mainly a question of feelings and as feelings cannot be forced, they can only be inspired by love of ideals which fulfil one's emotional needs.

Being in awe of and dependent upon authority, ingrained from early childhood, are fine-tuned and transferred to an almighty deity in adulthood. This is instead of inspiring reverence for life around and learning to be self-confident, self-reliant and taking responsibility for our fate.

The point of any myth is in its usefulness to inspire the search for the unknown, to broaden the dimension of the known, and to strengthen the human spirit.

The choice of what I may do today and how I may do it as well as I can, changes our tomorrow. If we expect things to happen, life will surely continue monotonously.

UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY

Reality has two aspects: the spiritual and the material, or what can be and what is. Our inherent, if unconscious longing for selfless love and truth is countered by the actuality of our selfishness and lack of integrity. To overcome the negative by the positive, untruth by truth, hate by love, and rancour by forgiveness, is the spiritual utopia of humanity. This is so even though the law of reciprocity is found to be most effective in society. However, neither the individual nor society have managed to find peace by its means. Tit for tat excites the ego but saddens the soul.

We learn to evaluate and choose through a sense of right and wrong. Without this, the moral development of an individual remains incomplete. The sense of right and wrong is born out of a love of spiritual ideals and is more than a social *more* for mutual self-interest. It is a product of cultural influence and education of course, but it is learned mainly through one's own effort. The problem is how an individual's psyche has been marked, favourably or unfavourably, by parental influence from infancy to adolescence, in addition to a genetic predisposition.

The worst way to treat reality is to make it amorphous, such as by conjuring up the ineffability of Brahman or a divine determinism. The search for truth, to be successful, must have a well-defined set of values to experiment with in real life, in order to determine their truth. However, through such a process, when one arrives at the door of what seems to be a perfect truth, of goodness or justice for example, a new door opens up farther along, revealing a greater horizon. For the nature of truth is, essentially, infinite.

Since the early part of the twentieth century, political and socio-economic philosophers have sought to perfect their theories as to what an equitable society should look like through the means of dialectical materialism in the case of communism, or of nationalist fascism with racist

overtones. Both, however, ended up as disastrous experiments. During this same time period, social democrats have tried to soften the hard-heartedness of capitalism by making their theories more workable. However, results have only been seen in developed and productive societies.

Capitalism took into consideration a basic truth tapped by Adam Smith that only through the manipulation of greed, albeit with a minimum of regulatory restraint, a society could be made prosperous. This could be achieved by combining initiative and industry with a profit-motive and the desire for social advancement. This opened up the vast energies of the fittest to compete in a free market of enterprise. Social democrats tried to counter this by getting the state involved in competition while providing a safety net for the weaker sections of society.

Religious, or rather spiritual philosophers, tried to provide a counter-balance by their theories of commitment to the ideals of social justice through compassion, on the basis of the credo that we are our brother's and sister's keepers. This was inspired by the speculation that we are all universally related to each other through the image of God but this had to be limited for practical reasons to tribal (read national) groups.

This theory was only workable in efficiently managed, productive societies but had to be diluted for obvious reasons. Human nature, being what it is, charity without a corresponding obligation becomes liable to exploitation, with the recipient's dependence perpetuating itself. You have only to see how the social democrats are vying with each other to veer to the centre of their socio-political spectrum.

Scientists kept their faith in the hypothetical search for reality but had the integrity to discard any hypothesis that was found to be unviable and to try new ones in order to arrive at their truth. The motive power of truth is security and the reliability of its premise. Its inexorable imperative is evidence, for the nature of truth is measured by its consequence and universal applicability.

Some speculative philosophers, however, presumed that reality was beyond this world which they dismissed as illusory. This led them to remain fogbound and unproductive for centuries, being also prone to hypocrisy due to the duplicity of human nature, as with the paragons of morality in Victorian England.

Altruism is the basis of morality but it can sustain itself only through mutual helpfulness. Love can and should be selfless, but the fountain of this emotion is bound to dry up without reciprocal nourishment. The investment of love enhances future security, such as children

serving as an insurance to their parents in their old age. In prosperous societies, social security takes care of this but only to a certain extent. In times of need, the aged turn to their children and they reciprocate, even in some instances uncaringly, depending upon the kind of relationship that they had with their parents.

Reciprocity helps survival but the weak inevitably suffer at the hand of the strong. If the weak pardons an aggressor, it is out of weakness. The primary duty of the weak is to try to be strong and the primary duty of youth is to be responsible for the future and not to be dependent on others.

Friendship signifies affection, reliability, trust, solidarity and generosity, but only when it is mutual. For hardly any relationship is sustainable for long with the mutuality of self-interest. There is nothing about self-serving values to be ashamed of. For they are a corollary to surviving more agreeably, altruism, love, decency and goodness being a part of mutual fulfilment.

MYTHS

Myths, as a cornerstone of religion, provide a romantic notion about the origin of our being in an insecure world. Myths about our divine roots give us the strength to overcome the deficiencies in our human nature. Myths about an almighty God attempt to prop up our powerless existence.

Myths about a powerful God are meant to console the distressed, although fail to answer for the overwhelming misery in which the vast majority lives. Is not compassion a healing balm to help us through suffering? Does it not help to soften our hard heartedness caused by selfishness? A role model helps us to bear our burden with fortitude.

The myth of a just God motivates us to create institutions of justice and fair play, to stick by the rules and to get together to struggle against injustice, even if justice does not have its sway from heaven. The myth about justice meted out in heaven serves as an anodyne to powerless victims. However, the only way to treat crime is the visibility of law-enforcement and the swiftness of a just reprisal.

The myth of God begetting a son and having him sacrificed at the altar of humankind's sinfulness, so that by believing in him people can be saved from eternal damnation, has inspired proselytising zeal for nearly two millennia and has brought solace to down-trodden converts. But

what about the four fifths of humanity who do not believe in him? Don't they deserve salvation by following others' paths to redemption?

It is us who should save ourselves from our own errors, with or without divine inspiration or help, through self-confidence. Why inject in the first instance the notion of being damned, pushing us into the sea, only then to throw the lifeline of salvation? By tapping our spiritual resources or focusing our energies on the infinite source of power, if you like of God within, should we not try to better ourselves?

Is there an infinite source of power? Doubtless this is true. We just need to observe the universe, a raw physical force, with the earth going round the sun at 30 km a second, the sun whirling within the Milky Way at 350 km a second, and the Milky Way itself speeding outward at 600 km a second (See '*Wrinkles in Time*' by George Smoot and Keay Davidson). There is nothing divine about these facts. From the atomic dust of this universe, from the particles of energy that became dust, we have become human, and from these particles have evolved our mind to qualify the divine.

What is divine, after all? That which calms our mind, enlightens it, fulfils us emotionally, uplifts our spirit, we call divine. That which perturbs, confuses, degrades and makes us unhappy, we call un-divine. It is in the state of consciousness that the divine and un-divine are conceptualised.

Myths serve as a pep talk to reassure and give hope. It does not matter if history proves them to be true or not. The declared myth of Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*, reincarnating as an *avatara* to re-establish *dharma* or righteous rule, make a mockery of itself when the Hindu religion and culture were assaulted and degraded repeatedly by the iconoclastic waves of Muslim invasion over hundreds of years.

Why does religion claim that we have spiritual roots? The answer is very simple. We have only to observe our experience and test it on a universal platform. Our preference is for the positive.

The highest purpose of myths is to widen the dimension of the known by projecting our search into the unknown from the premises of the possibilities and plausibility of encountering new truths, thereby enriching our existence. Myths do not merely serve as palliatives to help us cope with the deficiencies of the known and hope for the best in the unknown, but quite the contrary.

The need for the supernatural cannot be dismissed out of hand. Its primary origin is the need to survive, human existence being riddled with insecurity and inadequacy. The myth of an omnipotent God, even if all evidence points to the contrary, serves this purpose. Without hope, one loses the will to struggle.

It is only the supremely self-confident person, well secure in his or her mental and spiritual moorings, who does not need a God to appeal to, in order to confront the challenges and misfortunes with courage and stoicism. The vast majority needs an omnipotent being to beseech and to compensate for one's powerlessness by drawing strength from within.

There is also the need for a social framework to be cohesive by means of a role model which represents spiritual and ethical ideals in order to be mutually responsible and accountable, as well as fulfilled emotionally as an individual.

PEACE

Peace as an overriding instrument of policy, or peace at any price, has led to more wars than it has prevented. Non-violence and passive resistance as a policy against an armed opponent are tolerated only in a democratic society, not under a totalitarian government. Mahatma Gandhi could not have survived under Hitler or Stalin, nor under Mussolini or Franco. Even the transfer of power by Britain to India in 1947, against strong opposition by the Liberal and Conservative parties led by Winston Churchill, was possible because of war fatigue and the impoverishment of Britain after the Second World War.

It is still my conviction, in spite of the evidence to the contrary displayed in the Kenyan and South African experience of gaining empowerment, that non-violent struggle against tyranny is the only civilised form of achieving justice. This is because violence brutalises the perpetrator and the heavily-armed oppressor against whom it is directed, and leads to a spiral of reprisal.

It is also my conviction that people of the cloth should keep out of politics and try to influence social issues by their moral and spiritual support, supporting universal human rights, the religious vocation being the celebration of the best in humanity and not personal salvation which should take the back seat.

It is my conviction also that what two adults do in the privacy of his or her bedroom as regards birth control is their concern alone. A priest and politician should keep out of their affairs.

I have observed with horror the statistics of over 1,000 a day back street abortions in Argentina, a country of over 37 million people, where the termination of pregnancy even due to rape or incest is illegal, and where nearly a third of patients in the maternity wards of some hospitals are victims of botched abortions. In Chile, where the laws are the same, I was told by a famous gynaecologist in Santiago, that the statistics there are even higher in that country of over 15 million people.

The hard question is whether an adult female has less right than a foetus sustained in her body before it develops its nervous system at around 12 weeks? Again, a priest and politician should keep out of it.

A MISCELLANY OF MUSINGS

- For children, continuing through adulthood, lying is first of all an exciting experience in the sense of self-inflation and feeling important before others. There are two other factors that come into play. On account of the selfish desire to hoard, a child will deny having sweets in order not to share with another child, and an adult will not fully declare his or her income tax. One also lies out of fear to save one's skin, from being punished by elders, to avoid social disapproval, to maintain one's reputation, and to keep the peace at home.
- You may have heard of lingual diarrhoea, but have you asked if this is a result of the constipation of ideas?
- I have observed that the Anglo-Saxon sense of humour has a scatological character whereas the Latins tend to be rather salacious.
- From the beginning of humankind, females have been treated as the property of males, serving as a sex object, a bearer of progeny and low-cost domestic. A female's biological role in childbearing and rearing has made her emotionally vulnerable and concerned about the security of the nest. As a result, female gumption leans more to the practical side of life than that of a male. Also, the male is less capable of forgiving a female's infidelity because of the violation of his property rights in his unconscious, whereas the female is more able to do so with relative forgiveness so long as she is sure of her partner's emotional bond to provide the security of the nest, whether she has any children or not. When she loses that security, divorce ensues.
- The lack of desire is another name for apathy or laziness. A higher desire is always necessary to rise above a lesser one in order to overcome indifference.

- Indifference can easily be confused with tolerance. When in a position to retaliate, desisting from doing so is called tolerance.
- To be a renunciate, you have to have something to renounce in the first place.
- Even if the original impression subsequently bears out more often than not, it can go hopelessly wrong.
- Instant likes and dislikes can frequently be a self-echo. We like those in whom we see our aspirations and dislike those who reflect our weaknesses.

FAITH AND REASON

There is no inherent conflict between faith and reason. Blind faith spawns ignorance. If a church requires unquestioning obedience to its injunctions and dogmas, this is to ensure its authority over its adherents, to strengthen its institutional power and group identity. But, as education becomes universal, its purpose being freedom from ignorance and allows people to think for themselves, such an attitude becomes counterproductive.

Reason is a goddess in her own right, as much as faith. In fact, they are twin goddesses, psychically related. Without the discipline of reason, faith becomes at best emotionalism and at worst superstition. Without the inspiration and commitment of faith, reason becomes a dry intellectualism at best, and an ego trip at worst.

Faith is, of course, an emotion. This is very different from emotionalism which is a sensation of the ego loving not so much the object of faith, rather the role of doing so. In its pure form, faith is devotion. It is actually a love of the ideals that constitute the object of faith, God, or whatever best represents them, along with a commitment to realise those ideals. Just as the reality of love consists in what one does for the welfare of the beloved, the truth of faith lies in the motivation for and consequent realisation of the ideals which lie behind.

Thus, the word faith can be defined as a fountain of inspiration which provides the motivation in the search for truth, leading to an infinite process of its realisation. Reason protects faith from being blind, for integrity is the basis of reason.

The value of reason is not merely in being reasonable with one another, but rather not being arbitrary and dogmatic. This begins with the empirical verification of a manifest substance, for truth is *veritas*. It is not only a responsibility but also a duty to be honest with oneself and, as a result, to be honest with others. Such a verification is easy to see.

The real search begins at this point. What causes a substance in a particular form to appear? Is there a subtle substance, E conducting MC^2 ? It has to be real, the demonstration of the components of which is the purpose of science, MC^2 leading to the understanding of E.

But what does the empirical substance, life as we know it with all the complicated facets of human character, mean to us? This search for a meaning leads to infinite possibilities enabling us to understand ourselves and others, our origins, actuality and destiny. That is the purpose of philosophy and its instrument is reason through the love of wisdom. That is why the 19th century German philosopher, Gotthold Lessing, said: “If God had two gifts in his two hands, one the ultimate truth and the other the search for truth, he would ask for the latter”.

What religion calls truth revealed by God is actually a product of such a search, the individual seeker gaining an insight into his or her existence. If this endures the test of time and has a universal bearing, it acquires the epithet of a God-given law.

Even if in some *Vedantic* teachings it is said that there are some questions which cannot be answered by the intellect, just as Christianity says that one cannot know the mind of God, there is no question under the sun that cannot be satisfactorily explained. One can only say that, as of now, I have not found an answer to it, that science has not been able to solve the problem as yet, but the future holds infinite possibilities of knowledge.

OBITER DICTA

No one really believes in anything of which one has no direct experience. Beliefs are a projection of possibilities on the basis of relevant antecedence.

Beliefs generally mean hoping for something which is to one's advantage. As figments of imagination, they serve no purpose except to be seen well by those who share similar figments.

The relevance of any belief is measured by the extent to which one is motivated to do something about it. Hoping without self-effort to realise the object of hope leads to day-dreaming and being hopelessly stagnant.

In any belief, there is an element of doubt which can be overcome by testing its plausibility through practical means. If its reality is confirmed, it is no longer called a belief but knowledge.

Knowledge gained by practical experience gives self-assurance, not belief which is only meant to motivate. Knowledge does not bar the possibility of a better adaptation in the light of a

deeper experience gained in the process. This prevents knowledge from being dogmatic, just as belief which motivates one to search for its reality keeps one free from dogmatism.

If an unverified substance is embraced as reality and the empirical is dismissed as an illusion, irresponsibility, lethargy and both material and moral backwardness stalk the land.

Resignation undermines will and personal responsibility. To consider what is available to be good enough, for want of something better, is a stepping stone to strive for something better.

From personal experience and observation, I have found that the components of human nature are a product of, approximately one third each:

- 1 **Genetic inheritance** or karmic backlog if you wish to express it that way.
- 2 **Parental influence** in early childhood, together with environmental factors later in life.
- 3 **Subsequent self-effort** to better oneself or to worsen the negative traits by indulging them.

However, whatever self-effort, genetic roots cannot be totally eradicated, even though genes are malleable, nor indeed can parental influence, especially of the mother, which is absorbed during the first two years of life.

To put it another way, we are a composite of five *karmas*. The believer in *karma* automatically presupposes previous births. *Karma* is both a consequence of unrealised actions in a preceding life, and actions done in the present which both bear a consequence in the future. Whatever tradition says, meeting the consequence of past actions with present actions shapes our destiny. To put it in an unorthodox way, we are a product of:

- 1 **Adrishta** or unseen *karma* from the past life which brought us into the world deserving our parents.
- 2 **Griha** or that of our home, mainly of our parents who influence us indelibly in early childhood.
- 3 **Samaja** or that of the society in which we are raised, influencing our adolescence mainly and partially through adulthood causing us to act.
- 4 **Swartha** or selfish actions done consciously and unconsciously.
- 5 **Purushartha** or spiritually motivated actions.

CHAPTER 19 — SIX SYSTEMS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

The primary need for any living entity, whether human or animal, is survival. Unlike animals, survival on the human level can be made more agreeable through having a meaningful purpose and a better understanding of oneself and the world, rather than merely relying on the blind force of instincts. All societies reflect the strengths and weaknesses of the philosophies which shaped them, be they religious or secular.

Indian philosophy is divided into two broad groups: orthodox (*astika*) and heterodox (*nastika*). The former accepts the authority of the *Vedas* while the latter does not. The orthodox schools are called *shad-darshana* or six systems of philosophy consisting of aphoristic teachings of their authors which have been subject to endless interpretation. The Sanskrit word of philosophy *darshana* means a visionary perspective. The systems are:

- **Nyaya** of Gotama (also spelt Gautama) meaning method or system of logic.
- **Vaisheshika** of Kanada meaning specific, being derived from *vishesha* or special.
- **Sankhya** of Kapila, meaning enumeration or discerning perception.
- **Yoga** of Patanjali, consisting of eight interrelating steps. These take the form of spiritual disciplines, with the exception of two physical practices, namely *asana* and *pranayama*.
- **Mimamsa** of Jaimini, meaning investigation or reflection.
- **Vedanta** of Badarayana Vyasa which includes his *Brahma Sutras* based on the *Upanishads*. The word *anta* means end or final part of the *Vedas*, in other words the culmination of its teachings.

The heterodox group which does not accept the authority of the *Vedas* consists of the following philosophies:

- **Charvaka**
- **Bauddha**
- **Jaina**

The *Vedas* are the earliest Indian literature that have greatly influenced the evolution of the nation's philosophies. There are two traditions: the ritualistic and the philosophical, or that of *karma* meaning performance of rituals, and *gyana*, meaning speculation into the nature of reality in terms of the cause and purpose of existence.

Knowledge can be divided into empirical and speculative in terms of the meaning of reality on an individual and broader sense, with an infinite possibility of increasing our understanding.

RELEVANCE OF IDEAS

The *Mimamsa* system created a philosophy to justify rituals while the *Vedanta* philosophy speculated about the reality behind existence. These two systems are called *Purva* or *Karma Mimamsa* and *Uttara* or *Gyana Mimamsa* respectively.

Sankhya, *Yoga*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* formulated their philosophies in accordance with life's experience and observation.

Mimamsa and *Sankhya* do not believe in God as the creator. Accepting the authority of the *Vedas* through the six systems generally means a belief in an afterlife which, in turn, means a belief in an eternal moral order determining good and evil. One's deeds in relation to this moral order set the fate of humanity in an afterlife, along with reincarnation on this earth, while at the same time explaining the inequality and vagary of justice in our current existence.

Anything that is not empirical is mere speculation, even if these philosophies take for granted the veracity of the *Vedic* teachings without much argument. However, it is the role of speculation to find new realities by projecting into the unknown but these can only honestly be called new realities when they can be verified empirically.

The question as to whether God or a creator exists is not a philosophical problem, rather what does God mean and whether there is a criterion behind creation. One does not find a criterion for the universal well-being of humanity or even animals by observation. If the criterion for a divine intelligence is posited as incomprehensible to the human mind, then this renders it meaningless or irrelevant to that human mind. In the same way, the fact that an atomic particle can pass through a wall is irrelevant to a person who cannot do the same, or viewing a carpet as a mountainous terrain for a microbe is irrelevant to a person walking over its flatness.

All six systems take refuge in the law of karma in the *Vedas* in search of a rule of moral order in the universe, making oneself the author of one's destiny and explaining the difference in intelligence and inborn aptitudes as well as the circumstances of birth and achievement. However, this does not answer why a soul has to get involved in a material body in the first place before having to go through all that hassle in order to get liberated. Neither do these philosophies recognise that a moral criterion is a result of the mind being exposed to ethical ideals developed over generations.

In *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* systems, moral laws are under the control and guidance of God who is seen as the ultimate dispenser of human fate in Judeo-Christian theology whereas in *Sankhya* and *Mimamsa* (as well as in *Bauddha* and *Jaina* philosophies) they are autonomous and have nothing to do with the will of God. In *Vedanta*, God is an immanent spirit with no will of its own, like unmanifest electricity in the atmosphere waiting to be generated by the motor of human endeavour.

PHILOSOPHY OF KARMA

As all six systems believe in the theory of *karma*, it is better to examine its pertinence although none bothers to explain it in depth but takes it for granted on the authority of the *Vedas*. The purpose of the philosophy of *karma*, far from being fatalistic, is to make one responsible both individually and collectively for one's direction in life. Bhishma, the grandfather of Arjuna, the reluctant hero of the *Mahabharata* war, says: "Personal effort is what matters above all. Belief in fate makes one dull" (Shantiparva in *Mahabharata*).

The theory of *karma* automatically presupposes a previous and after life. *Karma* is generally divided into two kinds:

- 1 **Arabdha** or *Pararabdha* or that which is already bearing fruit, such as one's circumstances of birth and inborn qualities of character and aptitudes.
- 2 **Anarabdha** or that which has yet to bear fruit. This has two further subdivisions:
 - a) **Praktana** or *Sandhita*, or the force of accumulated actions as a driving power behind an individual's instincts, both constructive and destructive, leading to the creation of new *karmas*, and
 - b) **Kriyamana**, *Agami* or *Sanchiyamana* or action performed according to one's will or desire, whether positive or negative, which is influenced by external factors, examples and teachings, and carried out voluntarily and which in turn create new *karmas* which will bear fruit later on.

In all *karmas*, it is the motivation that determines the intensity of their retribution, such as in the difference between a pre-meditated and impulsive act of violence.

With or without a supreme deity's involvement, belief in an eternal moral order which leads one to take responsibility for one's actions taken in the best light of one's understanding of that order, makes the acceptance of glaring inequality and injustice plausible and, therefore, self-effort meaningful. That is unless one is content with the ideal of doing what is appropriate whilst coping with life. In this case, if the result is not conducive to the motivation, it leads to learning from failure and finding better ways to deal with circumstances, irrespective of the theory of *karma* being real or merely speculative.

Harping on about detached or unselfish action is indicative of a disgust with the utter selfishness of human nature and an unrealistic way of looking at it. In any involvement, there is bound to be a small measure of attachment in order to create motivation and, therefore, efficiency and creativity in action. Without this, no real love or excelling in work is possible. The ideal is not to be dependent on love nor have an infantile expectation but to accept failure with equanimity, to pause for a while, learn from one's mistakes and then to re-orient one's motivation and action.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

Religion is an instrument that experiments with sentiment and faith, just as philosophy does with speculation and reasoning. Both find pertinence in finding personal and social peace, security and happiness. Unless they influence one's manner of living, they remain sterile.

Religion, rising above myths and rituals which serve as a means of group identity, provides a way of finding peace within through a unity of body, mind and spirit. Philosophy, rising above intellectual curiosity, serves as the basis of social structure and inspires civilisation, creating a system of ideals with which to motivate and guide one's life.

Life suffers when it is led by the force of blind impulses and mundane desires. The purpose of philosophy is to understand, educate and sublimate them. The bottom line of Indian philosophy is given in the four observations of the Buddha. However, an excessive preoccupation with suffering and getting out of the cycle of rebirth is a rather negative way of looking at life. Instead, one can make life agreeably creative, making unselfish love the fountain of happiness thus invalidating the rejection of the world by the neurosis of *nirvana* or the eternal bliss syndrome.

The Buddha observes that:

- 1 There is suffering,
- 2 There are causes for suffering,
- 3 That suffering can be overcome, and
- 4 That there is a way to overcome it.

These are very valid observations and his eightfold path to overcome suffering is superb. It consists in:

- 1 Positive thinking
- 2 A truthful life
- 3 Constructive action or work
- 4 Right conduct in relationship to others
- 5 A sane disposition or attitude to life
- 6 Intelligent effort for self-improvement and general welfare
- 7 Honest livelihood in which no deceit, cruelty or violence is involved, and
- 8 Effective meditation to realise one's spiritual aspiration.

A moral sense is the highest goal of religion, a moral life its greatest practice, and moral criterion is the best definition of spirituality. Prayer, meditation and devotional practices are only the

means to its realisation, as per the following definition, if spirituality is not to be a cloud-cuckoo inanity or a holy-holy theatre. It consists of:

- 1 **Purity of heart** or that which is free from the ill effects of hate, malice, resentment, vengeance, avarice, wickedness and imputing bad motives to others.
- 2 **Unselfish love**, spontaneous compassion and kindness to, and consideration of, others through matching deeds.
- 3 **Integrity of feeling** or depth of sentiment rather than sentimentalism, of thinking, of expression through speech and action, and honesty to oneself and to others.
- 4 **Sublimation of passions** and worldly desires.
- 5 **Sublimation of the ego** or humility of spirit and genuine modesty, cutting out any theatrical gesture.

QUEST FOR TRUTH

Any search begins with a hypothetical acceptance of the existence of the object of search. The role of speculation is to make use of imagination and reasoning in order to find new truths. The foundation of speculation is a prior experience of an unsatisfactory reality, and the main instruments are inspiration and reasoning so as not to be carried away by day-dreaming. The *Nyaya*, *Vaisheshika* and *Sankhya* (as also the *Charvaka*, *Bauddha* and *Jaina*) schools accept this position. The *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta* systems do not regard human experience and reasoning to be adequate instruments to give correct answers as to whether there is a supreme ruler or creator. Instead, they rely on the *Vedas*, in the same manner as Jewish and Islamic religions rely on the testimonies of their prophets and the Christians rely on Jesus and the Apostles.

Apart from the *Charvaka* school, the six systems of philosophy (including *Bauddha* and *Jaina*) accept fate or *bhagya* as a collective consequence of one's actions in past lives which can be overcome in the present one if self-effort is strong enough. The world is regarded as a stage in which humans act out a morality play. The purpose is to overcome suffering and to be happy, happiness being the innate nature of the spirit embodied in an inadequate vehicle while living in an imperfect world.

Freedom of the soul from material bondage is the spiritual goal common to all six systems, and so too in the *Bauddha* and *Jaina* philosophies. The aim is to merge with the transcendental spirit according to *Vedanta* or attain an eternal existence in a state of freedom according to *Sankhya* philosophy.

This freedom is attained through knowledge of the various truths of existence in deep meditation, while awakening one's identity with the infinite spirit or God, the pattern of meditation varying according to the different paths. It is also necessary to lead a life of self-discipline and self-improvement as set out, for example, by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras*.

The practice of the five *yamas* or disciplines of non-violence, truthfulness, chastity, the removal of material greed and covetousness is also required. So too, the observance of the five *niyamas* or cultivation of good habits of physical and mental cleanliness, contentment, fortitude, self-improvement through study, and dedication to God or spiritual ideals.

Without prolonged meditation on one's relatedness to a higher power, there can be no strength in practice. Without profound meditation on some sacred teachings, there can be no understanding of the problems of life and the capacity to overcome them. This is a lifelong objective. Its difficulty is noted in the Sanskrit saying, "I know what is right but have little inclination to follow it, and I know what is wrong but am too weak to desist from it". This is echoed in the saying of Jesus Christ, "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak".

Repression of the baser instincts is nowhere indicated in any of the Indian philosophies, but rather their education and sublimation. This is achieved in the Yoga system by meditation on and the practice of their opposite counterparts. Life is regarded as transitory and, therefore, pleasure and pain, success and failure, are to be taken in one's stride. However, one should not lose sight of higher values through pleasure and success, nor be overwhelmed by pain and failure.

The earth is regarded in the *Vishnu Purana* as a mere speck of existence amongst fourteen planes of more or less evolved variety, comprising one unit among thousands of millions of others, each alternately coming into form (*shrishti*) in the course of billions of years before being withdrawn into the void (*pralaya*). Each is said to be presided over by a supreme deity, Brahma (not Brahman), one day of whose life is said to be equal to 432 million years of us earthlings. The Hindus love zeros! This overwhelming vision of the vastness of the universe and the insignificance of a human being may have contributed to the otherworldliness or disregard for material things in India's philosophical systems with the exception of the *Charvakas*.

With the exception of *Vedanta* philosophy, the remaining six are dated by some scholars as belonging to the period after Buddha and a couple of centuries before Christ. Excluding Buddhists, Indians generally have been remarkably negligent in record-keeping and thus lacked a

sense of history and the capacity to come to grips with reality and be inventive and innovative. *Vedanta* and *Yoga* are the most important systems that have shaped subsequent Indian thought and, to a much less extent, *Sankhya*. The remaining three had hardly any impact.

NYAYA PHILOSOPHY

Gotama or Gautama, the founder of the *Nyaya* school, laid down a procedure for arriving at knowledge of oneself and the universe, the ultimate aim of which he said was one's liberation from the bondage of suffering. This procedure has four parts:

- 1 Epistemology of the process and grounds of knowledge.
- 2 Knowledge of the physical universe.
- 3 Knowledge of the individual soul and the means of its liberation.
- 4 Knowledge of God.

The means of knowledge are:

- 1 Perception (*pratyaksha*)
- 2 Inference (*anumana*)
- 3 Comparison (*upamana*) and
- 4 Testimony (*shabda*)

The objects of knowledge to be studied and understood are divided into 12 parts:

- 1 Soul (*atma*)
- 2 Body (*sharira*)
- 3 Five senses (*indriyas*)
- 4 What these senses relate to (*artha*)
- 5 Process of cognition (*buddhi*)
- 6 Mind as the seat of perception (*manas*)
- 7 Activity (*pravritti*), both positive and negative, in its three forms – mental, vocal and physical
- 8 Problems of the mind (*dosha* – literally defect)
- 9 Rebirth caused by good and bad actions (*punarjanma*)
- 10 Experience of emotions caused by mental and physical activity (*phala*)
- 11 Suffering (*dukkha*) and
- 12 Liberation from suffering (*apavarga*)

Gautama (not to be confused with Gautama the Buddha) bases his philosophy on logical realism up to some extent and lays down a systematic way of looking at things. The nature of the mind is explored. Realism implies that objects exist independently of the mind, although ideas and feelings relative to them rise and fall variously according to different minds perceiving them. The *Nyaya* philosophy emphasises a critical perception and logical reflection rather than faith, scriptural testimony or intuition, while acknowledging the need for testimony. The highest goal is the liberation of the soul through the knowledge of reality, both in its material and spiritual aspects. However, Gautama dangles reality, like his peers, in whatever form that might appear to the individual's perception.

The first step is to differentiate between valid and invalid knowledge, such as the sun being stationary and the earth going around it which goes against our perception of what occurs. So, also, with other valid and invalid modes of perception, such as the apprehension of a rope appearing as a snake, giving rise to fear, whereas on closer scrutiny its true nature is found. In a more complex way, it is one's prejudice that distorts the perception of the qualities of man, leading to invalid opinions. However, an impartial observation of his actions enables us to identify his character, leading to valid knowledge.

Perception is both ordinary (*laukika*) and extraordinary (*alaukika*), such as using the senses to perceive an object, or being aware of a transcendental force in a state of meditation while imbuing the mind with profound peace. *Nyaya* (as also *Vaisheshika*) speaks of the six organs of knowledge, namely the five senses (external) and the mind (internal). The mind perceives through cognition, desire, aversion, will and the experience of pleasure and pain. It is atomic (subtle) in nature and not made of gross elements unlike the sense organs, but works as a co-ordinating instrument for every type of perception.

Alaukika perception is of three kinds. The first is the universal bearing of the characterisation of masculine and feminine traits, or an individual's desire to be treated fairly, irrespective of social background and habit. The second is an overall perception in combination with various qualities of an object, such as the hardness of a burning piece of sandalwood, its heat, fragrance, colour and the pleasant sensation its smoke creates in a room, a perception that is only possible through an approximation with what is pleasant, as opposed to an unpleasant feeling generated by a foul-smelling smoke from a piece of dung. The third is the intuitive

perception of reality in a highly evolved mind which has a limitless range as to the meaning of life, God, truth and love. This intuitive vision is a result of a prolonged, logical search during deep thinking.

OTHER MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE

Inference (*anumana*) relates plausible knowledge to already-existing knowledge. For example, one's mortality, the fact that one day one will surely die, is related to the knowledge that all living beings die. Relating cause and effect both ways is the role of *anumana*. *Nyaya* philosophy sets down an elaborate discipline of logic to arrive at a valid inference.

After perception and inference, the third way of deriving knowledge is by comparison (*upamana*) based on a given description of an object or quality in relation to another object or quality. One who has never seen a violoncello will have no problem imagining what it may look like by being told that it is a very large violin which has a deeper sound. The knowledge of the quality of love is arrived at by comparing the dimension of understanding, support, confidence and deeds that love elicits between two persons.

The fourth basis of knowledge is the acceptance of a testimony (*shabda*, meaning spoken word) of someone who has a greater access to knowledge. A student of chemistry, for example, accepts the testimony of a scientist that two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, form water, even though the atoms are invisible to the eye. On the basis of such a testimony, the student investigates more about the nature of water, such as whether it is heavy or light, hard or soft and what minerals it may contain, etc.

Testimony has three premises:

- 1 **Trust**, such as the word of an engineer who has built the room in which one is sitting, that the roof will not collapse over one's head.
- 2 **Understanding well** what is written in a scripture.
- 3 **Applying a teaching in one's life** to test whether it is valid for oneself or not.

Nyaya philosophy divides testimony into two kinds:

- 1 **Laukika** or secular, such as a witness in a court of law.
- 2 **Vaidika** or divinely-inspired statements in the *Vedas* in which all six systems rather naively put their trust while emphasising the importance of their correct

interpretation. This also occurs amongst the followers of the Old and New Testaments.

The *Nyaya* system views the universe as comprising four elements, namely earth, water, fire and air, along with three subtle substances – *akasha* or ether, *kala* or time, and *dik* or space, which are speculated to be infinite and eternal. Souls are said to be of a non-material nature and deathless. In a state of embodiment, they are subject to desire, will, likes and dislikes, pleasure and pain. Souls are infinite in number and can be found everywhere. They differ from the body and mind although they give life to both. In a disembodied state, a soul has no consciousness but regains consciousness through reincarnation when it once again becomes subject to desire and feeling. When the soul attains its final release, it becomes a pure substance.

The purpose of life is the liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth and death. This is achieved through the knowledge of the various truths which are relevant to life as enumerated in the scriptures. This knowledge is acquired by study (*shravana*, literally hearing), reasoning (*manana*) and deep meditation (*nididhyasana*). The *Nyaya Sutras* of Gautama refers to God as the original cause of the creation, sustenance and dissolution of the universe. Its attitude is theistic in the sense that all events are related to the will of God who is full of compassion, but it fails to explain why he does not alleviate the suffering caused by those who do not follow his moral order in spite of being merciful, nor his unwillingness to control their actions thus lending them to follow that moral code.

According to this philosophy, creation is said to be made from eternally-existing material atoms in subtle, invisible form, in conjunction with space, time, ether, minds in the form of atomic particles of intelligence, and souls. God is the prime ruler of everything and it is he who sets down the order of interaction of the constituent elements in the universe, including souls in their state of involution. The subsequent liberation of souls is said to be achieved by following the divinely inspired teachings of the *Vedas* and striving for perfection by carrying out appropriate *karmas* while going through a series of reincarnation. Such is the bottom line of *Nyaya* philosophy.

VAISHESHIKA PHILOSOPHY

The goal of *Vaisheshika* philosophy, the liberation of the soul or inner consciousness from bondage, is the same as that of the *Nyaya* system. As with the founders of the other systems, little is known about Kanada other than that he was an ascetic and was also called Uluka. His work, the *Vaisheshika Sutras* is divided into ten chapters, each consisting of two sections. This particular system of philosophy has served as a source of rumination by some other Indian philosophers.

In this system, epistemology or the grounds and process whereby one arrives at knowledge, is divided into seven categories:

- 1 Substance (*dravya*)
- 2 Quality (*guna*)
- 3 Action (*karma*)
- 4 Generality (*samanya*)
- 5 Particularity (*vishesha*)
- 6 Inherence (*samavaya*)
- 7 Absence of being (*abhava*)

Substance is said to be the foundation of all knowledge. Similar to the *Nyaya* system, this is divided into nine elements:

- 1 Earth
- 2 Water
- 3 Fire
- 4 Air
- 5 Ether
- 6 Time
- 7 Space
- 8 Soul
- 9 Mind

The first five are physical, each characterised by one or more particular quality perceived by one or more of the five senses, including ether which is said to be perceived by sound when it interacts with air.

The first four elements have two aspects: gross and subtle. The gross aspect consists of visible parts in contrast to the subtle which consists of indivisible atoms. The former is said to be

destructible and, therefore, temporary, while the latter is eternal. Ether has no parts and therefore is said only to have the atomic, eternal aspect. Space and time are similar and are perceived by inference, such as here and there, near and far, past, present and future. All three are all-pervasive, unlike earth, water, fire and air.

The soul is said to be an eternal substance and is the basis of consciousness, giving light to the mind. It is of two kinds: individual (*jivatma*) and supreme (*paramatma*). The former is numerous while the latter is sole and transcendental. The former goes through a series of reincarnations, while the latter does not, being the creator of the universe. Unlike the Vedantic view, however, they are not said to be of the same essence. Both are all pervasive, the former being mentally perceived in various states of consciousness while the latter is inferred as the original cause of everything. The mind is said to be composed of subtle atomic particles and, therefore, cannot be perceived through the senses. Its existence is therefore inferred through the internal phenomenon of feeling, thinking and willing, and the co-ordination of what is perceived externally in the shape of ideas.

In this system, the universe is created by the supreme soul from atomic particles of the nine elements listed above. As the atoms have no independent consciousness, their interaction and direction are subject to the ultimate intelligence, *paramatma* or God, from which evolve the laws of the universe and of action and reaction.

CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVES

Perception is qualitative and all elemental relativities are therefore subject to subjective experience in order to be known. Thus, Kanada, categorises them into 24 kinds. Hence, the name *vaisheshika* or categorical imperatives. These are:

- 1 Colour (*rupa*)
- 2 Taste (*rasa*)
- 3 Smell (*gandha*)
- 4 Touch (*sparsha*)
- 5 Sound (*shabda*)
- 6 Number (*sankhya*)
- 7 Magnitude (*parimana*)
- 8 Distinctness (*prithaktwa*)
- 9 Conjunction (*samyoga*)

- 10 Disjunction (*vibhaga*)
- 11 Remoteness (*paratwa*)
- 12 Nearness (*aparatwa*)
- 13 Intelligence (*buddhi*)
- 14 Pleasure (*sukha*)
- 15 Pain (*duhkha*)
- 16 Desire (*ichchha*)
- 17 Aversion (*dwesha*)
- 18 Effort (*prayatna*)
- 19 Heaviness (*gurutwa*)
- 20 Fluidity (*dravatwa*)
- 21 Affection (*Sneha*)
- 22 Tendency (*samskara*)
- 23 Merit (*dharma*)
- 24 Demerit (*adharma*)

These qualities can again be subdivided *ad infinitum*, such as different kinds of meritorious and unmeritorious actions propelled by various tendencies, or sounds grouped according to the musical instruments playing them, or consonants and vowels as in *mantra*.

Actions denote movement and movement occurs in relationship. These take place in the following manner. Innate instincts surge from the unconscious into the subconscious which then form as desires according to how they are expressed through external stimuli, before being focused through conscious volition or will, which then leads to physical deeds. In this way, one can observe the flow of instincts and desires. Through meditation on higher ideals one can reorient them into more positive actions leading to reformation of character.

Vaisheshika philosophy searches for the universal nature of human experience within the distinctive forms of individual perception and action. All parts, while being different, are interrelated. The running thread of the whole unites the particularities of existence, such as the universal need for love and protection which permeates all kinds of character, both good and bad.

Whereas all the elemental forms of substance, including the qualities of nature, constitute the nature of being, Kanada recognises the reality of non-being or void and goes through a process of differentiating the nature of existence and non-existence.

In spite of the atomic constitution of the universe, its coming into form and dissolution into the formless, this philosophy upholds an eternal moral order dispensed by a supreme being

and does not recognise the blind force of nature. The universe is said to be ultimately governed by the transcendental wisdom of this Godhead, allowing for sufficient autonomy of self-expression of the countless souls who inhabit it both in positive and negative ways, thus determining the fate of humanity.

The *Vaisheshika* systems offers a theistic view of life, believing in a supreme intelligence while, at the same time, taking into account a realistic perception of the elemental universe from which human nature is born and in which the individual soul is trapped. The idea of God is basically transcendental and separate from individual souls and also the atomic universe which they inhabit, although all is said to be dependent upon and governed by this supreme, unknowable being.

SANKHYA PHILOSOPHY

The *Sankhya* system may be characterised as dualistic realism. The eternal plurality of souls may have given it the name *sankhya* (numbers). It has deep roots in the *Vedas* from which its founder, Kapila, drew his inspiration. However, he did not uphold the existence of God, probably like the Buddha thinking that it cannot be proved. A larger version of the *Sankhya Sutras* is believed to have been lost, so too the commentaries of Kapila's two succeeding disciples. Several expositions of his teachings have nonetheless been written. Like the *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika*, *Sankhya* philosophy seeks to liberate the individual soul from bondage and consequent suffering. Through a process of metaphysical enumeration (*sankhya*), it seeks to know the two ultimate realities, namely spirit and matter or *purusha* and *prakriti* which exist eternally independent of each other although the original interaction of *purusha* on *prakriti* led to the manifestation of *prakriti* or matter.

Purusha as the transcendental spirit resides as pure consciousness in the body, mind and senses, which are products of *prakriti* whilst being different from them. *Prakriti* is the ultimate material force and cause of the universe which is constantly changing, unlike the unchanging, perceiving, luminous spirit.

The three main qualities (*gunas*) governing the primal force of nature are positive or cohesive vibration of upliftment and balance (*sattwa*), positive/negative or cohesive/de-cohesive dynamism or movement of energy (*rajas*), and negative or decaying, static heaviness of inertia

(*tamas*). Like three intertwining cords of a rope, these forces exist in everything in creation, one being more vibrant or dominant than another, with each interacting to various degrees on each other. All material objects are said to be products of these *gunas*, and life passes through their experience in a state of happiness and fulfilment, by the sensation of pleasure and pain, and the lassitude of indifference and avoidance of responsibility.

Cause and effect cannot be separated. It is evident that a manifest effect such as oil being already inherent in the seed, its cause, are both cause and effect, being identical. As such, the material universe cannot have a spiritual cause, but has a subtle source of unmanifest matter (slumbering *prakriti*) when the three *gunas* existed in a state of fusion. The starting point of the universe was in the conjunction of the transcendental spirit and the original, unmanifest atom (matter) which erupted in the formation of the universe.

COMPOSITION OF THE UNIVERSE

This conjunction gave birth to *mahat* (literally, the great) or cosmic mind as the driving force behind *prakriti*, awakening it from its primordial slumber. However, *mahat* is not *purusha*. As numerous souls (*purushas*) pulsated in the universe in a state of embodiment, *mahat* reflected in individual consciousness as *buddhi* or intellect. Out of *buddhi* arose the sense of being or the ego (*ahamkara*), echoing Descartes “By beginning to think, I became aware of being something”. Thus, surged the feelings (*abhimana*) of what I am and what is mine.

The pulsation of the ‘I’ created the five organs of knowledge (*gyana-indriyas*), the five organs of action (*karma-indriyas*), and the mind (*manas*). From *ahamkara* also arose the five subtle potentialities of perception (*tanmatras*), namely: sound, touch, colour, taste and smell, and their five elemental counterparts, namely: ether, air, fire, water and earth (*pancha-bhutas*). Thus, along with, and arising from, *prakriti* the seven principles of *mahat* (including *buddhi*), *ahamkara* and five *tanmatras*, their five material counterparts (*pancha-bhutas*), the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action, and the mind constitute the components of the entire creation.

It must be remembered that nearly 2,500 years ago, there were no scientific instruments to measure the particles in creation. Kapila, along with other sages of his time, could only observe externally and internally the nature of existence. Together with Kanada, Kapila’s perception and categorisation of the attributes seem to be remarkable, each doing so in his own

way. There was no knowledge of psychology at that time as we now understand the mind to function, but a deep insight is reflected in human nature in such great works as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas* and the *Panchatantra*.

However, *purusha* is different and unaffected by all manifestations of *prakriti* although ultimately giving light and life to them and thereby enabling them to function. As in *Vedantin* philosophy, it is the eternal, infinite spirit within the multiplicity of pure consciousness behind such vehicles as the ego, mind and senses, which all form part of the elemental universe. Happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain, as well as success and failure, do not affect the soul but belong to the mind and the body. Freedom from suffering lies in one's capacity to distinguish the *purusha* within one's material vehicle by means of deep meditation and purification of the ego.

Classical *Sankhya* discounts one, central and supreme *purusha* as God who creates and guides the universe. According to *Sankhya*, *purusha* co-existed with the slumbering *prakriti* before their interaction as neither one nor many. The dualistic realism of *Sankhya* arises from the observation of the play of material consciousness in one's mind, propelled by the ego, and also the elemental consciousness in nature, whilst trying to maintain awareness of an unaffected and distinct spiritual consciousness as a reality (*purusha*) within oneself.

Prakriti and *purusha* are both eternal principles, each being an ultimate cause in itself. In its multiple facets, *prakriti* is constantly changing, whereas *purusha* in its infinite plurality is unchanging and unaffected as pure consciousness. The goal of life is to rise above the bondage of *prakriti* by being aware of the pure, eternally free consciousness of *purusha*.

YOGA PHILOSOPHY

The Yoga system of Patanjali is widely known both in the West and India, more than any other system. The difference is that in Western countries, the physical aspect has a greater appeal through the practice of *asana* and *pranayama*. In India, a yogi is regarded to be one who has achieved mastery over his or her mind as well as the body but, above all, whose goal is a spiritual union (*yoga*) with *Ishwara* or God through deep meditation.

In a way, Patanjali can be regarded as the ancient father of psychology because in no other earlier literature of its kind, and not until 2,000 years later in the West, has the nature of the

mind being probed as deeply as in his *Yoga Sutras*. The primary objective of his system is mind control. As in *Sankhya*, the inner self is a free spirit within the gross body with a mind that veils its pure consciousness. Unlike Kapila, Patanjali speaks of the union of the individual soul with God as the highest goal of life.

The understanding of the nature of the mind is closely related to the Sankhya system. *Chitta* or the inner mind is composed of the three primordial qualities of nature: *sattwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. One's mental state depends on the preponderance of one or other of these qualities. When *tamas* prevails, there is lethargy, depression, dullness and negativity. When *rajas* predominates, there is restlessness, passion, ambition and exaggerated desires. When *sattwa* is uppermost, one is focused, harmonious, clear headed and positively disposed.

The five causes of mental suffering, namely: ignorance, egoism, desire, aversion and fear, are described and the process by which one can eradicate them through meditation is given. The nature of right and wrong perception is differentiated, as are the states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep, while the conscious, subconscious and unconscious layers of the mind are described.

Patanjali was probably the first teacher after Buddha and before Christ who taught that the best way to overcome negative emotions such as hatred was to meditate on its counterpart, love, applying positive antidotes. He called this *pratipaksha-bhavana* or counterposing of attitude. It is not enough to know what one should not do. It is important to get out of the circle of 'don'ts' and apply oneself to doing what one should do. It is only in this way that the negative 'muscles' of the mind, as it were, can be atrophied while using the unrepressed mental energies in the practice of spiritual ideals, the positive 'muscles' being strengthened in consequence.

Patanjali did not call his system a philosophy although later on it was incorporated into the *shad-darshana* or six systems of philosophy. It was called *ashtanga-yoga* or eightfold yoga (*ashta* meaning eight, *anga* limb). This was a way of life to attain spiritual union (*yoga*). To him, *darshana* or philosophy did not mean a mental vision as the term implies, or an intellectual pursuit as is generally the case with western philosophers, Spinoza being an exception. Rather, philosophy was the pursuit of self-knowledge with the goal of self-perfection.

FOUNDATION OF YOGA

Being a spiritual philosopher, Patanjali, laid down five ethical disciplines (*yamas*) and five rules to observe (*niyamas*) as a starting point because he recognised that moral principles constituted the foundation of any useful or decent way of living. The practice of self-restraint is basic to civilised behaviour. So, he emphasised restraining:

- 1 Aggressive impulses (*ahimsa*) thus enabling an understanding, if not loving relationship with one another, and refraining from any form of injury.
- 2 Untruth thereby promoting security through integrity and peace of mind (*satya*).
- 3 Lustful urges enabling a deepening of sentiment and the creation of a spiritual sense of belonging (*brahmacharya*).
- 4 Selfishness in order to uphold fairness and ethics, avoiding depriving others of their belongings (*asteya*).
- 5 Covetousness, showing that one has no right to desire what one is unwilling to work for or does not have the talent to achieve (*aparigraha*).

These he called the basic *yamas*.

The *niyamas* are rules:

- 1 To keep the body and mind clean (*saucha*) because cleanliness, both physical and mental are indeed next to godliness.
- 2 To practise the ideal of being content having done one's duty and accepting a situation that cannot be changed after trying one's best to change it (*santosha*).
- 3 To strengthen the body and develop will power through physical and mental endurance (*tapas*).
- 4 To educate oneself by study and learning the lessons of life through experience (*swadhyaya*).
- 5 To dedicate oneself to God or be committed to spiritual ideals (*Ishwara-pranidhana*).

After having taken care of the moral high ground, Patanjali asks us to prepare the body for the practice of meditation. This is done through steadiness of posture (*asana*) and the use of Hatha Yoga to keep the body healthy and free from tension, although he does not explicitly say so. To prepare the mind for meditation, he asks us to practise *pranayama* because the state of mind and breath are so closely related. By regulating the breath, one learns to steady the mind as an agitated mind makes the breath irregular.

Then follow the three steps of meditation:

- 1 By withdrawing the senses from external objects and the mind from their memory through methods of absorption (*pratyahara*).
- 2 By concentrating on a fixed point, externally or internally or both, such as by gazing at a symbol with the eyes open and then visualising it mentally with the eyes closed (*dharana*).
- 3 By contemplating the ideal of one's spiritual unity with the help of a phrase or mantra such as 'I am one with thee' or 'Soham' (*dhyana*).

When *chitta* or the inner mind is pacified through meditative exercises and a level of *sattwa* or harmonious equilibrium is attained, one is prepared for *samadhi* or the experience of elevated degrees of oneness with God. The highest of these is *nirvikalpa* or being in a state of total freedom from all lower levels of consciousness, including the temporary dissolution of 'I'.

To Patanjali, God is the supreme being, eternal and all-pervasive, omnipotent and omniscient. Devotion to God, in whatever way one might seek him, is the highest means of meditation, allowing the heart to be purified and the intellect enlightened. By recognising the deep-seated need for protection from a higher power and providing a methodical system of practising moral ideals and exercises of meditation, Patanjali make his *ashtanga-yoga* more appealing and applicable in daily life than the *Sankhya* and some of the other systems. That, indeed, is the reason for his popularity.

MIMAMSA PHILOSOPHY

Of the six schools, Jaimini's *Mimamsa* is probably the least known, except possibly in the Brahminical or priestly circles. Its purpose was to justify Vedic rituals and explain their significance through a philosophy of life which revolved around religious duties. Curiously enough, Jaimini does not see the need for a central Godhead from which creation is supposed to have originated. Matter is believed to be eternal, although constantly undergoing transformation, and subject to a spontaneous and autonomous moral order. So too are the infinite number of souls passing through a series of reincarnations according to their desires which are translated into *karmas* (actions).

Ritualistic and ethical duties, as enjoined by the *Vedas*, are to be observed not so much for heavenly rewards but for the sake of duty (*dharma*). There are many planes of existence consisting of higher or heavenly ones and also lower ones. According to some interpreters, Vedic

deities propitiated during the rituals are not persons but, rather, states of consciousness to which one tries to relate through the performance of rites in order to purify the mind and free it from suffering. Rituals also encourage a greater self-control and a sense of obligation to society, upholding a collective moral order as directed by the Vedic scriptures.

In the absence of God, spiritual ideals take the form of *devas* or luminous beings which inhabit the heavens where liberated souls migrate eventually after death and do not have to reincarnate again in the lower planes such as the earth. Following Jaimini's *Mimamsa Sutra*s, other commentators developed their own theories, such as the soul having no active consciousness but only a state of embodiment, with liberation being an ultimate form of oblivion or transcendence of consciousness rather than an experience of heavenly bliss.

The word *mimamsa* means the solution of a philosophical problem through reflection, although not too much evidence of this is found in this system. It is divided into three sections: the theory of knowledge, metaphysics, ethics and theology.

Knowledge is of two kinds: perceptual and non-perceptual. An object is perceived through the senses and the mind interprets its nature in the light of relevant past understanding. Non-perceptual knowledge depends on faith and what one wants to believe in in order to motivate life. Such knowledge derives from the testimony of the *Vedas*, although Jaimini does this selectively.

There are two types of testimony: personal and impersonal. Life basically functions on personal faith in relationship, because no one can be peaceful by being suspicious of everything. Similarly, faith in scriptural injunction is a product of its application in everyday life whose beneficial effects one can experience psychologically through a sense of inner strength and peace.

Mimamsa metaphysics believes in the immortality of the soul and in an eternally existing universe composed of numerous worlds, both heavenly and hellish, swarming with concomitant denizens. Although the performance of duty for duty's sake is emphasised, one cannot escape feeling that the rituals are a means to upward mobility through transmigration and the avoidance of suffering, in addition to their socially cohesive benefit. But rituals alone are not enough. One also needs to obey the guidelines of the law of *karma*.

Thus, *Mimamsa* metaphysics is both pluralistic and realistic, while not being entirely empirical due to its belief in what the *Vedas* say in comforting the human heart by offering

heavenly hopes. It recognises the potential energy trapped in *bhuta* (matter) and *shabda* (the sound of words) and the possibility of untapping this energy through burning the sacred fire and chanting mantras which form part of the Vedic rites, creating a psychic effect and aiding the soul's transmigration.

Theology in *Mimamsa* is interrelated with ethics. *Dharma* is considered to be both a religion in terms of performing rituals enjoined by the *Vedas* as well as leading a righteous life following the criteria which sets out what is right and what is wrong. The highest good consists in the control of passions and refraining from harming others. Some interpreters contend that the heavenly deities are not worshipped, rather the moral and spiritual *shakti* (force) attributed to them is made a part of one's life through the psychic power of rites. The main good that came out of *Mimamsa* philosophy is that since people love ceremonies, they ought to know more about what the rites stand for.

VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY

As the name implies, *Vedanta* philosophy is derived from the concluding part (*anta*, end) of the *Vedas*, consisting of the *Upanishads* which were written a thousand years before Christ. Badarayana (also known as Krishna Dwaipayana) Vyasa interpreted their teachings in his *Brahma Sutras*. He was said to have lived during that time and was also author of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Of all the six systems, and even more than the *Ashtanga* or *Raja Yoga* of Patanjali, *Vedanta* has influenced Indian thinking most pervasively even though this is not known to the average person. It not only laid down the basis of *Gyana Yoga* but also provided the inspiration for *Bhakti Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. Apart from Vyasa, its chief interpreters were Shankara and Ramanuja.

No other philosophy in the history of civilisation has expressed such a positive, unifying spirit of reconciliation. The tolerant attitude of Hinduism to other people's faiths is directly due to Vedantic teachings. Through the philosophy of *monism*, making God a transcendental and all-pervasive spirit rather than a singular, all-important and only valid deity as occurs in *monotheism*, took away the inherent sting of intolerance and iconoclasm.

As with most religions and philosophies, *Vedanta* has been understood in different ways according to its interpreters who transplanted their own ideas over the course of the centuries.

This even led negatively and hypocritically to suggesting that the world was an illusion. However, its immensely broad vision can be perceived in the following way.

VISION OF GOD

- 1 Brahman or the supreme being is not a deity or substance that can be confined with a conceptual image, even by the term ‘one alone’. Rather, it is an all-pervasive spiritual presence while still remaining transcendental. In this way, polytheistic differences were submerged by the philosophy that what people call God is but a spiritual vision of the individual’s devotion, sacred love and holy aspiration. The differences come into being in the process of trying to relate to this transcendental spirit. This is why it is said in the *Bhagavad Gita* that God comes to the devotee in the form in which one seeks him. The *Kenu Upanishad* points out that none of the elemental forces of nature (*devas*) have powers of their own but are only able to function due to the supreme spirit.
- 2 Even though God cannot be defined, the human spirit can relate to the indefinable through spiritual ideals which are qualified by such adjectives as: a) infinite – constantly expanding; b) eternal – long lasting; c) universal – being relevant to all regardless of religious or cultural background; and d) transcendental – allowing one to better realise these ideals.
- 3 The mantra *Ishavasyam idam sarvam* in the *Isha Upanishad*, meaning that the infinite spirit pervades all that moves and that does not move, created for the first time in human consciousness a sense of the sanctity for all forms of life, not only humans and not restricted to one’s own tribes. This sanctity extended respect to animals and nature as well. These ideals have only recently penetrated into western consciousness through such institutions as the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (even though they are eaten to satisfy greed) and ecological responsibility.
- 4 In the three monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God is seen as a transcendental creator. In Vedanta philosophy, Brahman or the supreme spirit, while being transcendental, is immanent in the universe. This can be defined in its five levels of manifestation as:
 - a) *Anu-spandana* (vibration of atom or energy) by which matter is held together or disintegrates.
 - b) Cyclic rhythm (*ritu*) of life in the birth of a plant, its growth as a tree, its seeding process, decay and death, carrying on the cycle through the seed.
 - c) Instinctive mind (*chitta*) in the animal plane and also the neutral laws of nature (*prakriti*) making evolution possible.
 - d) Discerning intelligence (*viveka*) on the human level, creating a sense of right and wrong and the karmic laws of cause and effect.
 - e) Intuitive soul-consciousness (*atma-gyana*) which ultimately dawns in a highly evolved mind in a state such as superconsciousness (*samadhi*).

RECONCILIATION AND UNITY

The vision of God's immanence shaped some basic philosophical positions in the following way:

- 1 *Vedanta* sought to reconcile religious antagonism by the epigraphic comparison of various faiths in search of God as vapours rising from the ocean and becoming clouds which, on contact with mountains, formed as streams which joined together as rivers flowing through different lands and acquiring their characteristics but ultimately merging into the same ocean from whence they had sprung. Thus, in spite of religious differences and cultural habits, humanity's origin and destiny are the same. Another simile given is of a multi-hued garland of flowers, each being different and yet holistically united by a common, running thread of the universal spirit.
- 2 Echoing the epigraph in the *Old Testament*, of a human being created in the image of God, *Vedanta* speaks of the identity of the transcendental spirit as the essence of the individual soul, in the same way that a spark of light is of the same essence as the sun or a drop of water identical in nature to the ocean. In this way, all members of humanity share a common spiritual heritage and should therefore try to rise above religious dogmatism and extend the law "Thou shalt not kill" beyond their tribal and national groups and live without warfare.
- 3 The light of God is equally luminous within every soul but expresses itself in different degrees of brightness or dullness due to the opacity or impurity of the *koshas* (sheaths), such as the various layers of the mind that cover it. Uncovering that light within and expressing it through truth and love in relationship is the goal of us all.
- 4 No one should be coerced into following a dictated path of faith, but each should grow according to the law of one's personal evolution and according to personal inspiration, choice and effort. Just as there are many paths leading to the summit of a mountain, the role of teachers is to point out these paths and provide the expertise of their own experience, but it is the individual who has to do the climbing in order to arrive at the peak of God-realisation.
- 5 The ultimate goal is the merger of the individual soul with the infinite spirit. This means the dissolution of individual consciousness but not the disappearance of its essence. This is illustrated by the simile of a doll made of salt which wanted to know where it came from and, upon entering the ocean, began to swim in search of its identity. The more it swam, the more its form diminished, until finally disappearing. However, its essence remained and became one with its origin, the ocean.

CONCLUSION

Such is the unique spirit of *Vedanta*. Its mystical vision of God is given in the words *sat-chit-ananda*, reflecting our longing for the reality of truth (*sat*), its comprehension (*chit*) and

realisation as supreme love (*Ananda*). Thus, God is ultimately transcendental truth and supreme love.

Vedanta does not emphasise *maya* or the illusory nature of the universe, although some commentators do. Instead, it speaks of how the mind can fool itself through its craving and attachment, forgetting the inner reality behind appearances, such as happiness being in the possession of material wealth and the experience of sensual pleasure, rather than to be found within oneself and in relationship with others. Happiness is, indeed, found through a state of harmony acquired through the fulfilment of spiritual ideals. Understanding *maya* also means that the solid reality of the earth should not obscure the subtle reality of the infinite invisible atoms which give it form.

The theory of *maya* is intimately related to the temporary nature of life's experiences. No infatuation or sorrow lasts forever. The more the mind conjures up its fantasies in a relationship, the greater the disillusionment. Not to be carried away by wishful thinking and passions to the flesh is heir, not to suffer unnecessarily on account of injured vanity, not to be swayed by pride and prejudice, but to be balanced in success and failure, is what the theory of *maya* tries to teach.

The running thread of unity, *advaita* or non-duality, is emphasised in the recognition of bickering selfishness in human nature and its aggression which causes so much division and suffering. *Advaita* does not intend to create a dull uniformity of perception or disregard the fact that it is the interaction within multiplicity that makes progress possible. To understand *Vedanta*, one should seek the overall picture that emerges out of the various *Upanishads* rather than get bogged down in Shankara's *Advaita Vedanta*.

The relevance of any philosophy is to make the journey through life more agreeable, meaningful, creative, enlightening and fulfilling. The urge to look up to an ideal, a role model, is fundamental to evolution, and the vision of God is the highest point of reference by which we can trace our upward identity. This has been expressed in a surpassing, universal spirit in the *Vedanta* system. In spite of its various unprovable speculations portraying the peculiarities of human imagination and psychological need, the basic projections of its teachings were astonishingly far-sighted and are as valid today, or even more so, than they were some three thousand years ago.

CHAPTER TWENTY — THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH

The following were compiled from various sources, many from class talks of Swami Shivapremananda Ji, founder-president of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY

- All the preoccupation about God is actually preoccupation about one's own security.
- Life is what you make of it, worthwhile or a mess!
- It is not so much important when one is born or when one dies, but what is done in-between.
- Remembrance aside, grieve not for one who is dead, but care for those who are left behind if they need you.
- To live in the hearts of those who love you is to continue living after you are gone.
- What further immortality may one seek after one is gone but in deeds well done, in a life well lived, and in relationships well nourished?
- Humanity is the greatest of all virtues. It is a mixture of the understanding of, and unselfish feelings for others, combined with matching deeds.
- Devotion to truth is the highest form of adoration of God.
- The best thing you can say to yourself before going to sleep is: I have not been unjust, I have not hurt others, I have not lied, I have done my duty.
- The moment you think or say that you love someone so much, immediately ask yourself what you are doing for him or her.
- If you are not capable of doing something you wish to do, then do something you can.

- The longest journey is the journey inward.
- A wise man said: I have never met a person who has given me so much trouble as myself.
- It is not so much that in the height of achievement or in the accompanying benefit you succeed, but in doing the best in whatever you are capable of doing.
- Nothing speaks better than action, especially when it is done before being urged.
- Without a sense of humour, life becomes heavier than it ought to be. The best form is to laugh at oneself and the worst, to laugh at the expense of others.
- Selfishness, arrogance, vanity, deviousness and intolerance are the five most effective means of making yourself detested.
- The more you try to pretend, the less you are likely to get away with it.
- Learn to count your blessings before complaining about what you lack.
- The merit of the sense of individuality is not to impose it on others.
- Everything new under the sun gives us new life. Do not lose the sense of curiosity.
- You start ageing psychologically when you begin to lose the sense of curiosity and become indifferent.
- Indifference, unless the situation demands it, is not only unjust to others but deepens your ignorance.
- There must be a willing effort in order to achieve anything, and also the willingness to innovate, to improvise and initiate new moves and take calculated risks.
- If you let the first opportunity go by, the second one may be too late or inadequate. By making use of several small opportunities, you may achieve more than by waiting for a big one to come along. Get hold of the first opportunity that comes your way.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH II – DO THE BEST YOU CAN

The following were compiled from various sources, many from class talks of Swami Shivapremananda Ji, president and rector of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Uruguay in Montevideo.

- Frustration is the mother of evolution, but only when you can do something about it.
- Nine times out of ten, we are disappointed in life because we do not ask enough of ourselves.
- Do the best you can with what you have rather than indulging in pious intentions under better circumstances.

- You can project only what you have been and what you are doing or cultivating now. By wishful thinking, nothing is achieved.
- Never ask others what you are not willing to do yourself. Standing on dignity makes a poor footing. Dignity is seen in how you conduct yourself in the lowliest of work.
- A good scavenger looks more dignified in doing his work naturally rather than trying to be dignified.
- You cannot see eye to eye with someone if you are looking down on him or her.
- Ultimately, it is human qualities that make the difference between success and failure as a human being.
- There are three skills: technical, managerial and conceptual. In the last two, human qualities play a great role.
- The identification of talent, the kindling of motivation and improvement of relationships in the institutions of society constitute a major part in governing, in order to achieve productive effort.
- To understand human nature is to work with human beings, not just files, blueprints and statistics.
- Human beings are full of likes and dislikes and secret resentments. It is very difficult to be objective. But, without objectivity, you cannot be fair to others.
- The most successful people are not those who burn the midnight oil themselves, but those who are able to guide and inspire others to work with a team spirit and a team effort. One who is able to arouse enthusiasm is the one headed for leadership.
- If you do not have integrity, you can never guide or inspire others. A teacher without integrity will not attract respect, rather contempt.
- Honesty, once pawned, is never redeemed. Once you start cutting corners, you will find that all corners are cuttable.
- Once we assuage our conscience by calling something a necessary evil, it begins to look more and more necessary and less and less evil.
- Only by being true to yourself can you be true to others.
- It is easy to be base, casual, frivolous, cynical and critical. Carping and quibbling are not a substitution for action.
- As long as your conduct is straight, you need not bother about being observed and talked about.
- Even little courtesies go a long way, like being first to smile and first to greet.
- Humanity means not to sacrifice a person for the sake of a purpose.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH III - UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION

The following were compiled from various sources, many from class talks of Swami Shivapremananda Ji, founder-president of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Chile in Santiago.

- Avoid pettiness. Accommodation with, and understanding of, others are essential in day-to-day relationships. Insisting on having your way all the time shows your insecurity.
- One of the deepest urges in human nature is to be appreciated. Give full credit for work well done and do so promptly and spontaneously. Be slow to blame.
- Nothings kills incentive in a person so much as criticism from a superior.
- As long as a person acts in good faith, he or she should be assured of your support in team work.
- A character roll is as much a picture of the person writing it as the person about whom it is written.
- Only consistency and decisiveness inspire respect and command obedience, not vacillation.
- One's word of honour is a good thing to cherish, but all important matters should be transacted in writing.
- Anger is the wind that blows out the lamp of the mind. Avoid displays of emotion. State the facts and let them speak for themselves.
- When you are right, you can afford to keep your temper. When you are wrong, you cannot afford to lose it.
- No gem can be polished without friction. So too, no virtue can shine without scrubbing the ego.
- A person conscious of his or her virtue, is not virtuous but self-righteous.
- Wounds inflicted by careless words are hard to heal. Do not be rash in what you say under the pressure of circumstances.
- Lamenting over something which has gone from one's hands does no good to yourself nor anyone else. Resolve not to make the same mistake again.
- Avoid paralysis by analysis. Sometimes there may not even be analysis, just pure paralysis.
- What you can do tomorrow, do it today. What you can do today, do it now!
- The difficulty is not so much in the choice between good and evil, but in the choice between good and good. So also, one has sometimes to choose between evil and evil, but the decision

has to be taken. Once having made the choice between the lesser of the two evils, one should endeavour to get out of it.

- A Sanskrit saying: It takes a thorn to take out a thorn, but then throw both thorns away.
- Trust others but keep your eyes open.
- To manage well, you have to delegate responsibility, but do not keep your hands too far away from the controls.
- Direction should be with the least show of authority. Firmness should be concealed in politeness.
- To be important is a deep human urge. If it is not catered to with supporting qualities deserving of that epithet, you will only make yourself ridiculous!
- A good teacher teaches without the least show of teaching.
- In team-work, remember that you have to work with the material available, not with what you would like to have. Your credit lies in getting the best out of the situation.
- A successful person is the one who can lay a firm character-foundation with the brickbats that others throw at him or her.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH IV - RIGHT AND WRONG

The following were compiled from various sources, many from class talks of Swami

Shivapremananda Ji, founder-president of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

- One who is sure of oneself lets others be themselves. Trying to impose your will on others is a sign of insecurity.
- Listen attentively and respectfully. Encourage those who work with you to speak out, but make sure that they know what they are talking about and who is in charge.
- You should have the capacity to assimilate new information and apply such knowledge with the best possible judgment of the circumstances.
- Be always firm and fair, but also tactful and polite. There is a way to disagree without giving offence or being self-important.
- Do not seclude yourself in an ivory tower. Get out and communicate with those with whom you work and live.
- The most difficult relationship is with your superiors, especially when some of them happen to be less intelligent than you. The qualities they are entitled to are loyalty and co-operation.

Do not forget that they have risen to where they are because of such qualities as ambition and will which you do not have in the same measure.

- Having one's nose rubbed in the mud helps to dispel illusions and allows one to see things with a correct perspective, so long as the person who does so cares for you and is sincere.
- One who thinks that he or she already knows what you are saying is generally incapable of focusing attention and is filled with a sense of self-importance. This holds the person to a low level of understanding.
- It is your work that will speak for itself, not the certificates apropos that you display.
- You can never be happy in a place of work without certain norms of working relationships. This means tact and courtesy, patience and consideration, reliability and understanding.
- It is not enough to do what is needed of you but it is necessary that your colleague understands what is expected of him or her. Mutual trust, responsibility and accountability are required.
- Personal example speaks more convincingly than any amount of exhortation.
- You may not be able to do all that you consider to be right but, as long as you are not doing what is wrong, you are on the right path.
- Rigidity will harm even if you are in the right. Principles are right, not because they are principles, but because they help those involved, including yourself, to be in the right.
- Let not right and wrong confuse you. Anyone who is not a hypocrite can know the difference. You have only to ask yourself: is this action only for myself or does it include the good of others? Does it unite or divide? Does it heal or harm? Is it authentic or deceitful? Will it hold true when the exigencies of the circumstances have gone? Will it speak for itself or have I to do a lot explaining? Am I sincere or devious? After the heat of the moment, will I be ashamed of my deed?
- Ultimately, it is the purity of conscience, inspiring steadfast resolve and action, the purity of heart in being free from resentment and a desire for vengeance, as well as the humility of spirit to learn and strive, that count as blessings in life.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH V - CHINESE PROVERBS

The following sayings were compiled by the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Uruguay in Montevideo.

- The higher type of person seeks all that he or she desires from within. The lower type seeks all that is desired from others.

- Honouring one's debts is the highest principle of honour, not only in monetary dealings but also in relation to the various debts one take upon oneself at various stages of life, such as to one's parents or to those who have been helpful along the way. Thus, honour is inseparably bound with duty.
- If the heart does not break now and then, how would you know that it is there? Hearts break and mend again just as dawn sows the evening and twilight sows the morning.
- Great happiness and great unhappiness are one.
- You cannot have something without giving. That would be unworthy.
- What is life but foolish desires and imperfect choices?
- Worldly passions are the thieves of life.

MISCELLANY

- The past is never dead. It is not even past (*Faulkner*).
- The separation between past, present and future has only the meaning of an illusion (*Einstein*).
- Man finds an image of himself in the questions he poses and shows himself more truthfully by the profundity of his questions than by his answers (*Andre Malraux*).
- The history of his soul (in *Confessions* by Rousseau) which he promised us becomes, without his having known it, the legend or myth of his soul (*Marcel Raymond*).
- There is always a path where no-one thought that there was one (*Euripides*).
- Man is but an insignificant dot in the infinite (*Pascal*).
- Man is but a servant of customs, prejudices, self-interest and fanaticism. The bane of man is the illusion that he has the certainty of knowledge (*Montaigne*).
- Truth is a dream, unless my dream is true (*Santayana*).
- What a wee little part of a man's life is in his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself (*Mark Twain*).
- Call no man happy until he is dead (*Solon*).
- Faith in immortality was born of the greed of unsatisfied people who make unwise use of the time that nature has allotted us. For the wise man, one life is sufficient. A stupid man would not know what to do with eternity (*Epicurus*).
- Man is but a foundling in the cosmos, abandoned by the forces that created him. Unparented, unassisted and undirected by the omniscient and benevolent authority, he must fend for himself and, with the aid of his limited intelligence, find his way about in an indifferent universe (*Carl Becker*).

- Only rarely have I paused amid the trivia of living which, making up so much of our existence, and out of which come the setbacks, triumphs, sorrows and the rare moments of happiness, to consider how puny and unimportant we all are, how puny in fact is our planet. Even the solar system, of which the earth is a negligible part, is but a dot in the infinite space of the universe. Who can say, then, that the purpose of the universe, if it has a purpose, has been to create man? Who can ever say that there are not millions of other planets on which there is some kind of human life, perhaps much further advanced than ours? (*William Shirer*)

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH VI - RELIGION AND SIN

The following were compiled from various sources by the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Chile in Santiago, including some from the class-talks of Swami Shivapremananda Ji.

RELIGION AND SIN

- From the Judeo-Christian point of view, sin is not of a moral but of a religious nature, defined biblically in terms not of behaviour but of an existential quality, in the sense of a relationship with God.
- From the yogic point of view, sin is an error, a deviation from the spiritual path, not from a contractual commandment of a deity. It is we who punish ourselves through our errors, as well as being able to save ourselves from them with the help of the spiritual content of our being.
- The Bible is a sacred text, but its prohibitions against riches or public prayers, for example, do not apply directly as exhortations. However, to brand human beings, to snatch away their legal standing, to oppress them with inquisitorial laws, does not reflect a Christian calling.
- In the West, morals are understood to be social norms to serve as ligaments of the body politic and the borders of life. They are shaped by the interaction of human necessities and, thus, have a behavioural connotation.
- From the yogic point of view, morals are a direct projection of spiritual ideals that flow from our soul, in recognition of each other's soul, and mean much more than social norms, even if they have a behavioural imperative.
- The Bible is not a bulwark against changing values, but rather a reservoir of inspired human experience from religiously heroic ages, the resource amid change for an ultimate and saving reference, the genesis, in fact, of our changeability.

FEELINGS

- Feelings are not just emotions that come from inside. They are reactions that one chooses to have, even though they may appear to be spontaneous.
- One feels that things or people make one unhappy, but this is not accurate. One makes oneself unhappy because of the thoughts one has about people and things.
- Since feelings come from thoughts, if one understands and controls one's thoughts, then one is capable of understanding and controlling one's feelings. Feelings are controlled by working on the thoughts that precede them.
- The following epitaph is from the tomb of Emperor Hadrian:

*My little soul,
Charming wanderer,
Guest and companion
Of my body,
You are leaving now,
And your games with me
And my friends are over.*

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH VII - JEWISH QUOTATIONS

The following sayings were adapted by the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires from Leo Reston's 'A Treasury of Jewish Quotations', with a few from the class-talks of Swami Shivapremananda Ji.

- God saw that heaven and earth were jealous of each other. So, he created man out of the earth and his soul out of heaven.
- Do not be too sure of yourself until the day you die.
- Reason serves only in a society which recognises the rights of all.
- Passion is a friend of prejudice, not reason.

- Passion for truth guarantees dogmatism.
- Passion for God guarantees bigotry.
- To accept a tradition without examining it with intelligence and judgment is like the blind following others blindly.
- No one is as ugly as the person who is conceited.
- When a friend says that the mother and daughter look like sisters, the mother beams but you should look at the face of the daughter.
- It is true that when an old man marries a young woman, he becomes young, but it is also likely that the young woman quickly becomes old.
- At the age of five, the child is the master of the parents, at the age of 10 their follower, at 15 their rival, and at 20 their friend or foe, depending on how he or she has been raised or treated.
- People deserve the kind of leaders they have. Parents deserve the kind of children they have.
- You can tell the nature of a person by how he or she treats children or subordinates.
- It is easy to fool yourself, somewhat difficult to fool your superiors, and most difficult to fool your subordinates.
- A basic requirement of a close friendship is, when a doubt arises, to clear it as soon as possible through a sincere and humble dialogue. If such a dialogue is not feasible due to pride or fear on either side, the friendship is not deep enough but circumstantial.
- If you keep insisting too long that you are right, you are wrong.
- The greatest teaching is to teach how to think.
- The greatest help is to teach how to help oneself.
- The first step to knowledge is to know that you know very little.
- The first virtue is to know that you are not good enough.
- The second step to knowledge is, after acquiring it, to apply it.
- The second step to virtue is, while practising it, not to show it.

The following sayings are adapted from 'The Book of Abraham' by Mark Halter:

- Where there is light, there is shadow. Light can be compared to the soul and shadow to the body.
- From the righteous we learn to do good. From the unrighteous, we learn to turn away from evil.
- He who wishes to be wise must listen to everyone.

- He who wants to be wise must learn something from everyone, for one becomes wise with the help of examples and instructions received from others.
- The *Kabbalah* makes the divine human, whereas for the Hassid, it is the human that is divine.
- The Hassid is saddened by the purity of joy, and he rejoices in the purity of sorrow.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH VIII – UNIVERSAL IDEALS

The following were compiled from various sources by the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Uruguay in Montevideo.

- The fault does not lie in our astrological sign but within ourselves, and the remedy is in our hands - *Indian saying*.
- Men are moulded in the furnace of responsibility, and on the anvil of self-reliance - *Percival Spear*.
- In thought, faith; in word, wisdom; in deed, courage; in life, service – *Inscription on the Jaipur pillar in New Delhi*.
- Social justice cannot be attained by violence. Violence kills what it intends to create. Society should assure man of his seven basic rights: 1) to life, 2) to security, 3) to work, 4) to a home, 5) to health, 6) to education, and 7) to religious freedom – *John Paul II*.
- Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. Expenditure rises to meet income. Action expands to fill the void created by human failure – *C N Parkinson*.
- Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though chequered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much, nor suffer much, because they live in the great twilight that neither knows victory nor defeat – *Theodor Roosevelt*.
- It is not the ministry of culture that you should worry about, but the culture of the minister – *Anonymous*.
- An unjust world raises the question of morality and, in turn, religion. Belief in the goodness of human nature and the projection of mankind's noblest qualities form the basis of religion. God is a unique personal creative energy. Conscience makes Christians. The source of that spark of conscience is God – *Hans Kueng*.
- Although primitive instincts and emotions are the basis of religion, faith actually stems from the sophisticated reasoning process related to a supreme moral and causal agency – *R Green*.
- It is useless for sheep to pass resolutions in favour of vegetarianism when the wolf has a different opinion – *Dean Inge*.

- An appeaser is someone who believes that if you throw enough steak to a tiger, the tiger will become a vegetarian – *Heywood Brown*.
- People will ignore an old man sitting on a park bench, but stare intently at a painter's portrait of an old man sitting on a park bench – *Anonymous*.

ADAM AND EVE AND SIN

The following interpretation was adapted from a class-talk by Swami Shivapremanandaji in Montevideo, Uruguay.

Original sin was committed by Adam when his individual soul breathed in by God became bored with a state of blissful union with the creator. Adam's ego-consciousness felt the need of a companion other than God. So, he asked God for Eve. God obliged him by creating Eve out of Adam's rib.

Eve became a symbol of Adam's mind. His consciousness separated from God-consciousness. He was not content being one with God. He needed duality within himself to enjoy life apart from God.

The serpent is a symbol of temptation, a necessary stimulant to knowledge because the mind needs a stimulus to think. Thus, the serpent tempted Adam to eat the apple. God was not too happy with what was happening.

As long as Adam's will was one with God's, he was not affected by the fruits of his actions because he had no mind of his own and there was no Eve. With a mind of his own and with Eve around, the apple became the symbol of carnal knowledge.

Adam ate the apple and became responsible for his actions. God was fed up and expelled both Adam and Eve from heaven with spare fig leaves. Adam turned to Eve and said, "Look what has happened to us!" Eve replied, "But darling, we have each other". Adam kept quiet and kept his thoughts to himself.

The Christian church made the carnal act the original sin and became obsessed with it. The original sin ought to be the rise of Adam's ego, separating him from God-consciousness. Therefore, the word for religion is *re-ligare*, to re-tie.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH IX

The following sayings were compiled by the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Chile in Santiago from class-talks by Swami Shivapremanandaji.

COMPANIONSHIP OF SOUL

From the autobiography of the late President of Egypt, Anwar Sadat

- One must seek the companionship of that inner entity, one's spiritual self, the source of hope, strength, creativity, security and of life itself. For only through its help can the dark shadows of the mind, its suffering and its uncertainty, be cleared.
- Nothing is more important than self-knowledge. Your first duty is to face yourself and to recognise the source of what troubles you. Then you have to deal with these troubles through faith in your higher self, in your spiritual values.
- Only when you know what you want can you get rid of what you do not want.
- There are always solutions to everything if only you would try hard and long enough to find them.
- Love of life can only be derived from the love of something positive. Love of the superficial not only leads to shallowness but also indicates a lack of love in one's own life.

SELF-REVELATION

From the 'Eighth Sin' by Stefan Kanfer

- Not only are two people in love one person, but one person in love becomes two people.
- Not only the mouth but the eyes can stammer. It is something a portrait painter can reproduce with a canny series of lines between the forehead and the neck, the eyes sometimes lying to the nose or the chin at war with the mouth.
- Women reveal themselves with their eyes and men with their mouths, particularly in the jaw set, through years of denial or indulgence.
- The face is a calendar and medical chart. Look at the nose to see how health has been. The eye's white reflects the nights, the margin around the eyes, the days. Examine the hair to see the current state of health, skin-tone to find out the future, and the mouth to see how things go from day to day.
- Girls with deep brown suntans will have skins like a rhinoceros' hide one day.
- There are silences inside silences, just the way that there are rooms inside houses and wardrobes inside rooms, trunks inside wardrobes and boxes inside trunks. When you next

come to the last silence, watch out because inside that silence there is the biggest silence of all, because it is God. (*This paragraph from the Kabbala was used by Swamiji during meditation*).

HUMAN RIGHTS

From a speech by Patricia Derian, former US Assistant Secretary of State

There are three basic categories of rights:

- The right of the integrity of the person, the right to be free from cruel and inhuman punishment, including physical and mental abuse to squeeze out confession under extreme pain. (A political prisoner of Stalin said later that if they beat you hard enough, you will be ready to admit that you are the King of England). It also includes the right to be free from the invasion of the home without a legal warrant, and from the denial of a fair trial.
- The right to economic and social justice, the right to work for food and shelter, and the right to education and health care.
- The right to enjoy civil and political liberties, such as the freedom of expression, including through the media, of assembly, of the practice of religion and the freedom to participate in government through a free electoral process. All rights should have individual and collective responsibility.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH X - CONSCIENCE AND HUMAN NATURE

- Ultimately a highly complex sentiment, having its first origin in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellowmen, ruled by reason, self-interest and by deep religious feelings, confirmed by instruction and habit, all combined, constitute our moral sense or conscience – *Charles Darwin, 'The Descent of Man', 1871.*
- Behavioural geneticists say that the heritability of the cluster of traits they call conscientiousness is between 30% and 40%. In other words, about one third of the differences amongst people can be traced to their genes. But that still leave two thirds traceable to the environment – *Robert Wright, 'The Moral Animal', 1994.*
- Darwin himself saw his moral tuning as beginning early under the guidance of his kin. He observed “I doubt, indeed, whether humanity is a natural or innate quality” – *Ibid.*
- Childhood lies are not just a phase of delinquency we pass through smoothly, but the first in a series of test runs for self-serving dishonesty – *Ibid.*

- Integrity in word and deed is the backbone of character and loyal adherence to veracity its most prominent characteristic. Character is power in a much higher sense than knowledge is power. Men whose acts are at direct variance with their words, command no respect and what they say has but little weight – *Samuel Smiles, 'Self-Help', 1859.*
- The character of parents is constantly repeated in their children: the acts of affection, discipline, industry and self-control, which they daily exemplify and live and act – *Ibid.*
- In centuries to come, Communism is likely to be viewed by compilers of dictionaries much as we view alchemy today. In defence of alchemy, much of the beginnings of modern science may have originated with the alchemists and with those determined to prove that they were charlatans or witch doctors. The century-long struggle to deal with the idea of Communism has given idealists, romantics and pragmatists an opportunity to address the issues of liberty and equality in modern society, but at a great human cost – *William Luers, 'Newsweek', 26 June 1989.*
- All the waffling about equality is at best an exercise in naivety and, at worst, a power grab by astute politicians. The ratio of leadership, a combination of intelligence, will, ambition and the ability to get the best out of others, being only one in ten or even less, society can only try to provide the equality of opportunity to filter out the incapable but require adequate compensation for their labour to have a fair standard of living – *Swami Shivapremanandaji, 'Reflections IV', 1999.*
- A society's retardation is guaranteed if equal status and material reward to all its members, if that is at all possible, are sustained for a long time – *Ibid.*
- Perhaps only a malignant end can follow the systematic belief that all communities are one community, and that all truth is one truth, that all experience is compatible with all other, that total knowledge is possible, that all that is potential can exist as actual. Note: Gurus, think of it! - *Robert Oppenheimer, 'Dark Sun' by Richard Rhodes, 1990.*

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH XI - HONESTY, THE BASIS OF ALL QUEST

- The liberal Buddhist attitude is: it is proper to doubt and to be uncertain. Do not act upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumours. When you know for yourself that certain things are unwholesome and wrong, abandon them. When you know for yourself that certain things are wholesome and good, accept them.
- Buddhism places the greatest value on human beings who alone amongst sentient beings can achieve the supreme state of Buddhahood. Each human has within him or herself the potential to realise the truth through his or her own will and endeavour and in turn to help others to realise it also – *Aung San Suu Kyi, Freedom from Fear, 1991.*

- Scientific knowledge is always tentative and always being refined. The history of science shows a progression of theories embraced for a time, only to be overturned or adjusted when contradicted by observation – *George Smoot, 'Wrinkles of Time', 1994.*
- Something in the evolution of the universe caused matter to condense, to form stars and planets and, ultimately, life. This includes not only life on earth but the possibility approaching 100% that there is life on other planets as well, including some within our own Milky Way – *Ibid.*
- Scholars who have devoted their life either to editing original texts or to the careful interpretation of sacred books are more inclined, after having disinterred from a heap of rubbish some solitary fragments of pure gold, to exhibit these treasures only, than to display all the refuse from which they have had to extract them.
- True love does not ignore all faults and failings. On the contrary, it scans them keenly in order to be able to understand, to explain and, thus, to excuse them. To watch, in the sacred books of the East, the dawn of the religious consciousness of man, must always remain one of the most inspiring and hallowing sights in the whole history of the world.
- What we want here, as everywhere else, is the truth and the whole truth. And, if the whole truth must be told, it is that, however radiant the dawn of religious thought, it is not without its dark clouds, its chilling colds, its noxious vapours – *F Max Mueller, 'The Sacred Books of the East' Vol I, 1900.*
- Our view of man obviously depends on our view of God. The Age of Reason exalted humankind but still admitted God as a sort of supreme philosopher-king who ultimately presided over the glories achieved by reason and science. The humanist nineteenth century voted him out. It increasingly saw reason and science irreconcilably opposed to religion, which would fade away. Secular humanism stubbornly insisted that morality need not be based on the supernatural. The ultimate irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that secularism has not led to humanism. Goethe points out the moral: “Only he deserves his life and his freedom who conquers them anew every day” – *Henry Grunwald, 'Time', 30 March 1992.*
- The large majority of the so-called happy marriages are simply habit marriages – *Anonymous.*
- The church recognises the limitations of men and helps them to surmount their mental obstacles by faith. The besetting horror of mental limitation becomes the beatific calm of spiritual consolation – *Anonymous.*
- If the church, any church, went too deeply into the realities of what it professes, it will surely undermine itself – *Swami Shivapremanandaji*⁷

⁷ The above quotations were sent in by the students of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH XII - HEALTH AND HATRED

- There is always a direct relationship between mental and physical health. Unless a person has a reason to live for other than himself, he will surely die, first mentally, then emotionally, then physically.
- To recover physically involves regaining the ability to get up in the morning. To recover spiritually requires restoring the will and desire to do so.
- Defeat is never fatal unless you give up.
- When you go through defeat, you are able to put your weaknesses in perspective and develop an immune system to deal with them in the future.
- No one can recover spiritually from a major loss without the help of others.
- Spiritual recovery is hastened by overcoming the sense of isolation, by recognising the fact that your family, friends and supporters still stand with you, and by putting the defeat into perspective.
- You must live your life for something more important than your life alone. One who has never lost himself in a cause bigger than himself has missed one of life's mountain top experiences. Only by losing yourself in this way can you find yourself.
- The moment that you think the struggle is over, when you have nothing to live for, you are finished. (*Richard Nixon, 'In the Arena'.*)
- Hate is difficult to discuss. The mind resists it. The subject is amorphous, disorderly and malignant. Why is hatred not one of the seven deadly sins and why is the *Old Testament* so full of hate?
- The reason the subject is hard to discuss is that hate is simultaneously a mystery and a moron. It seems either too profound to understand or too shallow and stupid to bear much analysis – a cretin with a club, violent, repulsive, irrational, a black intoxication and an accomplice of death.
- The subjectivists (poets and moralists) look for the seeds of hatred within the human heart. The objectivists (economists, historians and lawyers) dismiss such speculation and locate the causes of hatred in the conditions of people's lives. "Hard, visible circumstances define reality", said John Kenneth Galbraith.
- The typical hater, said Vaclav Havel, has a serious face, a quickness to take offence, uses strong language and shouts, displaying an inability to stop outside of himself and see his own foolishness. (*Lance Morrow, 'Time', 17 September 1990*).
- The stoics believed that the universe was rational, despite appearances, that man could regulate his life by emulating the calm and order of the universe, learning to accept events with a stern and tranquil mind and able to achieve a lofty, moral worth. They believed that

man, as a world citizen, was obliged to play an active part in public affairs. Thus, moral worth, duty and justice were singularly stoic qualities, along with a certain sternness of mind. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

- Religions often are the codification and sanctification of a people's native character. (*Luigi Barzini*)⁸

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH XIII - SOCIETY AND HOME

Society is a system of relations between individuals. Human beings cannot be themselves without interacting with their fellows, and society is a field of action common to a number of human beings. The source of action is in the individual.

All growth originates with creative individuals. Their task is twofold: firstly, the achievement of their inspiration or discovery and, secondly, the conversion of society to which they belong to this new way of life.

This conversion comes about in two ways: either by the mass undergoing the actual experience which has transformed the creative individuals, or by the imitation of its externals. In practice, the latter is the only alternative open by which the rank and file *en masse* can follow the leaders. (*Arnold Toynbee, 'The Study of History'*)

The way to build a better nation is to build better individuals. A successful nation is usually composed of citizens, the majority of whom are efficient and possess a reasonably high sense of duty.

An individual who aspires to be trusted should have character. The foundation of business, as we know, is credit. Credit depends upon confidence and confidence depends upon character.

Efficiency implies the possession, to a high degree, of the qualities of diligence, ambition, punctuality, discipline, precision and the desire to do one's work as well as possible. (*Sri M Visvesvaraya*)

⁸ The above quotations were sent in by students of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Chile in Santiago.

It is not the physical part of homelessness that is hard: home and homelessness are also ideas, emotions and metaphysical states. Home is all the civilisation that a child knows. Home is one of nature's primal forms and, if it does not take shape around a child properly, then his mind will be at least a little homeless all his life.

Creation is an onion with many skins, all layering outward from the child's self. If he gets lost in the galaxy, he can find the way back, can fly through the concentric circles to his own house, from the outermost remoteness to innermost home. Nostalgia means *nostos algos*, agony to return home.

The womb is the first home. Thereafter, home is the soul you come from and recognise what you knew before: the infinitely subtle distinctiveness of temperature and smell and weather and noises and people, the intonations of the familiar. Each home is an unrepeatable configuration, it has personality, its own emanations and its spirit of place. Home, like the mind, is a time capsule. Love is home. The myth of Eden is the first trauma of homelessness.

Home, after that expulsion, is what we make and what we build. We build our home again, endlessly, in memory of Eden. The present is never content. Perfection is hypothetical and home is always incomplete. (*Lance Morrow, 'Time', 24 December 1990*).

- A hen is just an egg's way of making another egg. (*Samuel Butler*)
- All reforms are brought about by the energy of the reformers and by the apathy of the opponents who are always in a majority. (*Anonymous*)
- Some use words to express thoughts, and some use words to express words. (*Anonymous*)
- Nothing can be so alluring or so offensive as a voice. (*Anonymous*)⁹

⁹ The above quotations were sent in by students of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH XIV - POINTS TO PONDER

- Consciousness precedes being and not the other way around. The worthiness of being consists in the commitment to the realisation of worthy ideals. For this reason, the salvation of this world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the power to reflect, in human meekness and in human responsibility.
- The only genuine backbone of all our actions, if they are to be moral, is responsibility, that is responsibility to something higher than my family, my country, my company, my success – responsibility to the order of being where all our actions are indelibly recorded and where, and only where, they will be properly judged.
- Hope is not a feeling of certainty that everything ends well. Hope is just a feeling that life and work have a meaning. (*Vaclav Havel, addressing the US Congress in 1990*)
- When you assemble a number of men in order to have the advantage of their joint wisdom, you inevitably assemble with those men with all their prejudices, their passions, their errors of opinion, their local interests and their selfish views. From such an assembly, can a perfect production be expected? (*Benjamin Franklin, addressing the American Constitutional Convention*)
- Politics is intimately related to human mediocrity. (*Maria Vargas Llosa*)
- The rule of law, the development of the common law, the fact that democracy is more than majority voting, is about justice, about certain human rights which no government can displace because they did not come from government. That is what unites us, the enlarging of freedom backed up by the rule of law, backed up by economic liberty, because political liberty and philosophical liberty will not last long without economic liberty. (*Margaret Thatcher in Newsweek, 8 October 1990*)
- History is a part of society's attempt to structure a self-image and to communicate a common identity. No community can exist as a community without common references. In a modern nation they come from history. (*Eugene Weber*)
- There is no such thing as a true historical account of anything. Each sees the world from his own vantage point. (*Gore Vidal*)
- The worst distortion of all is to turn love, a relation that is founded on natural sweetness, mutual caring and the contemplation of eternity in shared children, into a power struggle. (*Alan Bloom*)
- Joy is not the same as gaiety. Destruction accompanies pleasure. When I eat a cake, I get pleasure by destroying it. If I bake a cake, especially by inventing the recipe, then it is a joy. Joys are gardening, building a clock, fixing up a room and writing a book. Reading should be a creative act and, thus, bring intellectual joy. (*Michael Tournier*)

- I have puzzled for years over the church's dark, astigmatic view of sex. But sex is merely the narrow focus. The broader perspective, and failure, involves the church's view of women and their role in the world. Women are not ordained priests because Christ in human form was a man and chose male apostles. But surely maleness was incidental to the essence of Christ's teachings.
- Some similar distortion of religion's natural sweetness and profound reciprocity has been too long accepted as part of the Catholic Church's design (male authority and female submission). The danger lies in the continuing distortion and the airless statis of a bad tradition. (*Lance Morrow, Time, 3 October 1994*)¹⁰

THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH XV - HUMANITY'S ASPIRATION

- It is from God that we have received our being and it is to Him that we must leave the right to take it away. The bodies of all men are mortal and have been fashioned out of perishable matter. The soul is immortal, forever a fragment of God dwelling in our bodies. (Note: the idea of God within).
- Don't you know that those who depart from this life according to the law of nature, and repay the loan they received from God at such time as the lender chooses to claim it back, win everlasting glory. Their souls remain unspotted and obedient, having won the most holy place in heaven from which, when time's wheel has turned a full circle, they are again sent to dwell in unsullied bodies? (Note: the idea of reincarnation.) (*Flavius Josephus, 'The Jewish Way'*)
- Stories are precious and indispensable. Everyone must have his story, her narrative. You do not know what you are until you possess the imaginative version of yourself. You almost do not exist without it.
- People invent stories to explore their own behaviour and to imagine their possibilities. People require the stabilising, consoling, instructive influence of other human tales.
- People without a surrounding atmosphere of myth and example are prone to the stupidity that arises from being isolated and not curious about the nuances of the experience of others. (*Lance Morrow, 'Time' 21 September 1992*)
- Democracy acknowledges the right to differ as well as the duty to settle differences peacefully. Regimented minds cannot grasp the concept of an open exchange of major differences with a view to settlement through genuine dialogue. Democracy, like liberty,

¹⁰ The above quotations were sent in by the students of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Uruguay in Montevideo.

justice and other social and political rights, is not given. It is earned through courage, resolution and sacrifice.

- Revolutions generally reflect the irresistible impulse for necessary changes which have been held back by official policies or retarded by social apathy. The institutions and practices of democracy provide ways and means by which such changes could be effected without recourse to violence. (*Aung San Suu Kyi, 'Freedom from Fear', 1991*)
- Historically, nationalism as distinct from nationality or patriotism, is a fairly recent development. For a thousand years after the fall of Rome, people's loyalties were to their church, their lords, their rights and duties under the feudal system, to their guilds and, eventually, to their king. Only in the French Revolution did nationalism burst forth, complete with flag and anthem. Altars were raised to the French nation with the inscription: the citizen is born, lives and dies for *la patrie*. Given such messianic megalomania, national freedom did not lead to individual freedom.
- Yet something is happening to the traditional nation state. It is beginning to explode in two directions. Some of the newer, less stable states are exploding downward, as it were, into ever smaller ethnic or religious units, which is not really nationalism but tribalism. The nation state is also exploding upward, into larger units, notably the European Union. Western Europe has learned the momentous lesson that war and conquest no longer lead to prosperity.
- The most successful economies in the world are, more than anything else, the expression of people's spirit, will and intelligence. We will need a new sense of drive, less emphasis on rights and more on responsibility. (*Henry Grunwald, 'Time', 30 March 1992*)¹¹

¹¹ The above quotations were sent in by the students of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Chile in +Santiago.

SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

- If you cannot do what you love to do, do with love what you can.
- If anything is useful to you, treat it with love.
- If you are ready to give an opinion, do something about it.
- If you do not know a subject well, do not give your opinion.
- If you cannot help someone, do not give advice.
- Only a fool gives unsolicited advice.
- If you do not know how to do something better, do not criticise.
- If something does not concern you, do not interfere.
- If something is free, do not fail to appreciate it.
- If you do not know how something works, do not take it apart.
- If you wish to use something that is not yours, seek out its owner to ask for permission.
- If something is lent to you, return it promptly.
- If you promise something, do not fail to keep your word.
- If you do not know what to say, keep quiet.
- Be a listener. If someone is saying something, do not interrupt.
- If you manage to offend someone, do not fail to ask for pardon.
- If you break a thing belonging to someone, replace it with a better one.
- If you dirty a place, clean up. Having eaten, wash up.
- If you open a door, close it behind you.
- If you switch on a light, switch it off. ¹²

¹² These rules were sent in by the students of Swami Shivapremananda Ji from Buenos Aires.

CHAPTER 21 — ANECDOTES

SOME MEMORIES OF AN ENCOUNTER

“The caterpillar weaves a cocoon and lives within it. It becomes a chrysalis, always changing, waiting until the proper time. Then the cocoon is broken and the butterfly escapes, and it is beautiful because it is free, and it flies away to no one knows where” – Bette Bao Lord, 'Spring Moon'.

So, could be said of the spirit of man. A person is remembered for some time by the memories he leaves behind and for longer by the record of his works, kept alive by organisations which promote what he represented. It is difficult to imagine what shape Christianity might have taken without St Paul, or if the modern history of India would have noticed Ramakrishna without Vivekananda. It is not so much what a person was in terms of his human nature that determines his place in history, but what he meant to others and the impact of his ideas which serve as a catalyst in the minds of people, resulting in the shaping of society.

It was on a wintry day in 1945 that I had a rare tryst with destiny when I met Swami Sivananda at his still primitive ashram north of Rishikesh. He was youthful and vigorous at 58 years of age and bubbling with enthusiasm about what he was doing. The last time I saw him was just before I left for Europe and the Americas in 1961, sixteen years later, when he was recognised as a representative of what could be called the modern spiritual culture of India.

The foremost impact of his qualities on me was his immense tolerance and understanding of human shortcomings, his patience and tactfulness, the absence of *animus* and pettiness, the practicality and universality of his outlook, his freedom from religious and caste prejudice which was still distressingly present in many other ashrams at that time and, above all, his unique way

of letting others find their own spiritual path and shape their ideals. It was this last quality that held me at his ashram for so long. Never did he try to indoctrinate, nor require of anyone a blind allegiance, philosophically or personally. Mahatma Gandhi used to say, “If you wish to know the nature of a person, give him power”. Swami Sivananda, as founder of his ashram, held absolute authority there, and he came out well in its exercise.

Many years later, when returning to India on different occasions, I was told by two of his senior disciples that they had been to several other well-known ashrams both before and after, but had never met anyone like him in terms of the qualities I have just mentioned. Thus, I was happy to know that, without having shopped around, I happened to stumble upon the best teacher accessible then who was suited to my temperament. Since then, I have never regretted that tryst with destiny.

TRUTH AS IDENTITY

The truth of a person is in what he is, for truth is *sat*, that which is, as opposed to what is not. What is and what is not is, of course, in the eyes of the beholder. But truth, being universal, cannot be an isolated perception unsupported by fact. For the face of truth is self-revealing, even if what it means to the beholder may vary from person to person. Reality is wrapped up inside layers of illusion and it is the business of religion to make myths convincing. The point is in its ability to inspire the search for the unknown and to widen the dimensions of the known within oneself, thereby strengthening the human spirit.

“Truth is a dream, unless my dream is true”, said George Santayana. This is particularly so in relation to the truth about a person. It is too tall a claim to say that one knows a lot about oneself or another. Some truth is indeed expressed in words and deeds, but it is in the nature of things that some truth remains veiled. Mark Twain mused that a person’s “real life is led in his head and is known to none but himself”. Andre Malraux remarked caustically that the “truth about a man is first of all what he hides”.

Swami Sivananda was too uncomplicated a person, nor was he Hamlet-like heavy-laden with self-doubt, to have successfully been less than transparent. He spread himself all over the mainstream of his writings, like it or not. About half a dozen of his disciples wrote independent articles under his name at different times but these could easily be distinguished as not being in his style or not expressing the shape of his ideas. Great philosophical problems did not gnaw at

the fibre of his conscience, nor was he weighed down by the excess baggage of the glory of other philosophers from whom he drew inspiration. He will surely be remembered as a prolific anthologist of the religious literature of India which he presented in simple form. He knew what he wanted to say and do and how he wanted to be known. He then went ahead and did his best to get what he wanted.

No writer can hide his soul in what he writes about, even if he tries to do so. The personality and qualities of character, along with accompanying deficiencies, shine through: truthful or false, profound or shallow, restrained or blatant, sincere or hypocritical, modest or vainglorious, painstaking or flippant, thoughtful or fatuous, conscientious or unprincipled, knowledgeable or inane, literate or merely literary, self-effacing or blissfully egotistical. Unbeknownst to himself, mostly the writer is self-revealing.

The strengths and weaknesses of a culture are spun into the fabric of the society it spawns. How important then that one should not indulge in visions of a glorious past when they are narcotised by fantasies to escape their painfully evident contradictions in the present. Hypocrisy is an inevitable companion of an exaggerated sense of one's traditional background. A common fault of a backward society is to be pompous, if not ridiculous, about this while not trying to live up to what is relevant, useful, helpful and productive. Singing paeons of praise may be moving at times, if no one laughs.

The role of Swami Sivananda in the future of India will be etched by what impact his teachings have on the minds of the people who have access to them, and by the ability of the continued mission of service of the *Divine Life Society* to be able to promulgate them. They already have a good record in this regard. The usefulness of a teaching is in its revitalising effect on the mind: releasing, soaring and guiding, inspiring, ennobling and delighting, not confining, twisting and numbing, retrogressing, obfuscating and self-absorbing, but helping to form substantial values to live by and to save oneself from a life of "foolish desires and imperfect choices".

Swami Sivananda has left for posterity a well-established umbrella institution, The *Divine Life Society*, of which he would have been proud had he been alive today. Ambitious, he would have liked to make it a household word known as widely as possible, but dispassionate enough in not being frustrated with the less than optimum talents available to him. He did not

have a Madan Mohan Malaviya¹³ to establish a great *Yoga-Vedanta University*, later to be called an Academy, which he so much wanted. But no one could say that he spared himself in the effort. He laid the groundwork of what he called his mission and lived long enough to see it bear fruit which it continues to do with even greater fertility and efflorescence than during his lifetime. There cannot be a better epitaph than that.

ANECDOTES II

The following anecdotes were related by Swami Shivapremananda Ji in some of his class talks at the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.

BE A LIGHT UNTO OTHERS

Long before the glory-hopping gurus of these days who have their statues installed in their ashrams to be worshipped even when they are alive, there live selfless gurus who did not even care to make themselves known to the world. The following is an anecdote from one of them.

The guru was on his deathbed and saying goodbye to his chief disciple who was to succeed him after his demise. He said:

“If you are complimented for your integrity, take no credit for it, for you are a son of *sat*, transcendental truth.

If you are complimented for your wisdom, take no credit for it, for you are a son of *chit*, transcendental knowledge.

If you are complimented for your equanimity, take no credit for it, for you are a son of *ananda*, the equilibrium of spiritual fullness.

You should worry when you find yourself lacking in them, that you have not strived hard enough to inherit your birth-right, this spiritual inheritance that you have wasted so many years by making a habit of being a *guru*.

¹³ The late founder and organiser of the Varanasi Hindu University.

Do not fail to educate your disciples to stand on their feet, for the highest gift is the gift of self-reliance through self-knowledge, to think anew, yourself being a light unto them, so that people may learn to make fewer mistakes, to suffer less and to cause less pain to others”.

EARN THE RIGHT FIRST

- A mother once brought her little son to her *guru* and said, “My boy will not listen to me when I ask him not to eat too many sweets. Please tell him not to do so”. The guru told the lady to bring her boy the next week. She did so and the guru said to the boy not to eat too many sweets as it was bad for his health. The mother was surprised and asked the guru, “But, sir, why did you not tell him so the week before?” The guru replied that he himself was eating too many sweets and that without practising what he was going to tell the boy, he had no right to tell the boy what to do.
- Once I knew a guru who was very fond of saying how he liked to cut the egos of others. Having been a medical doctor, he coined the word ‘egodectomy’, and thought that it was great fun. I thought to myself, one has to have a great ego to practise egodectomy on others. The guru, however, rarely did so and was very patient and tolerant. It was just a coin of speech to make him feel important.
- A disciple of this guru once had to get rid of a colleague from the ashram he had founded because it was uncomfortable for him to accommodate a rival. Dismissing him, he said, “God himself wants me to ask you to leave”. I thought, what a crude way to justify a personally motivated action. Then he told me that, after firing his rival, he had cried. I thought, what a self-deceiving hypocrisy, for I knew he really hated his rival.
- Once Pope John XXIII was dreaming about the problems of his church and said to himself, “Tomorrow I will ask the Pope for their solution”. Waking up, he found that he was himself Pope and it was he who had to solve them.
- After John XXIII had become Pope, a boyhood friend and fellow-seminarian came to see him and seek his blessings. The friend had not risen up the ranks and was only a senior parish priest whereas the Pope, after lifelong diplomatic service in the Vatican’s nunciatures in the Balkans and France and having been the patriarch of Venice, had become the vicar of Christ.
- The priest said to the Pope that he was sorry that he could only do such a little service to the church. John XXIII replied, “After you leave this earth and meet your creator, he would ask you not what great works you did for the church but how many souls you saved”.

HOW WOULD YOU KNOW

- Shasta, the Zen monk, was standing over a bridge in the company of a fellow-monk and watched the fish swim below. Shasta said to the other monk, “Look how the fish are enjoying themselves”. The monk asked Shasta, “How would you know? You are not a fish.” Shasta replied, “How do you know that I would not know? You are not Shasta”.
- Two monks were walking along a path towards their monastery. On the way there was a stream they had to ford. As they were doing so, a young woman, also crossing the stream, was about to falter because the current was strong. One of the monks picked her up and, carrying her across, set her down on the road. The woman went her way and the monks continued to their monastery. Half an hour passed, both monks walking silently. The monk who had helped the lady thought it was odd that the other monk was so quiet and asked if anything was wrong. The fellow-monk replied, “You are a monk and you embraced a young woman, carrying her across the stream”. The first monk remarked, “Curious! I held the lady in my arms for only three minutes and you are still embracing her in your mind for more than half an hour”.
- There was a pundit who lived by the side of a great river, very proud of his learning. There was also a boatman who eked out his livelihood rowing his boat back and forth across the river. Rain clouds were gathering, threatening a storm. The pundit had to go to the other side urgently. He asked the boatman to take him across. The boatman replied that it would be unwise because a storm was soon about to arise. The pundit said that he would give him whatever fee he asked for, as he had important business to attend to. So, they both got into the boat and started out, the boatman rowing rhythmically. The pundit became pensive and started talking about the philosophical mysteries of life. He asked the boatman if he had at least read some of the scriptures. No, the boatman replied, he was too busy rowing the boat to feed his family. The pundit remarked, “Then you have wasted your life”. The boatman didn’t know what to say. Sure enough, a storm arose and the boat started being buffeted by the waves. It was now the boatman’s turn to ask the pundit if he knew how to swim. No, he did not. The boatman remarked, “What good is philosophy if you do not know how to swim to save your life?” Practical knowledge is better than speculative philosophy.
- Once a Greek Orthodox priest was dreaming that he was being pursued by the devil. However much he told him to get lost, the devil just would not go away. So, the priest abruptly turned around and grabbed the devil’s beard. He woke up with a start and found that he was fiercely pulling at his own beard!

SOME REMINISCENCES

In the mid-1960s, the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen of Rochester, NY, related an amusing experience in his early life as a priest. One Sunday he was asked to give a sermon in a village church. Having arrived there and being new to the place, he asked a boy for directions. The boy offered to come along and show the way. From the priest's collar, he recognised him to be a cleric and was curious to know if he was going to the church to give a sermon. Father Sheen replied that he was indeed. The boy wanted to know the subject and Sheen said that it was about the 'Way to Heaven'. The boy was so surprised that he exclaimed, "What! How come you are going to show the way to heaven when you do not know the way to the church?" I found Father Sheen's candour disarming. Then based in New York as director of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre*, I met him a few times. His breadth of vision was remarkable and motivation for helping the poor inspiring.

About that time, I used to see an immigrant rabbi from Hungary, Joseph Gelberman, who used to come to the Yoga Centre and I, too, occasionally went to his Little Synagogue on 20th Street and Broadway. He once told a story about a Polish rabbi. As a rabbinical student at the age of 20, the Pole was so full of idealism about the teachings of the Old Testament that he wanted to save the world through its gospel. At the age of 30, after becoming a rabbi, he found the world was too big but thought he could still save a small country like Poland through the Biblical teachings. By the time he was 40, he found that all he was capable of attempting was to save his Jewish congregation. When he reached 50, he found that even that was too much for him, but he thought that at least he could save his family. By the time he was 60, he recognised that the generation gap between him and his children and grandchildren was too wide and realised that the only person he was capable of saving was himself. Gelberman was very broad-minded, even if some spoke of him as an off-beat rabbi due to his unorthodox ecumenical spirit.

In 1949, when I was a young novice at the ashram of Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh, I went to see Anandamayi Ma at her ashram in the nearby town of Dehra Dun, also in the foothills of the Himalayas. One evening, after *satsanga* (prayer meeting), a middle-aged woman approached Anandamayi Ma to ask her for much-needed advice. After a quarter century of a buffeted married life, she could no longer live with her husband and asked if she should seek a divorce. The Mother replied that the fact that she was asking such a question showed that nature had not yet taken its course. When it really became impossible to live together, nature would

automatically separate them and she would not be coming to her for counsel. As long as there was a question, she could still continue to live with him. Full of motherly love, Anandamayi Ma was respected for her wisdom and revered as a saintly soul. She passed away in the early 1980s.

APPENDIX 1 — GAYATRI MANTRA

Gayatri means: *Gayantam trayate iti gayatri*. *Gayantam* translates as chanting, while *trayate* means to protect from sorrow.

The two great *mantras* of the *Vedas* are *Gayatri mantra* and *Mrityunjaya mantra*. *Gayatri mantra* is famous and powerful because of two reasons:

- 1 The vibration it creates.
- 2 Its request for ultimate enlightenment or God-realisation.

If you listen to the *Gayatri mantra*, you will find that there are three *swaras* or tones: *anudhatta*, *udhatta* and *swarita*. Chanting creates a vibration and the vibration created by this *mantra* helps protect us from being afflicted by sorrow. Most of our sorrows are born of ignorance. If ignorance is removed, our sorrows are also eliminated.

Krishna in the *Bhagvad Gita* says: “Because of ignorance, our intellect is concealed and, because of this, we are unhappy and deluded. *Gayatri mantra*, by creating powerful vibrations, helps us to overcome sorrow. Our sorrow may be real, but it is unreasonable, say the *rishis* (sages).

Listen to this story: Krishnaswami was very drunk. As he walked home, his friend Ramaswami wanted to have a little fun with him. He said, “Eh, Krishnaswami, I went to your home and found that your wife has become a widow”. The moment Krishnaswami heard this, he started crying. Then another friend of Ramaswami said, “Hey, Krishnaswami, how can your wife become a widow when you are very much alive?” To which Krishnaswami replied, “No, my

closest friend said that my wife had become a widow and he never lies”. So, he kept stupidly crying.

Hence the sorrow of Krishnaswami was real even though it was unwarranted. Most of our sorrows are real, even though unreasonable. This sorrow, born out of ignorance, has to be removed. *Gayatri mantra* is said to help us by creating a powerful vibration.

Please listen: we live in a universe. The universe lives within us. Both these dimensions should be understood. That we live in a universe, everyone knows. That there is a universe within us, we do not know. *Gayatri mantra* helps us to draw energy from the external universe and also from the inner universe. This is referred to by the term *savituhu*, meaning the sun. So, *Gayatri mantra* is a prayer to the external sun which represents the outer universe. It is also a prayer to the internal sun, the spiritual consciousness within us.

Let us all be enlightened: *dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*. It is interesting to note that even though an individual is praying, it says, ‘let us all’. It becomes clear that the sages wanted our prayer to be inclusive, not exclusive. Hence, the word ‘us’. This important principle, called the principle of the ladder, indicates that each one of us on the ladder of spiritual evolution is on one rung of the ladder or another.

Therefore, as we climb the spiritual ladder, we should help others as well. Just imagine if we fought each other as we climbed! There would be chaos. Hence, Krishna in the *Bhagvad Gita* says: *parasparam bhavayantah* - help each other to become enlightened. *Parasparam* means to help each other. *Bhavayantaha* means to nourish the ultimate good.

Listen to this story: the *devas* (demigods or angels) and *asuras* (demons) were invited by God into heaven and offered nectar which, when drunk, would make them immortal. The demons were very confused. “Why did God invite us?” they pondered. The angels were also confused: “Why did God invite the demons?” they wondered. Then God addressed both of them: “Here is *amrita*, divine nectar. Please drink it. You will become immortal, but only on one condition You have to drink it using the hand without bending the elbow. The demons tried their best to drink the nectar in this way. When they found that they couldn’t, they cursed God and returned to their abode. The angels knew better. They fed the nectar to each other, one by one, allowing the drinker not to have to bend their elbow. Hence, by *parasparam bhavayantaha*, or by mutually nourishing each other, they became immortal.

We have to start with a prayer and God will respond. Prayer is a surrender to the spiritual beauty within and the material beauty without. In such a beauty of surrender is to be found the beauty of prayer. When our whole being is offered as a prayer, a tremendous sense of wakefulness opens up within. This leads to *prachodayat* or enlightenment.

Somebody asked a master, “What should I do in order to be enlightened?” The master answered, “As much as you can do to make the sun rise and set”. Then the student asked, “Then what is the use of all the spiritual practices?” The master answered, “Only to make sure that you are awake when the sun rises and remain awake until the sun sets”. Enlightenment is a wake-up call to our consciousness. Hence: *prachodayat*.

In answer to another question about enlightenment, the master replied, “You just have to see”. When asked whether there was a special type of seeing, he responded, “No, an ordinary type of seeing”. When asked what one was seeing, he said, “See a flower, the stars, the moon...” The student replied that he had been seeing these to which the master said, “In order to see, you must be awake. Enlightenment is awakening the inner consciousness. When this inner consciousness is awake, you will be free from sorrow.”

Now what is enlightenment? Enlightenment is understanding the fact that there is an inner and an outer man. When the outer man is in conflict with the inner man, there is bitterness. With bitterness, you can never experience the poetry and beauty of life. If you look deep within, there is always a conflict between the inner and external man.

Here is another story: there was a monk who lived in the Himalayas, chanting *mantras* and meditating, having renounced the world. But within him another *mantra* was playing: “Oh, I am wasting my time. I am not enjoying the pleasures that a normal man enjoys in the world”. This was his inner *mantra* even though outwardly he was chanting spiritual *mantras*. Thus, he was in constant conflict between the inner and outer *mantras*.

Once the monk heard a lady singing a song “Oh, Lord, what can I offer you but the honesty of my song? Whether my song is good or bad, it is honest and authentic. It is this authenticity that I am offering to you, Lord.” When the monk heard the lady’s song, he realised that he had not been honest inwardly. He renounced his falseness which created a magical bridge between the inner and outer being. Through that bridge, there was the experience of inner oneness with the outer. This experience of authenticity enables inner awakening. Authenticity arises not through the arrogance of the intellect but by the innocence of the heart.

Listen to yet another story: there is an innocent man who prays to God, “Oh Lord, I do not know how to pray but one thing I know is that I love you with all my heart.” God replies that this was one of the best prayers a devotee had offered him. It is this innocence which leads to an inner oneness and, thus, to enlightenment. Hence *dyiyo* means our intellect, while *nah prachodayat*, means ‘Let our intellect be enlightened.’ With this inner awakening, one looks at existence from a completely different perspective.

Dattatreya, the son of Anusuya, was very wise even when he was very young. A student once asked him, “Who is your *guru*?” To which he replied, “The sun is my *guru*, the moon is my *guru* and fire is my *guru*. My whole existence has become my *guru*”. The student asked, “How is the sun your *guru*?” Dattatreya replied, “Look at the sun. It gives light but is not contaminated by what it illuminates, such as the gutters of the world. This is what I have learned from the sun. I can live in this world and not be contaminated by it. Thus, the sun is my *guru*.”

Savituhu refers to the inner sun, the spiritual consciousness within, which illuminates the mind, its thoughts and emotions but is not influenced by them, just as the sun is not affected by what it illuminates.

Another important aspect of enlightenment is understanding who I am. If you ask who you are, you will find that you are more than your body, because the body is seen by a seer within. You are not your thoughts, because the thoughts are seen by a seer within. You are not the intellect, because intellectual knowledge is derived by a seer within. Therefore, if you look closely, the body is the sun, so too the thoughts and emotions. There is *drik*, the seer or inner sun which is not affected by what it illuminates in the waking state or the dream state and which keeps the life-giving energy alive in the state of deep sleep.

The words *bhu*, *bhuvah* and *swaha*, refer to these three states of consciousness. The monosyllabic sound, *Om*, stands for *turiya* or the fourth, transcendental state while, at the same time, giving life to the three states of consciousness. If you anchor yourself in *turiya*, you will see that you are a mere witness to your thoughts and emotions which come and go. But you do not come and go, you remain steady in a state of awareness.

In the *Gayatri* mantra, we meditate on *Om*, the sun, to enlighten our earthly consciousness. This is indeed *prachodayat*, to look at life from a wider, spiritual perspective. We try to overcome insecurity which makes us suffer. The constantly changing phases of life make us feel insecure. If we do not accept this fact of nature, change takes us by surprise. We are not

prepared to face it. The *Gayatri* mantra gives us the wisdom to find security in an insecure world. It helps us to overcome inner conflicts. We learn to live our life spontaneously in the same way that we breathe naturally.

Now, how should one chant the *Gayatri mantra*? Rhythmically. It has to be learned from a teacher who has a background in Sanskrit. It should be chanted as the sun rises, standing before the sun with closed eyes if it is a prayer to *savituhu*, the external sun. If it is a prayer to the inner sun, it can be repeated at any time. In the early morning, facing the rising sun with closed eyes, repeat the chant at least seven times just loud enough for you to hear.

The *mantra* can be chanted while concentrating on each of the chakras, beginning with *muladhara*, then *swadhisthana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *agnya* and, finally, *sahasrara*. These chakras correspond to the base of the spine, to a point below the navel, at a point level with the navel within the abdomen, at the heart, inside the throat, between the eyebrows, and inside the centre of the skull.

The *Gayatri mantra* should also be chanted at least seven times facing the setting sun. The rays of the rising and setting sun are said to be good for the body. It is equally valuable to chant the *mantra* at any time of the day or night. It is best to chant quietly but one can also repeat the *mantra* mentally.

If you are chanting the *mantra* inside a room, make sure that you use a mat or comfortable seat which is only used for prayers. This will give the *mantra* a fitting place to generate its vibrations. If the weather is cooler, the body should be covered by a shawl to retain its warmth. The most important factors are devotion, sincerity and commitment.

APPENDIX 2 — AN INTERVIEW WITH SWAMI SHIVAPREMANANDA

By Jane Sill, Editor *Yoga & Health*

Jane Sill: I have your brief biographical *résumé* but would like to hear a fuller account of your stay at the *Sivananda Ashram* in Rishikesh, your duties there, your memories of Swami Sivananda and how he taught. Also, it would be interesting to hear about the main purpose of the *Ashram* (*The Divine Life Society*), its aims and aspirations and how these are being carried out today.

Swami Shivapremananda: I joined the *Sivananda Ashram* as a raw and rather naïve youth, straight from college, when I was 20 years old. I was drawn by the mystique of the Himalayas and the stories I had heard about the knights errant of the spirit who went there to find themselves (how far they succeeded is another question). I was also searching for a meaning of what life was all about. Swami Sivananda was not a mystic but a down-to-earth, practical teacher who had a striking personality. This acted as a good counter-balance to my dead serious, yet romantic, approach. What I liked most about him was his broad-minded, universal vision, his immense tolerance and understanding of the difference of opinions of others and the foibles of human nature, as well as his total freedom from any religious or sectarian bias. He gave us the liberty of conscience to think and express ourselves without imposing or requiring us to conform to his ideas.

My first duties at the *Ashram* were in the circulation department of *The Divine Life* magazine of which I became editor four years later. I also soon became junior private secretary to Swami Sivananda, partly answering his correspondence and doing some subeditorial work.

His teaching method was mainly by personal example, although in the early years of my stay, after the morning meditation class, he spoke for about three quarters of an hour on the practical aspects of spiritual life, sometimes pointing out the shortcomings he had earlier noticed in some of us, without mentioning any name. But we knew, of course, who he was referring to. He never reproached us but instructed indirectly how we could go about correcting ourselves. We learned the methods of *sadhana* (spiritual exercise) from books. We also learned a great deal from his manner of handling the problems of our egos as they occasionally cropped up, as well as from his conversation with visitors.

Swami Sivananda passed away in 1963 at the age of 76 when I was in Milwaukee, in the United States, in charge of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* which I had organised two years earlier according to his wish. The main purpose of the umbrella organisation, *The Divine Life Society* which Swamiji (as we called him) had founded in 1936, was the dissemination of the integral teachings of Yoga and their practical application in daily life for a better understanding and improvement of human nature and relationship, for self-knowledge and self-realisation. Having been a medical doctor for 10 years (from 1913 to 1923 in Malaya, now Malaysia) before becoming a *swami*, he was also concerned about the alleviation of physical suffering and thus started a charitable dispensary (now an adequately equipped hospital) and a pharmaceutical dispensary in his *Ashram*. This he initially called *Ananda Kutir* or joy-permeated cottage.

Having been in the West for more than 30 years, every time I go back to the *Ashram*, I find that the activities started by Swamiji are continually expanding. His concern was for the betterment of body, mind and spirit, for which daily classes in *Hatha Yoga*, meditation and yoga philosophy and psychology are made available at the *Ashram's Yoga-Vedanta Academy*. There are temples for worship and opportunities for *Karma Yoga* (selfless service) at the *Ashram's* hospital, printing press, publishing and despatching offices, and also the main kitchen which feeds some 500 persons daily. The *Ashram* helps to run three facilities for lepers situated a few miles away and gives scholarships to numerous students in India. The floating number of visitors who come there for short or longer periods of stay exceed one hundred. About 200 novices and monks reside there permanently and there are some hundred paid employees. *The Divine Life Society* also periodically conducts spiritual retreats at the *Ashram* and Yoga Camps and medical relief camps all over India.

JS: Can you relate a little more about your life and experiences after leaving India, your work in South America and your impressions on Yoga there in view of the enormous diversity of the southern continent?

SS: In 1961, after leaving India, on my way to the United States where Swami Sivananda had deputed me to spread the teachings of Yoga, I spent a month on a lecture tour of Switzerland, Hamburg and London. Until the end of 1963, I conducted the activities of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in the midwestern city of Milwaukee which was very insular and conservative. Meanwhile, I went on an extensive lecture tour of the west coast, from Vancouver to San Diego, which was more open minded. In 1962, at the invitation of a group of people interested in Yoga and being deputed by Swami Sivananda, I went to South America for the first time. There I founded the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Buenos Aires. I also guided the incipient activities of the same organisation in Montevideo, Uruguay, which Swami Chidananda, now President of *The Divine Life Society* in Rishikesh, had informally started in 1961. I then returned to Milwaukee. Subsequently, from 1964 to 1970, I was director of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in New York which was earlier founded by Swami Vishnudevananda.

While based in New York, I went back to Buenos Aires and Montevideo from time to time to guide the activities of the Centres there. During my second visit to South America in 1965, I founded the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Santiago, Chile, and re-organised the Centre in Montevideo. After 1970, I stayed for increasingly longer periods of time in these three South American Centres but went on lecture tours almost every year (every two years from the 1980s) to the United States and Europe. Now I am based in Buenos Aires and guide the activities of the Centre there and those of Montevideo and Santiago, staying for up to three months at a time in each place as their president and rector.

In the United States, the culture is basically oriented to Anglo-Saxon, Protestant values, as in Britain, whereas in South America, the cultural pattern is generally Catholic and Latin European, specifically in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile. In the rest of South America, it is Latin American, i.e. Latin Europeans mixed with American Indians who have formed a distinct cultural milieu. I am not very well acquainted with the latter since I have only been on a few lecture tours in Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia and Peru. I have also visited Bolivia and Paraguay as a tourist but have not been to Ecuador or Central America.

As you say, in South America, there is a great deal of diversity, in ethnic mix, culture, climate and geography. The high Andean mountains are fascinating. The Iguazu Falls are much larger than the Niagra Falls. Brazil is Portuguese speaking (the rest of Latin America being Spanish speaking) and has a polyglot culture and racial mix. Descendants of Portuguese colonisers mixed with descendants of African slaves and, to a lesser extent, with American Indians. There are also large segments of thriving Italian and German communities in southern Brazil where the climate is milder rather than tropical or subtropical as in the rest of the country. Venezuelans are also a polyglot mixture of Spanish descendants with Africans and American Indians in a lush, tropical country with shades of Caribbean culture superimposed on that of the Spanish colonisers. In Colombia, the racial and cultural mix is Spanish, overwhelming those of American Indian background.

The full-blooded American Indians make up the large majority in Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru, as well as in the Amazon region of Brazil. However, in all these countries, the ruling class is of European descent. In the southern zone where I reside, the climate is temperate, as in the south of France. In Buenos Aires, the culture is mainly European. It is the most cosmopolitan city in South America and the second largest after Sao Paolo. Forty percent of the Argentines are of Italian descent, the second largest ethnical block is of Spanish origin and the rest consists of German, East European and, to a lesser extent, of British descent. In Uruguay, the ethnic pattern is about the same. Eighty percent of the people in these two countries consider themselves middle class. The Chileans are mainly of Spanish origin and the second largest group is of German descent, there being also a sprinkling of East Europeans. Many Chileans are of mixed origin, as also about twenty percent of Argentines, i.e. Spaniards mixed with American Indians.

Except in the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo, Yoga is more popular and widespread in Argentina, Uruguay and Chile than in other South American countries, percentage wise. In the Buenos Aires area alone, there are over 40 Yoga groups, the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* being the largest with some 900 active members (in the 1980s). The second largest is the same organisation in Montevideo and by far the largest in Uruguay, with an active membership of over 600 (i.e. those attending classes at least once a week). Our Santiago Centre is smaller but still the largest in Chile. *Hatha Yoga* is the main draw, as in Europe and the United States, but there is a greater interest in the spiritual and philosophical aspects of Yoga in these three South American countries than I have seen in the USA and Europe.

Although 27 weekly *Hatha Yoga* classes are given in the two buildings of the Buenos Aires Centre, over a hundred students attend each of my weekly philosophy and meditation (*satsanga*) classes. At the Montevideo Centre, 20 *Hatha Yoga* classes are given weekly and over 80 students attend each of the philosophy and meditation classes. The attendance at the Santiago Centre is smaller. Each of these Centres are registered as non-profit church organisations and are run by a Board of Directors (council members) and office-bearers. There are also between 20 and 30 staff members in each Centre, consisting of *Hatha Yoga* instructors and secretaries whose voluntary work, including that of others, has enabled us to have our own buildings with ample space to conduct the activities.

JS: What is the origin of Yoga?

SS: No one can be sure when Yoga originated in India. Some teachers claim that it has a pre-Aryan beginning, i.e. in the Indus Valley civilisation which flourished between four and five thousand years ago. But there is no hard evidence. Yoga is a Sanskrit word, the language of the Aryan tribes who came to India from the northwest nearly 4,000 years ago. The word, derived from the root *yuj* (to unite) means ‘union’ – the union of the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of one’s being. The English word, yoke, may also have come from *yuj*. The earliest teachings of Yoga are found in the *Vedas*, mainly as *Gyana Yoga*, although *Hatha Yoga* may have an earlier origin, not as a system of physical culture but in order to develop psychic powers as a part of *Kundalini Yoga*. However, there is no hard evidence. By the time the *Bhagvad Gita* was composed, nearly 3,000 years ago (the present version having been written in the first century BCE), the spiritual and contemplative aspects of Yoga were already well defined.

JS: How would you describe Yoga?

SS: As a philosophy of life with which to develop a sense of being, our spiritual identity, as well as self-knowledge through a psychological understanding which helps to shape our motivation and sublimate our emotions and passions. It also helps us to cultivate a balanced state of mind, to deepen our relationships with each other and to acquire good health by the practice of *asana* (physical postures) and *pranayama* (breathing exercises). A tall order indeed!

JS: What is the relationship, if any, between Yoga and Hinduism?

SS: Hinduism is a religion which, like any religion, consists of three basic aspects: mythology, rituals and moral or spiritual teachings. Yoga has no mythology. It has no specific rituals but, rather, universal prayers for the welfare of all and as expressions of one’s spiritual

aspiration. However, in some Yoga groups oriented to Hinduism, rituals pertinent to it are performed. The only common aspect of Yoga with religion is its moral and spiritual philosophy but without any dogmatism. The goal of any wholesome religion, which does not claim to have any exclusive telephone lines to God, is the same as that of Yoga. Religion means *re-ligare* or to re-tie or reunite, while *yuj* means to unite – the individual with the universal, the material with the spiritual. In other words, it means an integration of the various facets of life and of humanity with each other and with a common, transcendental source of being.

JS: Is there one ultimate truth accessible through the practice of Yoga and is it equally accessible via other systems such as different religious beliefs?

SS: The only thing I can say about one ultimate truth is that it is ultimate nonsense, if there can be an ultimate nonsense. Truth is infinite and, therefore, endless. Truth is universal and, therefore, accessible to all. It is neither one nor many in the sense of separateness, but universal with a common convergence in an ever-widening state of consciousness. As such, the term ‘one’ is used. In a dogmatic mind, its understanding is limited. In a broadening vision, its perception is far-reaching and profound. In the relativity of its application, its aspiration is transcendental. When one arrives at the door of a clear vision of truth, a new door in the distance opens up and beckons for a greater spiritual understanding. However, truth must begin with the requisite of what it exactly means, *veritas*, verification. Then try to deepen your realisation of its meaning.

JS: Do you believe in saints?

SS: Saints are created on earth but they dwell in heaven, in other words in the idealised vision of some people. They help to inspire and one can pray to them in time of need for help. Haven’t you heard the Russian joke? Two women happened to meet in a park and started talking. One said, “My husband is an angel.” The other replied, “You are lucky” Mine is still alive!” Of course, there are saintly people who have surpassing qualities, but to expect someone to be perfect and free from any residual human deficiency is to ask for the moon.

JS: Do you see the West’s contribution to the understanding and practice of Yoga having a beneficial effect? Do you believe that Yoga can help promote an East-West synthesis, providing humanity with a means to improve and evolve and create a greater harmony in the world?

SS: That is a tall order! The West has certainly contributed a lot to the practice of *Hatha Yoga* through a better knowledge of how the body functions and how the different *asanas* and *pranayamas* etc. have their effect. The claim by some Indians as well as copycat Western authors

of books on *Hatha Yoga* that this or that posture and breathing exercise will cure this or that disease is not only stupid but unethical, due to the lack of adequate clinical data. Medical science and *Hatha Yoga* can surely benefit mutually by the therapeutical use of postures and breathing exercises under strict supervision.

Western culture, as a product of the age of reason and built on the foundation of Protestant ethics, can surely consolidate the application of the spiritual teachings of Yoga and make them more effective. Eastern mysticism can deepen western values such as responsibility and the work ethic, while the otherworldliness of yoga can compensate for the rampant materialism in the West, at least hopefully to some extent.

JS: Is knowledge derived from Yoga in one's consciousness finite? In other words, is all that is knowable, known through self-realisation or, as in other sciences, is knowledge constantly growing and becoming more defined?

SS: Knowledge is infinite and therefore has to grow constantly whether derived through the teachings of Yoga or the experimental means of other sciences. Knowledge, in order to be applicable, has to be defined. Definition is a discipline imperative to understanding. Its dimensions have, however, to be constantly widened through spiritual aspiration. The human mind that has produced all the scriptures, including the *Vedas*, is very limited indeed. It has caught only some glimpses of the endless light of truth or spiritual realities of existence, just as "scientists have picked up some pebbles of knowledge from the ocean shores strewn with an infinite number of such pebbles", as Sir Isaac Newton is said to have remarked.

JS: Do the laws of Yoga as described in the scriptures apply to the whole universe or just a part of it?

SS: I only know a little bit about the planet Earth we inhabit in a solar system of a medium-sized star in one of the outer arms of the spiral galaxy called the Milky Way in which there are a hundred billion stars, the Milky Way itself being just one of the fifty to a hundred billion galaxies (according to English physicist, Stephen Hawking). The natural laws of what exist have only limited universality and time-dimensional validity or truth, such as the moon whirling around the Earth a couple of billion years ago having a different velocity then and being at a different distance. So also, the laws of Yoga or the laws of the *Old Testament* have limited universality. At best they are relative to life, as we know it on Earth, within a particular time frame. The British author, J R Ackerley, once wrote to a friend: "I am half way through *Genesis*

and quite appalled by the disgraceful behaviour of all the characters involved, including God.” (Quoted by Lance Morrow in *Time*, June 10, 1991).

JS: What is a *swami*? Does the term vary according to different traditions and how does this relate to what is happening today, especially in the West?

SS: A *swami* is a title generally given to Hindu monk but, recently, it has been extended to others who do not owe allegiance to any particular religion. A *swami* is like a Catholic monk and usually belongs to one of ten orders, although not all ten now exist. These were organised by the eighth-century *Gyana Yogi*, Shankaracharya. A *swami* is traditionally ordained by the *Guru* or abbot of an Ashram after having stayed there as a novice for several years. The *Ramakrishna Order* requires approximately 10 years’ service. During this time, the basic scriptures are studied, including the major *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, and selfless service is engaged in, including devotional practices such as prayers and meditation. Centuries ago, these orders were supervised by four regional Shankaracharyas based in Jyotirmath in the Himalayas for the northern area, Sringeri in the South, Puri in the East, and Dwaraka in the West. This was carried out through the many Ashrams affiliated to these four regional headquarters.

The Shankaracharyas are still elected and continue to preside over their seats of theoretically spiritual, but not institutional, authority. Not many ashrams owe their allegiance to them. Ashrams in India are generally autonomous and are headed individually by a *guru* or abbot. Swami Vivekananda, at the end of the nineteenth century, founded the *Ramakrishna Order* in the name of his late *guru*, although Sri Ramakrishna was initiated by a monk from the Puri order. Swami Sivananda belonged to the *Saraswati Order*, owing its spiritual allegiance to the Sringeri headquarters but to none institutionally. As disciples ordained by Swami Sivananda, we belong to the *Saraswati Order*, but only in a spiritual sense. Our *bonafides*, as that of any others calling themselves *Swamis*, depend on how we conduct ourselves and on the reputation of the ashram at which we were trained.

JS: Thank you very much.

APPENDIX 3 — SETTING UP YOUR OWN YOGA SESSION

By Ronald Hutchinson, the late Editor of 'Yoga Today' monthly magazine published formerly in the UK.

Swami Shivapremananda politely balanced a teacup English style until he found that he needed both hands to talk about *asanas*. He then dispensed with the cup and quietly slipped into part of a Lotus position which left him cosily balanced in a posture which he obviously prefers to sitting western style.

Apart from the Lotus seat, Swamiji looks rather like a youngish university don who knows a great deal but has not had the time to grow fusty and bookish. He talks fluently in a very perfect mid-Atlantic English which occasionally slips from New York to London and back, which is not surprising considering that he spent much of his school days at an English school but has been teaching in New York for the last ten years. He doesn't really look old enough to have done all this but he is, in fact, also a Director of Yoga studies in South America. He has about him that timeless air that seems to hover over genuine Yoga teachers.

With his background of western schooling and a Christian education, Swami Shivapremananda probably understands better than any other Indian *swami* the problems which beset the westerner who comes to Yoga. Not for him the traditional shaven head and saffron robe. He pads around in neatly creased terylene trousers and a tweed jacket. His concession to the saffron coloured robe extends only so far as to wearing an orange-coloured cotton gown when he lectures.

Swamiji had just finished teaching a course of beginner students when he sat down to balance his teacup and talk about how to set up a Yoga session. He is absolutely clear about the first simple and even obvious rule which gets broken more quickly and more often in the West than all the other recommendations put together.

“The body gives the rule”, said Swamiji. “What you do and how much you try to do is governed by what your individual body is capable of doing. There is no point in assaulting yourself. There are some practices given by various teachers which are, in my opinion, too extreme. It is not necessary to be a contortionist to practise Yoga. Of course, many of the movements are strange at first and many people are stiff, but do not think that this stiffness is confined to the Western world. There are just as many stiff bodies in India as there are in the West. It takes time for people to become attuned, but one thing must always be clear: it is the body which sets the rule. When you are ready to do a pose, your body will adapt to it. Remember it should be possible to hold *asanas* without strain.”

There it is. The besetting sin of most beginners in the West is that we try too hard. It really is important to understand that there is nothing wrong with not being able to do some of the postures right away. It is no sin. You have not failed in any way. It is enough that you have made an attempt, so long as you put your heart into it.

So, you have to strike a balance between trying with all your will and concentration but without bullying yourself. Yoga is a path of self-development, the operative word being ‘self’. It is you personally who must ultimately decide how far and fast to go. Just because a teacher may say to do a thing five times, while another says fifty times, there is no reason to take either of them as gospel. Five repeats may be too much for one person and fifty too few for another. Only the individual can know for himself. It is really a form of lesson in responsibility.

Swamiji went on to say that he tried to set his postures into groups of patterns, each providing a miniature balanced session. Before starting, there should be a short preparation.

PREPARING YOURSELF

Preparation is simplicity itself. The first step is to relax and to dismiss from the mind all things other than the session you are about to enjoy. If you can adopt a cross-legged pose, then you can relax for a few moments in that.

The next thing is to loosen the shoulders. Swamiji said, “The great majority of people come to classes with tension in the back of their neck – the *medulla oblongata* and around their shoulders. You should try to get rid of this before you start or the breathing will not be free”.

To start this loosening process, Swamiji advises simple arm movements. Raise the arms sideways above the head and then lower them. Raise the arms in front, bending the elbows in and out a few times. Another method is to raise the arms at shoulder height in front of you and then open them as though you were about to do a swallow dive.

“When you have finished stretching, you can sit back into a cross-legged posture and chant *Om* three times. Some people may question this. I reply, yes, chant *Om* if you can do so without causing yourself any difficulties. Only you can judge if it matters that someone in a next-door bedsitter may think you are sinister ‘nut’. Fortunately, *Om* can be sounded very quietly and there is a sound reason for chanting it, even if you are not concerned with the wider spiritual aspects of Yoga. Chanting *Om* (pronounced as in ‘home’) will help you. *Om* is considered to be the sound of infinity. By intoning this sound, you attune yourself to the music vibration of the universe. You can disregard this explanation if you like, but the chanting of *Om* is a valid mark in time. It acts as a dividing line between the preliminary practices and the session proper. From the moment you have chanted *Om*, you should think of nothing else than the *asanas* you are practising.”

THE SESSION ITSELF

“You must balance your flexing”, said Swamiji, “I do not believe in those sequences where, for example, the Cobra, Locust and Bow all follow one another. I believe you should balance the flexing so that if one *asana* bends the spine forwards, the next one should bend it backwards. The same principle applies to other movements. If you bend to the left, then you must also bend to the right, twist left, twist right, and so on. The Shoulder Stand should normally be followed by the Fish pose. And another thing”, said Swamiji, warming to the subject, “I don’t believe that people should necessarily stay absolutely still when they are in some of the postures, particularly the upside-down ones. Once you can balance in the Shoulder Stand, there is no point in having the blood drain down. You can move the legs about, or come into half Plough on alternate sides.

Bring your right leg down behind your right shoulder and then swap over with your left leg. Another important thing to remember is to synchronise your breathing.”

So here then are some basic rules on how to set up a session as recommended by Swamiji:

- Relaxation
- Concentration
- Alternate the flexing positions
- Synchronise your breathing
- Above all allow your own body to tell you when you have had enough.

Below is a short session which can last for about fifteen minutes and which is set out according to these principles.

- 1 Relax for five minutes lying flat on your back (*Savasana*).
- 2 Stand and stretch the area of the *medulla oblongata* along with the shoulders.
- 3 Sit cross-legged and stabilise your breathing.
- 4 Chant *Om* three times.
- 5 Take two or three minutes of slow abdominal breathing.
- 6 Change to *Kapalabhati* ('bellows' breath) inspiring and expiring at a rate of one breath (in and out) per second. Repeat this for 30 breaths and then relax.
- 7 Practise the simple Twist both sides, synchronising the movements with the breath.
- 8 Holding the breath, come up slowly into Shoulder Stand to the count of seven. Resume normal breathing, holding the position for a short time.
- 9 While in Shoulder Stand, lower and raise each leg individually, first straight (e.g. right leg behind the right shoulder) and then diagonally (e.g. right leg behind the left shoulder). Loosen up the legs.
- 10 Lower both legs straight behind into the Plough, if you can manage it.
- 11 Come out of the position slowly and relax flat on your back in *Savasana* for a short time.
- 12 Raise the upper part of the body using the elbows, and slowly lower the crown of the head to the floor behind in Fish pose. Hold this for a minute or for as long as you can manage. Relax.
- 13 Lie flat on your back and raise your arms behind your head. Lower the arms back down and slowly roll yourself up into a sitting position. From there, fold forwards to touch your toes. Lie back.
- 14 Roll over on to the front and do the Cobra pose.

- 15 Relax face downwards, roll over and then relax face up. Stretch. Sit up. Stabilise your breathing. You have finished.

This is a very basic format. In the beginning, any session much shorter than this is hardly worth doing. But once you are fit and adept in the postures, even a ten-minute session like this will be enough to maintain health for long periods.

APPENDIX 4 — WHO IS A SWAMI?

The Sanskrit word *swami* is derived from the root *swa* meaning one's own. Thus, the word originally meant one who owns something such as an estate, or is master of a household. A Hindu god is also sometimes referred to as *swami*, as in the designation of a house of worship such as *Swami Narayan* temple. The word can also be added as a suffix to South Indian forenames, for example Krishnaswami or Ramaswami, even though this does not imply a spiritual vocation.

In ancient India, life was supposed to be divided into four stages:

- 1 *Brahmacharya* – the first 20 years devoted to study or learning a vocation while leading a disciplined life of celibacy. Child marriage was a consequence of Moslem rule from around the 12th century and even earlier in Sindh which is now in Pakistan.
- 2 *Grihastha* – the following 30 years are taken up in married life as a householder, raising a family and earning a livelihood. The word literally means, one who holds a house.
- 3 *Vanaprastha* – during the following 10 years or so, the husband and wife retire to a cottage in the forest (*vana*) and devote themselves to spiritual study and discipline.
- 4 *Sannyasa* – after the age of 60, generally the man renounces his possessions and becomes a monk, presumably the wife returning to one of her children's homes.

Probably only a fraction of one percent followed the fourth step, while only a few embark upon the third step, the majority remaining as householders. It was in the fourth or *sannyasa* stage that the word *swami* became the title of a monk or renunciate. It was not necessary to go through the second and third stages, depending upon one's spiritual and vocational urge.

The *gurukula* or abode and school of a *guru* came into vogue at least 3,000 years ago. Examples are Vyasa, Vasishtha and Yagnyavalkya. These were generally married men who were called *rishis* or sages, not to be confused with *sannyasis*, although some were eventually to become so.

The title *swami* denotes a monk who is celibate and not married or, if married earlier, is no longer living with his wife. He is a renunciate, even while being the head of an *ashram*, the property belonging to the *ashram* itself, and his vocation is one of spiritual ministry. These are the fundamental requirements of a *swami*.

Early in the 8th century A.D. Rabin., the first Shankaracharya organised the *sannyasis* into ten orders, some of which are now extinct. This was done primarily due to their aptitude. The *Saraswati* order espoused the erudite who interpreted the scriptures. It was to this order that Swami Sivananda belonged. The *Puri* order based their ministry in urban areas. Ramakrishna's *sannyasi* guru was a *Puri*. The *Tirthas* served in centres of pilgrimage. The *Giris* preferred mountainous areas, as did the *Aranyakas*, while the *Vanams* were drawn to the seclusion of the forest where they devoted themselves to a life of contemplation like the Trappist monks. The *Bharatis* generally came from the upper echelons of the social order although, strictly speaking, *sannyasis* are meant to be classless.

Ashrams existed in India for nearly 2,000 years before the time of the first Shankaracharya. However, he was the one who established four regional headquarters in various parts of India to oversee and supervise the correct adherence to Hindu religious ethos. Each was headed by a senior *swami* who had the title of Shankaracharya. The northern region was overseen from Badrinath/Joshimath in the central Himalayas, the south from Sringeri in Karnataka, the East from Puri in Orissa, and the West from Dwaraka in Gujarat. Many *sannyasis* continued to be itinerant and typically autonomous. There never was a supreme pontiff.

However, the authority of the regional Shankaracharya gradually waned as most of northern India came under the sway of Moslem rule, spearheaded by Turko-Afghan invaders from the late 12th and early 13th century who brought with them their Arab clergy. The *ashrams* gradually became autonomous, under the authority of their founding *gurus* who designated and/or elected their successors. Married *gurus* also continued to have their *ashrams*. The word *guru* is generally translated as the remover (*gu*) of darkness (*ru*) and, by implication, of ignorance.

No record is found as to when the suffix *ananda* was first used to designate an ordained monk. However, from the late 17th century onwards one comes across names such as Samarth Ramdas, *guru* of the famous Maratha King Shivaji. Some, like Swami Rama Tirtha and Swami Tapovanam, did not use the suffix, although most ordained monks today do so.

Apart from a vocational aptitude and the vows of celibacy and renunciation, spiritual aspiration is the fundamental prerequisite of a *swami*. He is equivalent to a Catholic monk. The vow of obedience to the abbot or *guru* is implicit as long as he lives in the ashram and the *guru* is alive. Otherwise, obedience is given to the current head of the order as happens in the well organised *Ramakrishna Mission* based in Belur, near Calcutta. A Catholic monk's vow of permanent residence in a monastery does not apply to all *swamis*, some of whom may be itinerant monks.

Apart from the *Ramakrishna Mission*, there is hardly any supervisory organisation in India on a par with the Catholic orders, so that it is difficult to verify the quality of training undertaken by a *swami* or his or her vocational authenticity. The *Ramakrishna Mission* requires four years of probation and a further four years as a confirmed novice (*brahmacharya*) before being considered for ordination as a *swami* and having the epithet *ananda* added to the name. This is mainly to make sure of the vocational aptitude through years of service, spiritual discipline and the acquisition of a basic knowledge of the scriptures.

The title *swami* also means one who has taken on the vocation of a teacher, in the same way as a rabbi, but also being a celibate and a renunciate. In a spiritual sense, the word means one who tries to attain mastery over oneself. The various shades of the saffron robe indicate the colour of fire. This symbolises the aspiration to attain enlightenment and to remove the dross of earthly desires.

In the West, the title *swami* and the suffix *ananda* are often used with astonishingly unabashed superficiality and, in many instances, with unscrupulous complicity of *swamis* from India. It is for the public to evaluate the integrity of *swamis*, which is fundamental to any religious vocation, by the kind of life they lead and the ethical and moral principles of the institutions they guide.

The Biblical verity that human beings are made of clay, into which God breathed his spirit, is very appropriate. In *Genesis*, it is said that we are all made in God's image. As a life-principle or *prana*, yes, but as a dormant soul or *atman*, this image remains to be awakened.

Made of clay as we all are, it is all the more of paramount importance that *swamis* try to measure up to that ideal as best they can. This can be achieved by living a life of integrity, unselfish love, humility of spirit, altruism and the sublimation of earthly desires and carnal passions. Avoiding bombastic titles, which is up to posterity to give, and not going around like a canary in public places where people are not used to seeing robes, speak of a delicate mien.

APPENDIX 5 — WHAT IS PRANA?

WHAT IS PRANA?

Generally speaking, *prana* is the energy principle within all that exists, sentient and insentient. *Prana*, as understood in the term *pranayama*, may simply be translated as a vital force which is of the nature of an electrical impulse that emanates from the brain and sustains all the activities of both body and mind. It can also be called a perceptible and imperceptible life-force. It is perceptible through breathing and the beating of the heart, and imperceptible as an energy which automatically flows through the nerves enabling the various organs of the body to function, as well as the brain to think and recall.

Nearly a thousand years ago, or perhaps even earlier, yogis such as Swatmarama speculated about this *pranic* activity and specified its five functions. One should not take these literally, considering the rudimentary level of neurological knowledge in early medieval India. Therefore, one should not repeat parrot-like what was said in texts such as *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita* and *Shiva Samhita*. Instead, their contents should be interpreted in the light of today's physiological knowledge. Considering how limited the understanding of anatomy was in Europe as recently as only 200 years' ago, the speculative insights in these works is remarkable.

Although the word *pranayama* is sometimes translated as restraint (*yama*) of the breath (*prana*), its actual meaning according to Swatmarama is to lengthen or prolong (*ayama*) the breath. It generally means, however, to harmonise and regulate the two aspects of *pranic* energy which flow through the nervous system. One is passive (*ida*), and the other dynamic (*pingala*): *yin* and *yang*, anabolic and catabolic, *ha* (sun) and *tha* (moon). There is no physical nerve as such

which is called *ida* or *pingala*, but the terms may be considered to refer to the flow of these two types of energy impulse. This harmonising process is also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (IV, 29) as ‘the outer breath flowing into the inward breath’ and *vice versa*. The aim of *pranayama* is the harmony of breath, flowing in and out peacefully.

FIVE PRANAS

The functions of *pranic* activity may be divided into five: *prana*, *samana*, *vyana*, *apana* and *udana*. Swatmarama grades them differently but both interpretations are meant to give a better understanding of how *prana* functions in stages.

- 1 ***Prana*** – the *prana* in the air (oxygen-nitrogen) is breathed in to nourish the forms of energy called *samana* and *vyana* which flow through the bloodstream, sustaining the organs and cells of the body. This constant process of replenishment continues until death. Used up energy (*apana*) is discharged from the lungs which are then refilled with a fresh supply (*prana*). The yogis of medieval India observed that this *prana* is located in the chest, although all five *pranas* are actually located in the brain.
- 2 ***Samana*** – serves the assimilative process converting external forms of energy such as food, mainly by digestive activity, which is then used to nourish metabolically all the organs and cells of the body. Its location was observed to be in the upper abdomen.
- 3 ***Vyana*** – converted nutritional energy needs to circulate freely in order to provide this nourishment. Thus, the circulatory function made possible through the pumping of the heart muscles is called *vyana*, a process of infiltration. It was thought to be located all over the body.
- 4 ***Apana*** – having converted energy from external *prana* through the intake of food (*samana*), which then circulates through the blood-stream (*vyana*), being purified through a process of oxygenation (*prana*), the residual waste matter then has to be eliminated. This eliminatory kind of energy impulse is called *apana*. It can be observed in the peristaltic movement of the small and large intestines, the cleansing of the blood in the kidneys giving rise to urine, the process of perspiration through the sweat glands, and the discharge of carbon dioxide through the lungs. Its location, according to the yogis, was the lower abdomen.
- 5 ***Udana*** – the function of this *prana* was thought to be located in the area of the head and neck, in the brain and brain-stem. *Ud* means upward. It not only performs the more subtle forms of vital activity, such as the function of the endocrine system, but also sustains the process of thinking and memory. It was also said to regulate the unconscious.

PRANA IS ALL-PERVASIVE

Prana is found not only in all forms of manifest life such as in living beings and plants, but also in stones, water and air. Some stones are said to ‘breathe’ better and therefore appear more vibrant than others. Some waters ‘breathe’ more when not clogged by vegetation and therefore look more limpid. Some airs are charged with refreshing, positive *prana*, while others emanate negative energy as occurs with a certain type of wind blowing from mountains.

The five vital *pranas* owe their existence to the *atmic prana* or dormant individual consciousness of the spirit within, also known as the soul.

The universal form of *prana* is cosmic energy (*prakriti*) which exists in space. There is *prana* in sunlight, so too in electro-magnetic force, gravity and in the strong and weak forces of the atomic nucleus of matter. Behind this universal *prana* is to be found the transcendental, immeasurable spiritual force called *purusha*.

From universal *prana* is born *akasha* or ether, from *akasha* arises *vayu* (air or gases), from *vayu* arises *agni* (fire), and *apas* (liquid matter) arises through a process of combustion and condensation, and from *apas* arises *prithvi* or solid matter.

From *purusha* is born the individual spirit or soul (*jivatman*). From *jivatma* arises *manas* or the mind. From *manas* arises *prana* or the vital force and, finally, from *prana* arises the body or *sharira*.

Thus, within the physical body is the vital force. Within the vital force is the unconscious, subconscious and conscious mind (*antar-chitta*, *vahir-chitta*, and *manas*). Within the mind is the microcosm (*vigyana*) of the universal consciousness (macrocosm), and within *vigyana* is *ananda* or spiritual plenum.

The body is the chariot, the five senses are the horses, the five reins are the vital *pranas*, the mind is the driver, and the rider is the individual soul. Roads are the value system of the paths of life that one chooses. Negative paths give a bumpy ride and positive ways a smoother journey. Horses do not move without the urging of the reins. The reins do not move without the prompting of the driver, and the driver directs according to the order of the rider.

APPENDIX 6 — PRACTICE OF MEDITATION

Transcription of a recording of a class session

PREPARATION: Posture and becoming aware of the breath

We will begin the practice of meditation with a few simple steps. First of all, sit in a comfortable position. If you are sitting on a chair, the feet and knees should be together, back straight without being rigid, the neck and head also straight, hands on the lap with one palm resting on the other facing up. Close your eyes. Feel peaceful, restful and detached. You are not trying to do anything, not even trying to meditate. There is no predisposition to do anything, just feeling detached and relaxed. Your breath is spontaneous and natural. Now try to become aware of the breath. You experience the inflow by a feeling of its coolness inside the upper part of the nostrils and, gradually, you also experience a cool sensation deep inside the head. As you exhale, try to feel the warmth of the outflow of the breath inside the lower part of the nostrils. Slowly, the mind becomes deeply absorbed in the experience of the external form of the breath. The purpose of experiencing this external *prana* or breath is to become aware of the internal *prana* which is the spirit or life force within. To breathe in Latin is *spirare* and this is made possible on account of the presence of the spirit within. In Yoga, to be aware of the breath is also to be aware of the spirit within. The psychological counterpart of the experience of the breath, that is the experience of the spiritual content of our being, is primarily through a sense of inner peace usually associated with the inflow of the breath and a sense of freedom associated with the outflow of the breath. So, for the first minute, we shall try to train the mind to feel the breath with complete attention: the coolness inside the head and the warmth inside the nostrils. Breathe spontaneously.

You are not trying to breathe deliberately slowly, but naturally. As a result of concentration, the breath automatically becomes slower than normal. The concentration should remain gentle. You are not forcing the mind to do anything, just to be aware of the breath.

1a First Step: Cultivating a Disposition - ‘Peace and Freedom’

Now, together with the awareness of the external breath, its coolness and warmth, we try to meditate on inner peace and an inner state of spiritual freedom. These are the two characteristics of the expression of the spiritual content of our being, that is a profound inner calm, in a state of freedom. In other words, the mind is totally free from any state of bondage, anxiety and conflict. Feeling like a free soul, liberated from all that is negative, you become deeply immersed in the peace of the soul. That is the first part of meditation. You are continuously aware of the inflow and outflow of the breath. Now we have to guide this spiritual feeling with the help of two words: ‘*peace*’ as you inhale, and ‘*freedom*’ as you exhale. In Sanskrit, this is translated as ‘*shanti*’ as you inhale, and ‘*mukti*’ as you exhale. But it is better to repeat these two words in your own language in order to guide the spiritual feeling of this first part of meditation.

Naturally, thoughts will come and go, but the best way is not to try to prevent thinking by resisting thought. When a thought arises or when you become aware that you are thinking of something else, say to yourself: ‘*I am now feeling profoundly peaceful. I am a free soul.*’ Once again, go back to the mental repetition of the two words: ‘*peace*’ as you inhale and ‘*freedom*’ as you exhale. In the course of time, you will not need to repeat the words. You will automatically become aware of a state of inner calm and freedom without the need to verbalise. Until then, from time to time, repeat the words ‘*peace*’ and ‘*freedom*’ when inhaling and exhaling only when thoughts arise rather than doing so continuously. And, only when you need to, amplify these two words with the phrases, ‘*I am full of peace, I am a free soul*’. Now continue.

1b Addition to the first step: Paripurnam, spiritual fullness; coolness of the inflow of the breath

We have now practised the first step which is the basic one. This can be added to, depending upon the time available. The mind is again absorbed in the feeling of the breath, both the inflow and the outflow. Now, try to become aware only of the inflow, in other words the coolness

experienced inside the head, exhaling spontaneously without trying to concentrate on the warmth of the out breath. At the same time, try to imagine a cool sensation inside the head. With each inflow, you renew this sense of coolness which becomes deeper and deeper, rising to a sensation inside the top part of the head with each inflow of breath. The related mantra is: ‘*spiritual fullness*’ or, in Sanskrit, ‘*paripurnam: transcendental fullness*’. When thoughts come to your mind, you can mentally repeat: ‘*My heart is full of peace*’, the short phrase of ‘spiritual fullness’ being repeated from time to time. This is associated with the experience of coolness deep inside the head. With each in-breath, try to renew this sense of coolness. Continue. This optional extension of the first step is designed to deepen the sense of inner peace.

1c Second optional addition: Feel in harmony with the whole of creation and expansive with each out breath.

This optional extension of the practice is designed to develop an inner sense of spiritual freedom, experiencing a sense of unity with the entire creation. This is achieved by the repetition of a few phrases. Begin by becoming aware of the breath, both the inflow and the outflow. Now, before repeating the affirmations, you may choose one of two points of concentration. Either continue to be aware of the inflow and outflow or, in order to develop concentration, try to become aware only of the outflow, that is the warmth inside the nostrils while not trying to pay attention to the coolness of the inflow. Then, try to become aware of the outflow in the form of a warmth inside the throat and, gradually, inside the lungs within the chest. Try to maintain a continuous awareness of this outflow, even when you are breathing in, being aware of the warmth of *prana* inside the chest. If you find this difficult, then just remain aware of the inflow and outflow. Practise at first for at least a minute before repeating the following affirmations while you feel the breath: ‘*My breath is one with the breath of all*’ or ‘*I am breathing with all living beings*’. Repeat this affirmation from time to time, at least half a dozen times ... ‘*My breath is one with the breath of nature. I am breathing with the trees, with the waters of the lakes, rivers and ocean. I am breathing with the earth. My breath is one with the breath of nature ... My breath is one with the breath of God. I am breathing with the entire atmosphere. I am breathing with the entire creation beyond this earth. My breath is one with the breath of God which sustains this whole*

universe. I am breathing with the atmosphere and the entire creation beyond this earth, with the entire universe. My breath is one with the breath of God' ...

Rest period between steps of meditation

Now pause. Detach the mind without any focus. You are not aware of the breath, nor are you making any affirmation. Keep the eyes closed. If necessary, move your shoulders and the neck. Relax your torso. Move your feet if you have to. Feel detached. Pause for a couple of minutes. We have meditated for a little over half an hour. After a while, I shall continue with the second basic step. When you are practising the meditation alone, without the help of a tape, once you have learned the first step, practise only the meditation on *peace and freedom* if you have less time, synchronising the meditation with the inflow and outflow of the breath for around ten minutes. If you are practising the extended version, using both additional parts, this will take more time.

2a Second step: Repetition of Mantra

After a pause of a couple of minutes, we shall begin the second basic step which involves using a *mantra*. You can choose the *mantra* yourself with the help of suggestions from someone who is knowledgeable. Otherwise, you can choose just one from the following three. The aim of the *mantra* is to renew a sense of spiritual belonging to an inner transcendental, spiritual source. It helps to develop a sense of identity with the Divine, because it is only through a feeling of the Divine or spiritual connection that our mind is at peace and has a sense of inner spiritual fullness.

2b Choice of Mantra

First, become aware of the breath, both its inflow and outflow, its coolness and warmth. After at least a minute or two, choose one of the following:

- A basic *Yogic* or *Vedic mantra* which is found in the *Isha Upanishad* is *Soham*. Repeat ‘*So*’ as you inhale and ‘*ham*’ as you exhale, being aware of the inflow and outflow of the breath and enjoying a sense of infinite unity. ‘*So*’ means the infinite spirit, a transcendental, spiritual vision of God which is not anthropomorphic, an infinite spiritual presence which is transcendent as well as being immanent. ‘*Ham*’ means ‘*I am one with, I am in, I am of*’.

Continuously repeat this *mantra*. Instead of the Sanskrit, *Soham*, you can instead repeat: '*I am one with You*' which is the English translation. In this case, '*You*' can be a personal deity such as Jesus Christ.

- Those who are Christians and who are deeply tuned to the presence of Jesus, can repeat the second *mantra*, that is inhaling '*Jesus*', exhaling, '*I love you*', or '*Jesus*', '*I am one with you*'.
- A third option is for those who have a Jewish background. Two of the best known names of God in the *Old Testament* are *Adonai*, repeated as you inhale, meaning *My Lord*, and *Elohim* as you exhale, meaning *The Lord of all beings*.

Continue.

2c Substantiation of the mantra by repetition of three phrases

After practising for about five minutes, the second basic step is designed to renew our sense of spiritual identity or sense of spiritual belonging to a higher, transcendental source of life which is within our heart. This is God within, God all around us, and God beyond all that we know which is transcendental. Now we shall substantiate this *mantra* of spiritual identity by repeating three phrases.

- Be aware of the breath as before. Mentally repeat four or five times: '*My body is your temple*' while feeling a spiritual presence, either mystical or personal such as in the case of Christians who try to feel the presence of Jesus within them which occurs during the transubstantiation of the Holy Communion. In the Jewish faith, one feels the presence of God. One tries to feel at one with God, '*My body is your temple*'. Then feel a flow of harmony and sense of well-being and health coursing through the entire body. You feel the body is wholesome. '*My body is your temple*'.
- '*My mind is your altar*'. This is like a clear, blue sky which is your mind, a pure mind, the altar of God, limitless, not a narrow mind but an open mind, wholesome, pure and peaceful. '*My mind is your altar*'. Feel an inner purity, a spiritual consciousness, a pure conscience that is the presence of God in your mind, purifying your mind, making it more and more universal: '*My mind is your altar*'.
- Be aware of the breath, as before. Mentally repeat four or five times: '*My soul is your abode*'. Now feel a glow of light filling the inside of your head and flowing into your heart within the chest, filling it with pure love. Once again, feel pure love flowing from your heart back into your mind, inside your head and filling it with pure light, the light of God and the love of God. This is what you try to experience as you repeat the affirmation: '*My soul is your abode*'.

Rest period between stages of meditation

Now disconnect the mind. Pause after this second step which will take a minimum of ten minutes, the first part consisting of a continuous repetition of the *mantra* and the second part substantiating the meaning of the *mantra*. As before, when you rest between the two stages of meditation, keep your eyes closed and, if necessary, move the shoulders and legs.

3a Third Step (Optional): Repetition of Five Affirmations

After having rested for a minute or two, begin the third part which is optional but which can be very helpful in planting the seeds of positive qualities which you want to develop in the subconscious. This is done by means of repetition of five affirmations. This will take at least ten minutes.

At first, become aware of the breath. After a minute, begin the repetition. Repeat each phrase about four or five times, trying to experience its meaning.

- Inhale and feel the breath while repeating, '*Peace is my real nature*'. Exhale and feel the breath while repeating, '*not conflict*'.
- 'Love is my real nature, not resentment'.
- 'Truth is my real nature, not untruth'.
- 'Strength is my real nature, not weakness'.
- 'Freedom is my real nature, not bondage'.

3b Abbreviation of phrases

The five phrases can then be abbreviated, repeating them mentally while inhaling and exhaling:

- 'Peace', inhaling. Exhaling, 'Only peace'.
- 'Love, spiritual love'.
- 'Truth, only truth'.
- 'Strength, mental strength'.
- 'Freedom, spiritual freedom'.

This third step will take about ten minutes. Then pause. This marks the end of the meditation practice. Feel peaceful, restful and detached for at least a couple of minutes before getting up.



Swami Shivapremananda

APPENDIX 7 — STRESS MANAGEMENT

Transcription of a talk given on 27th November 1995 at Golden Square Bookshop, London.

From the time we are born, we have to cope with life. We can't help it because, fundamentally, we love life. From the very simple fact that we don't want to die, we refuse to give up and those who are on the point of giving up are actually unconsciously calling for help because giving up is not a natural process.

Life begins with some kind of involvement in the sense that, without interdependence, we cannot survive. In the process of interdependence as we grow up, we may react in ways that are not conducive to surviving happily or agreeably and that is how stress builds up. So, you have to ask the question, "What is the cause of stress or feeling unhappy and tense?" In India, at the medical hospital in the *Sivananda Ashram* and also at two other hospitals I visited, I found that the tendency was to treat the symptoms rather than the cause. This was the general trend. I do not know how it is in England. Of course, the immediate need is to treat the symptoms because you want to alleviate suffering. But simultaneously, you must treat the cause. If you are not mindful of the cause, treating the symptoms will not be very helpful in terms of a long-lasting result, because the symptoms will recur from time to time. So, any alleviation will only be temporary. We must think of the cause. I shall come back to this point later.

There are some basic facts of life which we have to face up to. One is that people are born different, due to a great extent to their genetic make-up. Health is a product of several factors. The primary one is genetic which most people tend to ignore. I know a case of a *swami*, a colleague of mind, who died in 1993. His name was Swami Vishnudevananda. He wrote a

good book, '*A Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*'. He had a series of strokes and became diabetic. He was very good at postures and was quite committed and devoted to practising Yoga from the age of seventeen. He joined the *Sivananda Ashram* at the age of eighteen and started practising all aspects of *Hatha Yoga* in a dedicated way from then on. He also practised meditation until he developed diabetes. He ate wrongly and became rather stout. But, as late as his mid-sixties, he was still healthy. But the genetic factor was there. You can remain quite healthy even if you are quite stout.

PSYCHO-PHYSICAL FACTORS

Let us take the case of Winston Churchill who abused all the rules of health. He hardly undertook any exercise. Neither did Somerset Maugham. There is a saying attributed to him that the only exercise he did was getting in and out of the car and yet he lived to a very old age and generally kept healthy. Both died in their 90s. There is a genetic factor which we have to accept. We can't do anything about this. In the same way, some are born with a stressful make-up, while others with a less stressed personality.

Then, there is the second factor: one's childhood. This is easier to relate to and more tangible. We can understand this and can work on ourselves. Genes can also be adaptive but this takes a lot of time and effort.

There are five basic factors which make up our personality. We have already mentioned the first, the genetic factor which relates not only to physical but also psychological health. Psychologically, a person may be more fearful and will need a lot of change to overcome fear complexes.

Previously, psychoanalysts tended to attribute the immediate impact of the personalities of the parents, and especially of the mother, during the first two years of a child's life because of their close contact. This is, of course, true. Some child psychologists such as Jean Piaget, the French child psychoanalyst, would say that by the time a child reached the age of five, the future was already decided because of the impact of the parental influence and the unguarded, unfiltered absorption in the child's psyche of that influence.

I do not know much about child psychology or the irreversibility of the influences received by a child in very early childhood. But I am reluctant to submit to the theory that this

gives rise to an inalterable state of being. For the first five years of a child's life, character traits are projected upon a child, sometimes with tact and sometimes without any tact at all. All the frustrations and hang-ups and unhappiness of the parents can make them react in a certain way to a child's behaviour which may affect their future. But I am not keen on the theory that this is irreversible, rather that it is an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration. One has to work hard to counteract such influences.

KARMIC THEORY

I am returning to the old *karmic* theory. I can't prove past lives or the theory of *samskaras* or ingrained character traits with which we are born and which are said to have been formed in one's immediately preceding life or, sometime so it is said, stretching back much further to lives in the past. I can't prove these theories and so I will fall back on the genetic factor, the parents, because *karma* is said to bring you to a home according to the nature of one's *karma*. I don't want to go into this as it is a question of belief.

The point is that any belief that helps you to cope with the day-to-day problems of life and which helps to give you a certain amount of self-confidence and understanding of the problems of life and gives you enough motivation and incentive to move forward is good enough. Whether there is a basic truth doesn't matter. The truth is in evidence if a spiritual belief such as a belief in God helps you to be a better person. That is proof enough. I don't speak about the existence of God which depends on how you define the existence of God. If someone says that there is someone up there who is deciding your fate, I don't know about this. I cannot deny it because I don't know, nor can I say 'Yes, yes'. That would be lying because I simply have no proof either way. However, if that belief helps me to accept things in a more tranquil way with greater equanimity and gives me the motivation to work on myself and look forward to something good and positive, in the belief that God knows best and so I must do my best, that I should accept the things that I cannot change after having tried to change what is possible, then I would uphold that belief.

These sentiments echo the prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr "to have the courage (sometimes translated as strength) to change what can be changed and the serenity to accept what cannot be changed and to have the wisdom to know what can be and what cannot be changed". Sometimes

the authorship of these lines is disputed, but that doesn't matter. The saying contains a truth which I would say is very much in keeping with the spirit of Yoga. I refer back to the five factors I mentioned earlier, the first being the genetic factor. In the theory of *karma* this is called 'the inexplicable state of being', the inexplicable qualities with which we are born. As I explained, genes can be adapted. In the same way, *karmas* are flexible and can be shaped and reshaped without completely annulling the consequences of what has caused them.

GENETIC FACTOR

So that is the first factor of our life. We have to learn to cope with our genetic background even if we don't like it. Previously it was thought that the genetic factor pertained mainly to one's physical make-up, propensity to certain diseases, and so on. But now it is known that it goes much further. Even if you separate a child at the time of birth and put the child in a different environment, the child will grow up in the course of time carrying psychological factors or genes of the child's parents, whether you like it or not. I also mentioned that genes are adaptive. The second factor is what is called *griha karma* or the *karma* of the household or, in the case of very young children, the early impressions formed by the influence of the parents and their immediate contacts.

In order to grow up healthily, you need two basic elements, apart from the basic physical needs. The first is the nourishment and protection of love. Love, of course, is present in the sense of attachment. A mother feeds her child as an extension of her body and takes care of the child. This is natural. But, again, we must understand a basic factor. The maternal instinct is not entirely universal, not is it continuous. It is not present in all women. Those children who are born from mothers who do not have a sufficient maternal instinct to be able to afford that protective warmth of love, of being wanted, have to struggle a great deal.

That is what we need to take into account. There is also the factor of one child being more wanted than another and of the disappointment that this causes. For example, a mother may have two sons and then a daughter while the mother really wanted another son. In olden times, especially in the East and countries which have a slightly backward social structure, females are considered to be a burden on the household as they are not productive in terms of manual labour as they do not have sufficient strength. This is, in fact, a mistaken belief because I have seen in

many poor countries women working even harder than men. This is sheer social injustice, and so too is the system of dowry. Marriage becomes the primary goal of a female. It becomes a kind of protective continuity apart from also being a ‘meal ticket’. But the female also contributes to the economy of a household, especially in agricultural communities where women often work as hard or even harder than men even though they may not carry such heavy loads. These factors should be taken into consideration. Women also have the responsibility of taking care of the house and of organising household tasks.

So, let us consider the case of a daughter being born to a mother who wanted her first child to be a son. The disappointment that the mother feels will be expressed in her relationship with the child. Of course, she will adjust to having a daughter but the immediate reaction is very, very unfortunate if it is negative. This factor needs to be taken into account. There is nothing worse in a child’s life than feeling unwanted by their parents. The nourishment of love, and the nourishment of feeling wanted helps the emotional growth of a child.

ROLE MODEL

Another factor is role model or security of character. As I mentioned, cowardice is imprinted in the genes; so too is courage. This is why the inquiry would be made as to whether one belonged to the military caste when joining the Indian army. In the same way, when joining the British army, the recruit is asked whether any member of the family belonged to the armed forces. So, the factor of courage or cowardice is there although it does not always arise in children. The lying habit or dishonesty can again be linked to genetic factors. Years and years, even generations, may be needed to outgrow these factors even if a child is placed in different circumstances or environment. All these factors contribute to stress: not being wanted, being regarded as a person who is careless, who has no responsibility, or who is dishonest, devious or prone to cheat whenever given the opportunity. This causes rejection from a group, either personally or collectively, giving rise to a ‘bad’ name. In this way, the sense of isolation contributes to stress.

The second factor is therefore the immediate environment which determines how lucky or unlucky we are to have parents who can cater to two basic needs. The first is the emotional nourishment of being wanted and of being accepted with the tender warmth of love. The second

is having a role model. We call this protection: the security of love and the security of character which offers the immediate blueprint of knowing what is right and what is wrong. There is a well-known saying of Bernard Shaw that children start loving their parents because of the simple fact that they depend upon them for their survival. This is a natural process of identifying and thus feeling some kind of warmth as there are no other immediate examples around.

Life begins with imitation. And so, blindly copying the role models one is initially exposed to: one's father and mother. Children then start to ask questions. During this third process, they either start to hate their parents or begin to understand that their parents are human beings, allowing them to accept their failings and not to judge them with resentment. However, there are some who cannot get over the childhood trauma of bad treatment, of not having the protection of love and of not having received character guidance.

RELATIONSHIP

These two basic factors determine the relationship of a child to its parents: one is the protection of love and the other the guidance of character. You can do without the protection of love but, without character guidance, you will suffer and that suffering is greater than the lack of love. Lacking the protection of love, one grows up afraid of relating to people. For example, having grown up in a home which has seen divorce with a lot of quarrelling and a lack of understanding and acceptance, can lead later on to a failed marriage with an inability to relate to others and a tendency to repeat the mistakes one has witnessed when young.

There is a saying that a relationship between a boy and girl or between a young man and a young woman begins with infatuation which leads to marriage. The second stage involves picking faults with each other and the third stage is indifference. So, after getting tired with finding faults, they become indifferent to each other in the same way as one gets used to a comfortable or uncomfortable chair. This is a very sad thing to say. We need to have a greater motivation to manage our lives.

The third factor is society. We are the product of the society in which we live and are influenced by our surroundings. This is called *samaja karma* and relates to the influence of one's peers at school, in our place of work and, generally speaking, of social and economic factors.

Marx and Engels exaggerated the importance of these, suggesting that all social ills were due to economic factors.

One cannot say that all social ills are the product of bad management of the economy but it is a fact that we are greatly influenced by social pressure and circumstance. One may have the sheer bad luck of being born in the wrong place where there are no stimuli, or where there is no incentive to find work, to engage your mind, or that one falls prey to bad influences which may lead to very negative results. For example, one experiments with drugs. In the latter case, this is basically a search for escape. Something is not fulfilling in the lives of drug addicts. They want to ‘have kicks.’ This again can be traced back to their relationship or lack of relationship with their parents.

Of the two factors over which we have some degree of control, in spite of genetic imprints and the previous three factors which we have just discussed, one is defined as selfish deeds impelled by our basic instincts without the filter of a sense of right or wrong or sense of responsibility or fairness, of right and wrong, responsibility to each other and to our own selves. So, this is the fifth factor. Do we really want to submit to all our weaknesses or do we wish to have a measure of control over our lives? This is called *karma* inspired by spiritual ideals.

CAUSES OF STRESS

Now let us consider the reasons why stress accumulates. There are two basic causes. One is the ego. The second is all consuming desire. The ego can be divided into two, with many subdivisions. When one talks of a person who has a big ego, this indicates self-importance which is due to selfishness.

Stress is caused by clashing with others. This leads to unhappiness and to poor relationships. One clashes with people in a place of work and at home. One can clash with a complete stranger due to intolerance. This is a product of the ego. If you do not agree with a person, why not explain your position and respect the other person’s position?

If you are secure in your knowledge, there is no need for an argument. Religious quarrels spring from an unconscious lack of conviction. Intolerance is a result of insecurity. You are unsure of your understanding of your own or another’s religion. Your concern should be to inform yourself.

In an advanced country like Britain, there are laws against blasphemy. You can be taken to court for infringing them, although this is not normally done. Blasphemy is due to irresponsibility. It is caused by the ego. A selfish person is naturally irresponsible although he or she can be trained not to be.

In *Raja Yoga*, the method of counterposing your attitude is taught to overcome a defect. If you are intolerant, try to cultivate patience and understanding. In a relationship gone sour, if someone hurts you, instead of being resentful, try to remember a positive experience you have shared in the past and be grateful for that. That is an immediate step one can take to help overcome resentment. Then think of someone you love.

If something goes wrong in a relationship, accept your responsibility. It may be that nearly 50% of the blame lies with you. This is the way to put a stop to resentment. Due to a poor relationship with one of your parents in childhood, you may have deep roots of resentment. As an adult, you can tell yourself that this is no longer valid and thus it is irrational to be resentful.

SUBSTITUTION AND TRAINING

Self-pity arises due to not accepting one's responsibility. It is easy to pass the blame on to others. This is also a cause for stress. It is like slowly poisoning your health. Anger is an immediate reaction which poisons your blood. One should never hurt another when he or she is eating, nor should one get angry while eating. This causes an imbalance in the gastric juices and delays digestion. In extreme cases, it leads to indigestion.

The desire to be loved is a natural emotion. If you love someone, it is normal to expect a response. You should not expect this from a selfish person. Lower your level of expectation to avoid disappointment. Love is a two-way stream. If it is one-way, it cannot last long. If you are not loved, ask yourself the reason why. There may be a solution.

The mind is a field of energy. Energy is movement, a pulsation. The energy pattern can be treated in three ways: by indulging it, for example, if you become angry, become angrier which will make it even worse; by suppressing it, which will cause stress; and by sublimating it. The last approach is the only solution. It is done by cultivating the counterparts of patience, tolerance and understanding. These are inter-related and mutually help each other.

Sublimation needs motivation. In other words, you need to love the ideal of what you want to cultivate. In the *Bible* one reads about do's and don'ts. It is more important to emphasise what one should do. This allows the positive energy of the mind to be strengthened. By stressing the don'ts, this strengthens negative energy. You should, of course, take into account what you should avoid doing but then turn your attention to what you should do.

The key to success practice is *abhyasa*. Patanjali, in his *Yoga Sutras*, insists upon it. Practice is the result of motivation, in other words of loving the ideal which underpins it. Then there needs to be talent, at least to some degree. Whether you have talent or not, you can only find out by trying. It is better not to set your goal too high but, rather, keep it to a reasonable level. The third requirement is effort. Make the best effort you can. Effort is to be combined with learning. Life should be an endless process of learning which carries on until one's very last day. This means to work hard.

The next requirement is to learn from one's mistakes. There is a saying that one should learn from other people's mistakes but one generally does not learn this way. One should learn from one's own mistakes. The foolish fail to learn from their mistakes. One only learns by trial and error.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

We return to the subject of ego. The next cause of stress is the problem of image, or vanity. In other words, one is preoccupied with how you are seen. You go through play-acting in order to be seen well. But the truth will come out sooner or later. A lady told me that her father was considered by others to be charming but that was only outside the home. His real nature showed indoors where there was no concern for image allowing him to behave according to his real character.

Another cause of stress is being consumed by desires. There is a difference between desire and need. Desire is fed by desire. The more you fulfil one desire, the more you want before falling prey to another. We should learn the limitation of our capacity and accept this rather than becoming frustrated. If we do not succeed in what we most wish, try something else to see if it is possible to succeed in that.

We desire something in order to feel fulfilled. Objects do not give fulfilment, rather the sense of the ego being satisfied by its possession. The ownership of a house does not give fulfilment, rather the harmonious relationship of those who live there which gives rise to a sense of belonging, acceptance, communication, understanding, respect and gratitude. Too much work does not give rise to stress if you love the ideal behind that work. What does give rise to stress is the need to do something you do not enjoy but are obliged to do.

That money is nothing is a hackneyed saying. It is patently false. Economic autonomy is basic to not compromising your values. Money gives the option for a better education, better health care and wide-ranging travel allowing one to learn from other people's cultures, as well as experiencing some audio-visual form of the arts if you have the talent.

Unhappiness is another cause of stress. This is mainly due to a poor relationship with someone with whom one shares one's home or place of work. You should be the first to smile rather than wait for the other person to smile. Be the first be considerate and then expect consideration. Be the first to sympathise and to understand. This is the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

Do not forget that there are people who are less fortunate, less talented and have fewer opportunities than you. If you are near them, they need your attention rather than criticism or, even worse, contempt. If you do not get along well with someone, cultivate understanding and tolerance and, as a last recourse, indifference.

The above points are basic to self-management in order to cope with stress.

APPENDIX 8 — KNOW THYSELF

By John-Paul II, from the Papal Encyclical, 'Fides et Ratio'.

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth, and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth, in a word, to know himself, so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fulness of truth about themselves.

In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded, as it must, within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness, with the question of the meaning of things and of their very existence becoming ever more pressing.

This is why all that is the object of our knowledge becomes a part of our life. The admonition, 'Know Yourself', was carved on the temple portal of Delphi, as testimony to a basic truth to be adopted as a minimal norm by those who seek to set themselves apart from the rest of creation as human beings, that is, as those who know themselves.

Moreover, a cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different parts of the world, with their different cultures, there arise at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life. Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going? Why is there evil? What is there after this life?

These are the questions which we find in the sacred writings of Israel, as also in the *Vedas* and the *Zenda Avesta*. We find them in the writings of Confucius and Lao Dze, and in the

preaching of the Tirthankaras and the Buddha. They appear in the poetry of Homer and in the tragedies of Euripides and in Sophocles, as they do in the philosophical writings of Plato and Aristotle. They are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which has always compelled the human heart. In fact, the answer given to these questions decides the direction which people seek to give to their lives.

Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth, so that their lives be ever more human. Among these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it.

ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy emerges, then, as one of the noblest human tasks. According to its Greek etymology, the term philosophy means love of wisdom. Born and nurtured when human beings first asked questions about the reason for things and their purpose, philosophy shows in different modes and forms that the desire for truth is part of human nature itself. It is an innate property of human reason to ask why things are as they are, even though the answers which gradually emerge are set within a horizon which reveals how the different human cultures are complementary.

Philosophy's powerful influence on the formation and development of the cultures of the West should not obscure the influence it has also had upon the ways of understanding existence found in the East. Every people have their own native and seminal wisdom which, as a true cultural treasure, tends to find voice and develop in forms which are genuinely philosophical. One example of this is the basic form of philosophical knowledge which is evident to this day in the postulates which inspire national and international legal systems in regulating the life of society.

Nevertheless, it is true that a single term conceals a variety of meanings. Hence the need for a preliminary clarification. Driven by the desire to discover the ultimate truth of existence, human beings ask to acquire those universal elements of knowledge which enable them to understand themselves better and to advance in their own self-realisation.

These fundamental elements of knowledge spring from the wonder awakened in them by the contemplation of creation. Human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny. Here begins, then,

the journey which will lead them to discover ever new frontiers of knowledge. Without wonder, men and women would lapse into deadening routine, and little by little would become incapable of a life which is genuinely personal.

Through philosophy's work, the ability to speculate which is proper to the human intellect, produces a rigorous mode of thought, and then in turn, through the logical coherence of the affirmations made and the organic unity of their content, it produces a systematic body of knowledge. In different cultural contexts and at different times, this process has yielded results which have produced genuine systems of thought.

Yet, often enough in history, this has brought with it the temptation to identify one single stream with the whole philosophy. In such cases, we are clearly dealing with a philosophical pride which seeks to present its own partial and imperfect view as the complete reading of all reality. In effect, every philosophical system, while it should always be respected in its wholeness, without any instrumentalisation, must still recognise the primacy of philosophical enquiry, from which it stems and which it ought loyally to serve.

Although times change and knowledge increases, it is possible to discern a core of philosophical insight within the history of thought as a whole. Consider, for example, the principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality, as well as the concept of the person as a free and intelligent subject, with the capacity to know God, truth and goodness. Consider as well certain fundamental moral norms which are shared by all.

These are among the indications that, beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an implicit philosophy, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way.

Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it: *orthos logos*, *recta ratio*.

On her part, the Church cannot but set great value upon reason's drive to attain goals which render people's lives ever more worthy. She sees in philosophy the way to come to know

fundamental truths about human life. At the same time, the Church considers philosophy an indispensable help for a deeper understanding of faith.

FAITH AND REASON

Therefore, following upon similar initiatives by my predecessors, I wish to reflect upon this special activity of human reason. I judge it necessary to do so because, at the present time in particular, the search for ultimate truth seems often to be neglected. Modern philosophy clearly has the great merit of focusing attention upon man. From this starting point, human reason with its many questions, has developed further its yearning to know more and to know it ever more deeply.

Yet, the positive results achieved must not obscure the fact that reason, in its one-sided concern to investigate human subjectivity, seems to have forgotten that men and women are always called to direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them.

This is to say that with the light of reason, human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to the end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it with the horizon of faith. Therefore, reason and faith cannot be separated without diminishing the capacity of men and women to know themselves, the world and God, in an appropriate way.

There is, thus, no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith. Each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action. The desire for knowledge is so great, and it works in such a way, that the human heart, despite its experience of insurmountable limitation, yearns for the infinite riches which lie beyond, knowing that there is to be found the satisfying answer to every question as yet unanswered.

In acting ethically, according to a free and rightly tuned will, a human sets foot upon the path to happiness and moves towards perfection. Here, too, it is a question of truth. It is this conviction which I stressed in my encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*: “There is no morality without freedom. Although each individual has a right to be respected in his own journey in search of the truth, there exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth and to adhere to it once it is known.”

It is an illusion to think that faith, tied to a weak reasoning, might be more penetrating. On the contrary, faith then runs the grave risk of withering into myth or superstition. By the same token, reason which is unrelated to an adult faith, is not prompted to turn its gaze to the newness and radicality of being.

Faith will, thus, be able to show fully the path to reason in a sincere search for truth. Although faith, a gift of God, is not based on reason, it can certainly not dispense with it. At the same time, it becomes apparent that reason needs to be reinforced by faith, in order to discover horizons it cannot reach on its own.

My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space, and would, therefore, acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for a liberation provides the context for a great metaphysical system.

CONCLUSION

A survey of the history of thought, especially in the West, shows clearly that the encounter between philosophy and theology and the exchange of their respective insights have contributed richly to the progress of humanity.

Precisely in the light of this consideration, and just as I have reaffirmed theology's duty to recover its true relationship with philosophy, I feel equally bound to stress how right it is that, for the benefit and development of human thought, philosophy too should recover its relationship with theology. In theology, philosophy will find not the thinking of a single person which, however rich and profound, still entails the limited perspective of an individual but the wealth of a communal reflection.

I appeal to philosophers, and to all teachers of philosophy, asking them to have the courage to recover, in the flow of an enduringly valid philosophical tradition, the range of authentic wisdom and truth, metaphysical truth included, which is proper to philosophical enquiry. Let them always strive for truth, alert to the good which truth contains. Then they will be able to formulate genuine ethics which humanity needs urgently at this particular time.

Finally, I cannot fail to address a word to scientists whose research offers an ever greater knowledge of the universe as a whole and of the incredibly rich array of its component parts, animate and inanimate, with their complex molecular structure. I would urge them to continue their efforts without ever abandoning the horizon within which scientific and technological achievements are wedded to the philosophical and ethical values which are the distinctive and indelible mark of a human being.

May Mary, seat of wisdom, be a sure haven for all who devote their lives to the search for wisdom.¹⁴

¹⁴ To celebrate Easter, the students of Swami Shivapremanandaji from his Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre in Buenos Aires, Argentina, selected the above excerpts from the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* of Pope John-Paul II, published by the Vatican in September 1998.

APPENDIX 9 — A WINDOW OF YOGA IN ...

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN ARGENTINA - I

By Ana Hosmann de Sarasin

In territory, Argentina is the eighth largest country in the world after India. Its 1,068,301 square miles of area compares to that of 94,249 square miles of the United Kingdom, the inhabitants being some 32 and 57 million, and the density about 30 and 600 persons per square mile respectively. Stretching from the tropical borders of Brazil and the uplands of Bolivia, above the latitude of Capricorn, all the way towards the Antarctic, the country has a wide range of climate. The southernmost town in the world is Ushuaia on 55S latitude. On the West, the lofty Andes demarcate the 2,800 miles of frontier with Chile. The northern border adjoins Bolivia, Paraguay and Brazil. On the East is Uruguay and the Atlantic Ocean, while on the South the Tierra del Fuego peninsula juts into the Antarctic Ocean.

The capital, Buenos Aires, is on the southern bank of the nearly 30 miles' wide River Plate, striding the same latitude as Adelaide, Australia. The climate is like that of Rome, hot and humid in the summer and cold and moist in the winter. One third of the country's population, some 10 million, live in Greater Buenos Aires, and in Montevideo and Santiago de Chile. The inhabitants are mostly of European origin, the majority being descendants of Italian and Spanish immigrants. The national language is Spanish, like the rest of South America with the exception of Brazil where Portuguese is spoken. At least 20% are Mestizos, that is mainly of Spanish origin mixed with Red Indians. Pure blooded Indians are few and located in the North or in Patagonia,

in the South. As in North America, there are no large or powerfully structured Red Indian communities, the Spanish conquistadors having caused their decimation and absorption.

At the beginning of this century there was a thriving British community of at least 100,000, mostly living in the Buenos Aires area. This number has now reduced to around 30,000. The British have left their legacy in a few fine schools, cricket, football, rugby and polo clubs, as well as some cultural institutions. In Patagonia, there is a large group of Welsh descendants who are generally sheep farmers. In the southern lake region, there are German, Swiss and Austrian communities, so too in and around Buenos Aires. The Jewish population is the largest in South America and next only to that of France and Britain, numbering some 400,000. Most are Ashkenazim with strong religious and cultural institutions. There are also immigrants from all parts of Europe, as also from the Middle East, especially from Lebanon, Japan, China and South Korea, but only a few thousand from the Indian subcontinent. Italian descendants comprise about 40% of the inhabitants, the next largest being Spanish, as in Uruguay.

The country wrested its independence from Spain in 1813, the mother country having been invaded by Napoleon and was therefore unable to put down the rebellion. Agricultural produce dominates the Argentine economy, although there is a large industrial sector led by automobile manufacturing. In grain and meat exports, our country competes with the USA, Canada and Australia, but only 39% of cultivable land is used, 61% not being utilised on account of the glut in the world market. Argentina can, indeed, be a future breadbasket for those countries suffering from an agricultural shortfall. Our land is also rich in mineral resources and just about self-sufficient in petroleum.

Since independence, we have had a tumultuous political history, alternating between weak democratic and moderately dictatorial governments. Since 1983, there has been political stability and the free market policy of the present government has arrested inflation and encouraged growth. We have a welfare state. As usual, the middle classes, claiming to be 80% of the population, grumble the most. There are many large pockets of poverty, but not as extreme as in many other South American countries. The Catholic church has widespread influence over society but there is complete freedom of worship for other faiths. The political changes did not affect the activities of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre*, although the followers of Hare Krishna and Jehovah Witnesses were banned by the military government.

Buenos Aires is a cosmopolitan city. In the newspapers one sees advertisements for more than two dozen cultural activities, including free public lectures on various topics ranging from nuclear science to Yoga philosophy which run every evening. The *Colon Theatre* is the most prestigious in South America and plays host to world famous artistic ensembles such as the *New York Philharmonic Orchestra*, as well as the *Bolshoi* and *Kirov* (now *Marinsky*) ballet companies who regularly perform there. It is also interesting to note that percentage wise, relative to the number of inhabitants, Buenos Aires has the largest number of psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in the world and a district is unofficially known as Villa Freud. Since the Second World War, British commercial influence has declined, even though Harrod's continues to be the largest department store in the country.

ABOUT MYSELF

After acquainting readers with my native land, I shall now offer a few words about my own background and that of Yoga in Argentina. My father was a fourth generation German and country squire. Mother was born in St Petersburg, of Swiss-German parents who moved the family to Switzerland after the Bolshevik revolution. As a young woman, she migrated to Argentina and married my father. I was born in Buenos Aires on Easter Sunday 70 years ago, the first of their four children. Although my parents were Protestant and respected other faiths, religion did not play a significant role in our family. I was sent to a Catholic school belonging to the order of St Vincent de Paul, whose headmistress was a German. It is there that my incipient spiritual longings were stirred by the candlelit ceremonies redolent with incense and melodiously moving chants.

My childhood was a pleasant one on my father's estate, not too far from the Atlantic Ocean resort of Mar del Plata. I studied music and languages and married Max Sarasin, a Swiss German, who had migrated to Argentina. We had a loving relationship until death parted us 26 years later. Like my parents, he was a Protestant and equally ecumenical in spirit, but we were not churchgoers. My aunt, who had a cottage in Capri off Naples, introduced me to the works of Carl Gustav Jung. She sparked my interest in the arts and literature. Psychology prepared me for Yoga.

In 1961 and early 1962, Ulrich Hartschuh, a Uruguayan German from Montevideo, organised a few meetings in Buenos Aires to which he invited Swami Shivapremanandaji who

was at that time staying in Milwaukee, USA. Along with my husband and Renate Gradenwitz, I was among the participants at the meetings which resulted in Swamiji's arrival in June 1962. At that time, my husband and I were just curious about Yoga. We did not know what a *swami* meant. After putting Swamiji up in a hotel for some time, we had the honour of hosting him as our house guest for two months. His presence, classes and public lectures, made a deep impression on both of us although we took our time to come close to him.

In 1932, a group of Argentinians, mainly from the literary scene, invited a spiritual teacher from India, the first ever to come to our country. He was Swami Vijayananda of the *Ramakrishna* order who pioneered the knowledge of Yoga in South America, even though at that time only a few people were interested. His work was restricted to the Buenos Aires area, but he also periodically visited Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo. Swami Vijayananda founded the *Ramakrishna Ashram* in the suburban town of Bellavista where he passed away 32 years later in 1974, at a ripe old age. Like all swamis of the *Ramakrishna* order, he did not teach *Hatha Yoga*, but was the first to introduce *Raja Yoga* and *Vedanta* philosophy in Argentina, even if within limited circles. He also translated some of the works of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and wrote a few texts himself in Spanish. Since the late 1950s, there have been a number of books available on various branches of Yoga but *Hatha Yoga* is of most interest to people.

When Swami Shivapremanandaji came to Argentina in 1962, there were only two or three small Yoga groups in town teaching *Hatha Yoga* and holding lecture and meditation meetings, but they were not known for their erudition or spiritual depth. In fact, my tentative contacts with them made me withdraw due to the neurotic behaviour, backbiting and in-fighting I found there. On a sunny, winter afternoon, on 24 June 1962, a large group headed by a reception committee received Swami Shivapremanandaji at Ezeiza airport. From the very same evening, Swamiji started giving public lectures and philosophy and meditation classes on an almost daily basis throughout his three-month stay in Buenos Aires. On 17 July, he founded the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* of Argentina. It was a very special day, dedicated to spiritual teachers. At that time, we did not know what *Gurupurnima* meant. Yoga was so very new to us.

THIRTY YEARS OF YOGA

As we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of our Centre, we look back upon all these years with nostalgia. Years of effort from so many wonderful souls, several dozens of them, headed by Swamiji, his constant coming and going to keep their enthusiasm alive and the light of aspiration burning and their love for him, as his for them, have made the Centre a spiritual home for so many of us. Some are no longer present, my husband included, who passed away at the age of 61 in 1975. The loving memories of many of them warm our hearts and the ethos of their spirit soundlessly resonates, in the ambience of the Centre. We had, of course, our share of disappointments. Otherwise, that would be too unrealistic.

We functioned at first on a small scale in rented accommodation until, in 1968, we bought our flat in the town centre where our activities rapidly grew. The Centre's main building was completed in 1983, where most of the work is concentrated. The active membership hovers around 900, the majority attending twice a week the 27 *Hatha Yoga* classes which are available. The *satsanga* on Saturdays draws a good number, and so too Swamiji's lectures on Wednesdays.

The Indian embassy in Buenos Aires has always given their wholehearted support and encouragement, sponsoring many of our activities and jointly holding some. As a founding member, my husband served the Centre in a variety of capacities, as treasurer, vice-president and president. He was also a *Hatha Yoga* instructor and council member, the Centre having gained its charitable status in 1964. At present, I am the vice-president and take care of public relations and organise Swamiji's programmes. I enjoy giving *Hatha Yoga* classes and continue to be a council member. Yoga Centres have mushroomed in our country since the 1970s. There are nearly 50 in Buenos Aires alone. Most are run on a commercial basis. As with Swamiji's other Centres, all our staff members work on a voluntary basis.

Over the past 30 years, thousands of students have passed through our doors. To hundreds of them it has been a transformative experience to come into contact with Swami Shivapremanandaji. We welcome people from all backgrounds. As often happens in the West, most are mainly interested in *Hatha Yoga* but some also come to listen to Swamiji out of curiosity and to talk to him due to some transitory psychological need. However, I can honestly say that to many others who have got to know Swamiji well and who have been regular attendees at the Centre, they have found something beautiful, consoling and healing, fulfilling and enlightening. This happened to me when I met with Swamiji soon after my father passed away.

Father, along with my husband, were closest to me. I know that Swamiji has filled a void in the lives of many.

Serving at the Centre has been a remarkable experience for most of us, not only educationally but also helping us to know more about ourselves. We have our share of excitement and tiffs, warm rapport and closeness, as in any family or community setting. The Centre is a home like any solidly structured hearth, with its share of differences of personality, ego posturing, ups and downs in mood, admirable spirit of service, deep friendship and warm camaraderie. Yet we all hang on together for the sake of our ideals, some working like industrious ants, some inclined to bovine repose, some painstakingly meticulous and dutiful, and some excelling eels at their ability to slip from responsibility. Yoga has been a marvellously enriching experience in my life to which I owe my physical, psychological and spiritual well-being. Now I will ask my good friend and colleague, Oscar Cabos, to relate his experiences.

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN ARGENTINA - II

By Oscar Cabos

My interest in Yoga began due to a health problem. I suffered from respiratory problems from childhood. A friend of mine recommended a book, '*Science of Pranayama*', by Ramacharaka. This book not only changed my breathing habits but awakened in me a longing to search out a higher meaning in life. I also became interested in naturopathy and organically grown food, an interest I still maintain. I was then in my mid-twenties. The practice of *Hatha Yoga* improved my health but did not fill an inner, spiritual void of which I became increasingly aware.

My parents were of Spanish ancestry. They were both loving and caring. I grew up in a Catholic culture, without being overly influenced by religious dogma. We were not a church-going family. From my parents I learned responsibility, wishing to take care of those who were sick, and also a spirit of service and a sense of duty. However, there was something missing in my life. This made me join, successively, two Yoga Centres in Buenos Aires for short periods of time. But I did not find what I had been looking for, a feeling of spiritual fulfilment. In 1961, I attended three lectures by Swami Chidanandaji when he visited Buenos Aires from Montevideo.

In 1962, Swami Shivapremanandaji came to Argentina for the first time. Destiny works in strange ways. I attended all his lectures and became a founding member of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* which he inaugurated on 17 July 1962. Since that moment, I have never separated from him spiritually. I am not a religious man and am aware of Swamiji's innate distaste for hyperbole. He says, "No one is good enough to be another's spiritual master" and likes to spell words such as 'master' with a small 'm' and *guru* with a small 'g'. He would like to do the same even with the word, God, but does not do so in order not to offend the religious-minded. However, I wish to be forgiven when expressing my sincere feeling in saying that, since I have known Swamiji, his life has become my life and that it is through him that I have found a sense of purpose which I did not have before.

In the early years, Swamiji was disinclined to suffer fools, much less gladly. Nowadays, he does so patiently. To me he is a model of humility, even if at times expressing himself energetically. He has made me understand how few material things are needed to live happily and to enjoy each moment without unnecessary anxiety and self-pity, enjoying inner spiritual strength cultivated through a living faith in spiritual ideals and the practice of selfless service. Swamiji himself is a true image of his teachings, although often self-deprecating. With a few simple words, he used to put an end to the worries that had a short while earlier kept me awake all night. He has a great capacity to simplify complex issues and find solutions to problems which seemed to have no answers. Swamiji has taught me to live as best I can without complaints, to think and act positively, and to consider life to be a blessing rather than something to grumble about.

I have been treasurer and assistant treasurer of the Centre and also a council member. Before that, I was joint secretary. I am also an instructor of *Hatha Yoga* and serve on the building construction committee. Earlier, I had a small business and now occasionally visit the Buenos Aires stock exchange. I have no financial worries, having learned when enough is enough. I am fortunate to have the three boons I have read about in some Yoga books: to be born a human being, to have spiritual aspiration and to have found a real teacher.

From Swamiji I have learned the relativity of things in determining what is more important and what is less, never being over confident that I am a possessor of the truth, to realise that my understanding can always be improved and never lose the capacity to wonder, as a child does, and to learn anew. By his side, I have discovered hidden traits of my character

which I have been able to strengthen as well as to correct. Each time Swamiji stays among us, he brings peace and solace and renews our spiritual aspirations, as well as the wish that he never leaves us, for that would be as if peace, simplicity and transparency were leaving us too.

Swamiji is one of those people who practise what they teach, although he reveals a cynical streak when he says, “A spiritual teacher is, indeed, great if he practises some 50% of what he preaches, for most of them this is only 10%”. He speaks from his heart and is not impressed by titles, social standing or material riches. What he cherishes most in us are integrity, compassion, selflessness, constancy, positive thinking and broad-mindedness. He may consider these lines of mine rather exuberantly Latinate, but they truly represent what I have learned from Yoga for more than 30 years. To speak of Yoga is to speak of my teacher who has certainly brought meaning to my life which is like kindling the sacred fire in me.

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN ARGENTINA - III

By Salomon Birman

My parents were of Jewish origin. As children they migrated to Argentina with their parents from what is now Moldova and was at that time known as Bessarabia. They grew up here under the influence of the local Catholic culture, but respected the religious tradition of their parents, even though they did not practise their religion or go to a synagogue. I was brought up in the same way, being rather ignorant of the *Old Testament*. However, I held in deep respect the holy days of Judaism.

My introduction to India was through a book of Victoria Ocampo who had translated into Spanish some of the writings of Rabindranath Tagore. Mircea Eliade's book, '*Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*', along with some articles by Aurobindo and Yogananda, stimulated my interest in Yoga. In 1968, I visited India as a tourist, more out of curiosity to know the culture of the land. Through the recommendation of some friends, I joined the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Buenos Aires more than 23 years ago and began to attend the *Hatha Yoga* classes. When Swami Shivapremanandaji arrived, I attended his philosophy classes and *satsanga* which appealed to me so much by their quality and clarity that, in the course of time, I became a staff member.

I am a married businessman and we have two grown up children who have their own families. My wife and I are very fond of our grandchildren. I have asked myself several times why I am involved in Yoga and serving the Centre. The pure and simple answer has invariably been that it does me a lot of good. The teachings of Swamiji have brought me peace and have taught me to be more tolerant of and to love others. They have inspired in me the spirit of *Karma Yoga*. What has been particularly important to me was that they have made me study my own religion in order to find my spiritual roots.

Having served as treasurer of the Centre, I am at present its joint secretary, while continuing to be a council member. I am also an instructor of *Hatha Yoga* and a desk secretary. Swamiji has taught us that no work is too low, relative to one's position in life or in an organisation. My professional background was in air-conditioning large buildings, and I had the honour of supervising the construction of the Centre's main building, a role I am still fulfilling in the continuation of its annexe. Although professionally retired, I also help one of my sons in his computer business. My association with Swamiji and the Centre has made my life more complete. I understand the world much better than before and am able to handle the problems that arise with inner strength and balance. As Patanjali says, Yoga is after all a state of inner balance and fulfilment.

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN ARGENTINA - IV

By Mercedes von Pieschel

When I was 14 years old in 1928, I chanced upon a book written by Swami Sivananda, '*Practice of Yoga*', his very first. I was then a student in one of the best British schools in Argentina. Having been brought up in a Catholic family, the book introduced me to a wider horizon of thinking. My father was a well-known architect of Spanish descent and a personal friend of Le Corbusier. Mother's parents were French and they drew their inspiration from St Vincent de Paul and were dedicated to the service of the poor.

My father constantly moved his family around because of his work with the result that I grew up with no childhood friends. That inner solitude in early life may have contributed to my

coming to Yoga later in life. Meanwhile, Mahatma Gandhi entered my life. Before the Second World War, the British empire was the most powerful in the world. I thought that Gandhi's non-violent means of obtaining India's independence was fabulous, and of which Jesus Christ would have heartily approved. Since then, I have held him and the mysterious land, India, which gave him birth in the highest esteem. Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Buenos Aires sometime in the 1930s, invited by a great dame of letters, the late Victoria Ocampo, made quite a sensation in the Argentine literary circles. She later translated some of his works.

In the course of time, I married a German and we had four children who all have their own families. In 1965, I was passing through a difficult time when father was on his deathbed. Being very close to him, it was painful for me to see him suffer. Swami Shivapremanandaji was then visiting Buenos Aires and I started to go to his lectures and philosophy classes. It is said that when the *chela* (disciple) is ready, the *guru* appears, although Swamiji does not initiate anyone nor calls himself a *guru* of anyone. Instead, he wryly says, "Even supposing the *chela* is ready, it is not sure that the *guru* will appear. Instead of waiting forever, the *chela* should seek out a suitable teacher to learn from".

Since meeting Swamiji, Yoga has helped me enormously through life. The construction of the main building of the Centre was completed in 1983. Soon after, I became the first resident there. My stay has been very rewarding and happy. I have peace and the time to read and practise Swamiji's teachings. Now, at the age of 78, in spite of two successive hip operations, I continue to be an instructor of *Hatha Yoga*. The surgeons at the local British hospital and my family and friends were astonished at how rapidly I recovered and started moving around in just a few days and resumed giving classes, thanks to my regular practice of Yoga. I am also a member of the Centre's finance committee.

There are, of course, many different ways of teaching Yoga, in both its physical and spiritual aspects. However, I have always felt that Swamiji's way is what has helped and taught me the most to find my path, although I know that I have a lot to learn philosophically and in doing my *Karma Yoga* more efficiently. Living in the Centre, I became more aware of myself. Having to cope with the human side of my fellow staff members has been an education in itself. Before, I used to judge people by their formal educational background rather than by the values that shaped their character. As Swamiji says, "Knowledge is not the determining factor of a person's culture but, rather, their behaviour".

To me, along with the rest of the staff, the Centre offers a great opportunity for self-development. Everyone is a voluntary worker, with no risk of losing an income, which puts our egos to greater test. A new skin is laid upon thinner skins without becoming insensitive, and we learn to understand better each other's points of view, instead of imposing our own. I find extraordinary the way Swamiji has organised the Centre and the line of his teachings and consider myself to be very fortunate to be a part of it. We have the maximum autonomy of living our lives, experimenting with and finding our truths, and being creative with our teaching while following the broad outlines he has laid down.

Swamiji says, "Each of us should grow according to the law of our own spiritual growth and through our individual effort in the line of our best understanding. A human being is not like a clod of earth to be kneaded into shape by the superimposition of a religious or political ideology, neither by a *guru*, nor a messiah. One can only inspire the heart and mind by the purity of aspiration and clarity of reason, so that the individual may learn to choose, be personally responsible and walk his or her own path, and society may do so by consensus". To communicate with students while teaching a class the feeling of mutual affection and understanding has been a moving experience in my life. What greater reward can one expect at my age than to be active and useful and to be loved?

HOW I CAME TO YOGA

By Renate Rikke Maria Gradenwitz

I was born in Hamburg of a German father and a Norwegian mother. Father was a Martinet, and mother oozed with warmth. I had rather a strict Lutheran upbringing. When I was a child, Hitler came to power. My parents were quickly disillusioned by the dangerous extremism of his fascist and racist ideology. We were an international family. Mother was courageous and outspoken, which were perilous traits under Nazi rule. As a child I was deeply scarred by the unsettled times in which I grew up. That may have unconsciously planted in me the seeds of spiritual search, by which I do not mean religious beliefs, that unfolded later in life.

In Hamburg, I went to a private school. Religion was a part of its curriculum, which bored me. Nazi fanaticism, like an octopus, grabbed all aspects of German society, including our school, which bewildered me. Father had been doing business in Argentina. He happened to be there when the war broke out. Mother followed him sometime later. I was at that time in a finishing school in the French part of Switzerland. Theatre interested me. While going to a commercial school in Basel during the war to prepare for a career, I took acting lessons. Father died in an accident in Buenos Aires and, as mother felt lonely in a foreign land, I migrated to Argentina in 1947 to be with her for some time.

Feeling somewhat uprooted and pulled between mother's Norwegian and father's German roots, and having to adjust to life in Switzerland and then Argentina, it was only to be expected that questions would arise such as: where do I really come from, who am I, where am I going, and what is the meaning of it all? Yet all these questions were not deep enough to bring me to search for higher values. I lived a normal, worldly life with its ups and downs, hopes and frustrations, pleasures and disappointments. In 1958, while staying in Switzerland, I met a Yoga student. I had already read a few books on Yoga and began to get interested, first of all in *Hatha Yoga* and then mainly in *Vedanta* philosophy.

That year, I started to go to Selvarajan Yesudian's Yoga School in Zurich and to his Yoga camp in Caslano near Lugano. He had a calm disposition and I liked his simplicity and stories about India. Selvarajan had pioneered the teachings of Yoga in Switzerland since 1948. These were my first steps on a long path which became more and more a part of myself. It was an inner need, a search without being able to say what it was that moved me. It was something that somehow had to happen which pushed me forward, without being able to explain why. I returned to Buenos Aires in 1959 to nurse my mother who was very ill and continued with my interest in Yoga, reading a lot of books on the subject. In those days, I thought that I could answer all kinds of questions, having quite firm ideas and preconceptions about the teachings of Yoga, despite doubts and prejudices.

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Here in Buenos Aires, in 1961, I joined a Yoga Centre but was disappointed. The same year, I listened to a couple of lectures by Swami Chidanandaji. The following year, Swami Shivapremanandaji came and inaugurated the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* and I became one

of its founding members. A managing committee had already been formed, inspired by Ulrich Hartschub of Montevideo. His enthusiasm was infectious. I was also charmed by its secretary, Marina Gonzalez del Campo. I became her friend. In 1962, Swami Shivapremanandaji did not speak Spanish and I interpreted nearly all his lectures and classes. At first, I did not realise that the longer I listened to him, the more I became aware of just how little I knew, that a revealed truth is only part of the truth and that one needs to seek out the rest for oneself, stretching into the infinite. As such, a spiritual journey is so very personal, so very private and so full of trials and errors.

I have now known Swamiji for more than 30 years. From our very first encounter, I have never been separated from him spiritually, nor from the Centre that he founded. In due course, I passed through various roles such as desk secretary, instructor of *Hatha Yoga*, editor of the Centre's bulletin, its accountant and Swamiji's housekeeper. Now, having retired from a multinational German company, I continue to be the administrator of the Centre as its general secretary, while cooking for Swamiji when he is with us. Yet, as Swamiji would say, everyone has a right to think and believe and express as one chooses. "Truth is first of all *veritas* which has to be verified by evidence and its consequences. Then the dimensions of truth have to be widened through spiritual search, deepened by self-realisation, which is an infinite process".

Swamiji has awakened in us the hunger for learning, advising us that no one can reveal to us the truth but can only speak about it in the light of his or her realisation. He would tell us how walking the spiritual path is totally private and personal and should be spoken of as little as possible. When I read fantastic stories about yogic experiences, I wonder how much self-promotion is involved, knowing full well that a deeply spiritual experience at once becomes sacred and inexpressible. I have read that Yoga is not about going somewhere, for you are already there; that being is not becoming, for you already are. That is all well and good for a saint to say, but what about us, ordinary souls, knowing so little about the various layers of our *persona*? And what about an individual who is wrapped up in a spiritual ego and who is concerned with promoting a self-important role, well equipped with cameras and tape recorders? Swamiji jokes, "Blessed Immortal Self, you are fired; you need not bother to come back to the ashram, thy own Self."

REALITY AND ILLUSION

Do we really learn by the *neti-neti* (not this, not this) doctrine? It is like emptying the ocean with a blade of grass until one finds the truth. This is too depressing a goal, for when would I finish emptying the ocean? Discarding and discarding the layers of superimposition, what guarantee is there that what reveals itself at last will be the truth? Deep down I know, of course, that I am a soul, the spiritual content of which is, as Swamiji would say, “transcendental love and truth, beauty and goodness, peace and harmony, purity of heart and clarity of wisdom.” But I also know that I am a body composed of, and sustained by, its primordial instincts in my unconscious, that I am a mind upon which layers upon layers of my personality have formed within my subconscious since the time my mother brought me into this world. To negate them would be hypocritical. Swamiji says:

“We are a contradiction unto ourselves. We are both spirit and matter, light and shadow. The pure light of our soul is veiled by many layers of our personality, revealing it in various hues according to their transparency, sometimes obscuring it, sometimes allowing a facet to shine through. We are in this world to cleanse these layers, not to deny them by fiat, to harmonise and sublimate them with the help of the inner light, not to repress them and try to atrophy them. Until the day we die, we will be both spirit and body, the mind serving as a bridge between the two. We are happy when the consciousness is closer to the spirit, in and through and beyond our relationship with others. We are unhappy when it suffocates inside the ego in the relativity of its feedback from others or lack of such feedback.”

There was no conflict in my coming to Yoga on account of my cultural background. Both my parents were a product of the age of reason, with a highly developed moral sense. To the contrary, it was due to many unanswered questions that I came to Yoga. At first, Yoga was a means to better health, to be more self-confident and to do well in material and professional life. It did not represent a spiritual goal until I met Swamiji, and then that goal meant how could I be a better human being and how could I learn to love? Infinite love and God became synonymous to me. Earlier, I could not cope with the injustices of birth, some having more advantages than others, some wicked people having better luck than others who were decent and struggling to be fair and virtuous.

I found the theory of reincarnation to be a better alternative to the theory of only being given the chance of a single lifetime in which to deserve eternal heaven or hell. I could not cope

with the idea that there was only one valid religion, only one gospel truth, and that only by believing in it could one be saved. What about the thousands of millions of human beings who did not share that truth? Is it not egomaniacal to think that they are lost? The spirit of reconciliation in Yoga and its philosophical and religious broadmindedness drew me to it.

On the other hand, harping on about the need to be free from the cycle of birth and death, that life on earth is unreal, that the world is an illusion and all such mealy-mouthed assertions, leave me cold. It all sounds so hypocritical and patently illogical. As Swamiji says, “We cannot understand the world if we reject and curse it. We cannot learn from the mistakes of a past life because their memory is not carried over to the present life. We can only learn from what we do now and what we remember.” Rationalisation about the inequality and inequity in life through the theory of reincarnation brought me peace. I learned that I could improve myself here only by regarding the world as a reality. There are, of course, higher and lesser realities, but one can only cope with, and be responsible for, what is tangible. Swamiji says, “To regard this world as an illusion is like brushing the dirt under the carpet, not cleaning it.”

SHAPING OUR BELIEFS

So, I was indeed searching for a teacher who would not fill my head with fantastic ideas for daydreaming, nor tempt me with the promise of freeze-dried illumination such as attaining *samadhi* in six months, but would make me face myself as I am through the light of my higher self. In Swamiji I found such a teacher who taught us that we were not created in the image of God but with the potential rudiments in the form of spiritual longing, and that our happiness lay in realising this longing through our relationship with others and identifying with our inner self which has yet to be awakened.

In my Christian background, I was told to believe in what the scriptures said, in other words I was taught to accept without questioning. From Swamiji I learned; “Believing is not conforming. You can really accept and assimilate only what you know. To know is to search. Without searching, you cannot know what you are asked to believe to be true or not.” My religion taught me to accept suffering as a means of purification, that the poor are worthy of heaven, while the rich are not. I have always rebelled against such ideas. Then I found my peace in Swamiji’s sayings:

“Suffering by itself does not purify. Otherwise, the majority of us would become saints. Only when we are willing to correct the cause of suffering can we learn from it, and by sharing the suffering of those while helping to alleviate it, we purify ourselves. When suffering is prolonged, we become anaesthetised to it and, therefore, cannot learn from it. Overcoming suffering is the goal and only when suffering cannot be avoided, should we accept it stoically.

Poverty is degrading and dependence demeaning. Economic freedom is the first freedom because it gives one the freedom of choice, and autonomy. Money is not the root cause of all evil, but attachment to it can lead to a great deal of evil. Poverty and wealth can both be bondages from which we should try to free ourselves. It is not true that the poor will sail to heaven through the eye of the needle of misfortune and the rich will stay behind with the camels.”

I have learned to accept life as a blessing because, in spite of my lower self, Swamiji has awakened in me the hunger for higher values. In spite of the dark hours, the moments of doubt, I have the urge to go on, for life has many more beautiful hues than ugly ones. Maybe that is what faith means: faith in ourselves and faith in God. Swamiji has deeply influenced my vision of God, even if it is only a faint glimpse of what God might be in the light of spiritual aspiration.

From time to time, I have the urge to run away from it all, from God, from Yoga and the Centre, and let my hair down, and be my worldly self. Is there anything wrong in this? I do not think so, as long as I am not harming anyone or acting unethically. In fact, I enjoy being with my non-Yoga friends who live a normal, worldly life, without a thought about God entering their heads. I enjoy going to the theatre and having dinner with them. I enjoy going to the beach, to the fjords and mountains, and visiting my classmates in Germany, as well as relatives and friends in Norway and Switzerland. Swamiji approved of this as a part of life, just as healthy as any other, so long as we do not forget our basic spiritual values. I have no problem in maintaining both.

I cannot stand overt spirituality just as I dislike crash courses in Yoga or using terms such as, ‘having a good work out’ in *Hatha Yoga*. Levitation, reading others’ minds, and claims that a half hour’s daily meditation will change one’s entire life, with a promise of salvation, repel me. Swamiji says that, there being so much unhappiness in life, spiritual teachers should never be ‘merchants in human misery’ (his words), that they should be all the more responsible due to the gullibility of people. I have seen how false overt humility is and the supposed holiness of some swamis or spiritual teachers.

I have now turned 70 (in 1992) and accept life as it comes, neither feeling burdened by it, nor being too light-hearted about it either. Swamiji has taught us to keep our feet firmly planted on earth with our heads looking upward towards the sky, losing neither ground nor sky, realism nor idealism. I can once again say that life is a blessing. How has Yoga helped me in daily life? It is like the air I need to breathe, like the water I drink. It has become a part of me, sustaining my faith, my hopes, my ideals, giving me self-confidence and peace by substantiating these ideals, and encouraging me ever onward while keeping my lower self on a tight leash. I know that Yoga is there, even when I feel like running away from it all, because I know that I cannot simply run away from myself.

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN URUGUAY - I

By Maria Caffera

Uruguay is a relatively small country, with its northern frontier along the southernmost state of Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, and the western border along the eastern province of Argentina, Entre Rios. On the south and east lies the Atlantic Ocean into which the River Plate flows. In size, it is nearly three-quarters the size of the United Kingdom, but it has a much smaller population, this being a shade less than three million. The land is very fertile. Agricultural and rolling grassland stretch endlessly, almost completely empty and streaked with a few low-slung mountain ranges.

The industry is mainly agronomic: grain producing and cattle raising, as well as sheep farming, its woollen and leather products being amongst the finest. The second largest industry is tourism, thanks to the hundreds of kilometres of beaches along the South Atlantic coast with their fine-grained white sands which are free from rocky outcrops. Tourists come mainly from Argentina, with a few from Brazil and wealthy visitors from North America and Europe.

The climate is temperate, rather like the Cape Province in South Africa or California, but with an abundant rainfall and plenty of sunshine. The capital, Montevideo, where one-third of the population lives, is exactly on the same latitude as Adelaide or one degree south of Sydney or Cape Town. Most of the population are of European descent, the Spanish conquistadors having

virtually and swiftly exterminated the sparse Red Indian settlements. Unlike other South American countries, there are no *mestizos*.

Only one percent of the population are of African origin, Montevideo having been a slave market town during Spanish rule. There is no racial discrimination in our country. Some 80% of the people are of Italian and Spanish origin, the rest coming from other European countries, including a tiny proportion from Britain. All groups have inter-married, while keeping their cultural roots alive. For example, the Germans have a Goethe Institute, the French an Alliance Francaise, while the British run some excellent schools through the British Council. There are no Asian immigrants. It might be interesting for British readers to know that, for nearly 70 years from the 1880s, the United Kingdom was the largest trading partner of Uruguay, until displaced by the United States around 1950.

DEMOCRATIC TRADITION

One does not see the extremes of wealth or poverty in Uruguay as one does in Brazil and most other South American countries. About 80% of the population is middle class. The lifestyle is easy-going and rather Mediterranean, with a resigned idea that tomorrow will take care of itself. The shops and offices warm up only after 10 o'clock but do not close in the afternoon. The habit of siesta is fast disappearing. The language is Spanish, spoken with a River Plate accent. The upper class imitates the French intellectually, while the general population looks to Italy and Spain for their cultural identity. However, the people of Uruguay are not gay like the Italians, nor proud like the Spanish, but rather sombre and modest. They are a friendly, hospitable people, with a *laissez-faire* attitude.

After achieving statehood in the early nineteenth century, followed by a few years of civil war, the country has enjoyed democratic forms of government, except for a decade of military rule brought about by left wing terrorists in the 1970s. Uruguay is probably the first country in South America to separate the Catholic Church from the state at the beginning of the century. Two centre parties, both having centre-left and centre-right wings, take turns in governing the country, and hold vociferous parliamentary debates. The two Houses of Congress and the presidential form of government are modelled on the United States. Like the United Kingdom, we have a welfare state.

Generally, the interest in India was, and still is, limited to a tiny group of people looking for an other-worldly attitude to life through the writings of Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, amongst others. A stretch of embankment in Montevideo is named Rambha Mahatma Gandhi. Some works of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda have been available since the 1930s, following on from works by the *Theosophical Society*. Uruguay had its first direct contact with an Indian philosopher when J. Krishnamurti visited Montevideo in the mid-1930s.

A few books on *Hatha Yoga*, including one by Swami Sivananda, began to circulate from the late 1950s. One of those interested in this branch of Yoga was Mateo Magarinos, then a junior minister in the Foreign Office. One day in 1961, he wrote extra-officially to his friend Orlando Nadal, then our ambassador in New Delhi, inquiring as to the feasibility of an Indian teacher visiting Uruguay for a time. This is how Swami Chidananda came to Montevideo later that year. He stayed for four months and gave almost daily classes on different branches of Yoga during this time. A small group formed around him and, in July 1961, he laid the metaphorical foundation stone of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Uruguay.

Our country was very lucky to have a visit from Swami Chidananda. He made a very good impression and inspired a few souls by his personal example of holiness. Among these was German born officer of the IBM (Uruguay), Ulrich Hartshchuh. Our *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* exists today thanks to Ulrich's boundless enthusiasm, childlike devotion to yogic ideals, untiring selfless service and organisational skill. After Swami Chidananda left in October 1961, Swami Shivapremananda came one year later and also stayed for four months. Although then resident in the United States, Swamiji assumed the leadership of the Centre and began to come for short stays at first and then for longer residence. It was his constant attention to keeping the spiritual ideals alive, his continuous selfless service and inspiring teachings, that made the Centre what it is today: a well-established, highly prestigious institution which is the largest of its kind in the country.

ULRICH HARTSCHUH & OTHER FOUNDING MEMBERS

Swamiji was especially fond of Ulrich Hartschuh who unfortunately died of a heart attack at the age of 57 in 1983. All those who came into contact with him, including myself, were inspired by his example of what a *Karma Yogi* is like. Robert Dix, also German-born and then an officer of the Hoechst (Uruguay), succeeded Ulrich as the Centre's administrator. Few could match him in

the output of hours of dedicated service he gave. He also served as Swamiji's secretary. His calm disposition was admirable and his goodness of heart, unforgettable. Swamiji held him in deep affection and used to say that it was "Robert's sweat that built the Centre". His wife, Lotti, was also a prominent worker. Swamiji's book, 'Ila Inmanencia de to Eterno', was produced by her. It consisted of a series of class-talks in English which she transcribed, edited and translated into Spanish.

Several others helped to form the Centre thanks to years of exemplary service. Most prominent amongst these was Margarita Mendoza who passed away at the age of 82, in 1988. Another colleague whom I would like to mention was Richard Brown, grandson of a British admiral, who died while quite young in an accident in 1971. I succeeded him as the Centre's treasurer. It would be fair to say that the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* pioneered the teachings of Yoga in Uruguay. Since the 1970s, more than two dozen other groups, including one known as the *Asociacion Sivananda de Yoga*, were set up mostly in Montevideo, operating for private gain. Many of their teachers have been former alumni of our Centre. As of February 1992, our active membership has been 631, that is counting those who come twice a week on average to participate in any of the 20 weekly *Hatha Yoga* classes or philosophy and meditation *satsanga* (prayer meetings).

I came to Yoga in 1965 after reading Swami Shivapremanandaji's book, 'Platicas sobre Yoga' (Talks on Yoga), the first of his works published in Spanish that year. At first, I knew nothing about Yoga. Although my long-time interest was in athletics, it was the spiritual teachings in this book which stimulated my interest in the subject. In our country, however, Yoga is thought of mainly in terms of a series of physical exercises. I immediately recognised their benefit in helping to calm the mind and relax the nerves. I needed both in my profession as a chartered accountant which required constant concentration.

It is now more than a quarter of a century since I have been associated with the Centre, firstly as a student and then as a staff member, mainly taking care of the accounts, which I still do, and later as an instructor of *Hatha Yoga* and, finally, as administrator with the title of vice-president. I also guide the philosophy and meditation meetings during Swamiji's absence. After I retired as a director in the *Uruguayan Ministry of Economy and Finance*, I have been very happy to serve as a full-time worker at the Centre.

My parents were descended from Italian immigrants, so too those of my wife. My upbringing was secular and liberal, with the emphasis on self-effort, respect for the law and one's teachers, decency and affection within the family without being demonstrative, and with an overall sense of duty and responsibility. The practice of the Catholic religion in my family consisted of baptism, confirmation, church marriage and little else. But I was taught to respect spiritual values and not to be dogmatic. With such a background, coming to Yoga did not cause any conflict in me.

Being trained as an accountant, I found Swami Shivapremanandaji's teachings to be precise and pragmatic. His idealism fitted in well with my upbringing and I considered myself very fortunate to have encountered his interpretation of Yoga. It became a positive influence in my life and my work at the Centre has given me much happiness. In Yoga I found a great realism which helped me to understand human nature, to find peace within myself, to cope with the problems of life with greater equanimity, to improve my conduct, and to deepen my ties of love and friendship. What more can one ask for from a transitory life of light and shadow?

YOGA IN URUGUAY - II

By Humberto Cairolí

I came to Yoga on medical advice about 20 years ago when I was over 40 and suffered from chronic migraine. According to my doctor, the condition of my spine was like that of an old man. The medications prescribed gave me only temporary relief and caused gastritis. My prognosis was not very encouraging. One day, my doctor said, "Why not try Yoga?" I had then a very superficial understanding of Yoga which conjured up an image of a man standing on his head or sitting cross-legged with closed eyes.

The same doctor recommended that I go to the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Montevideo. Thus, more out of curiosity than conviction, I started to practise *Hatha Yoga*. My body was very stiff to start with. Soon, however, my chronic headache disappeared, my muscles and joints began to loosen and the condition of my back improved remarkably. This naturally made me an enthusiastic practitioner. Noting such a rapid improvement in my health, I

encouraged my wife, Blanca, to join the Centre as she had suffered from asthma for a long time. We also liked to share our interests outside the home. Soon my wife was also experiencing relief from the condition thanks to the practice of *Hatha Yoga*, especially *kapalabhati pranayama*. She learned to breathe better and, believe it or not, gave up the cortisone drugs upon which she had been dependent for 25 years, much to the surprise of many, including her doctor.

After two years of regular practice, we trained to become instructors. We still continue to teach, not having lost any of our initial enthusiasm after all these years. We both had our favourite *Hatha Yoga* teachers who inspired us by their dedication and friendship. I learned a great deal about the exercises from the late Matias Guasch, an immigrant from Spain and, in addition to Swamiji, I learned about Yoga philosophy from Robert Dix who was then in charge of *satsanga*. When Swamiji came to Montevideo, my wife and I never missed any of his classes. In the meantime, we read all his books which helped to shape our ideas about Yoga.

Both of us became voluntary workers and came under the inspiring influence of Margarita Mendoza, then general secretary, a position to which I succeeded in 1988 after she passed away. Margarita had been a founding member and one of the chief architects of the Centre. I have rarely met a person like her. She had unblemished integrity, self-effacing service and an immense sense of duty and responsibility, not to mention her unfailing reliability and devotion to Swamiji. She was very close to him and served as his secretary, a position to which I also succeeded after she left us physically.

Like most people from Uruguay, I am part Italian and part Spanish, my father's family having migrated from the Lake Como region of northern Italy and my mother's family from northern Spain. I had a very happy childhood with loving parents and was raised with traditional Christian values but without an adequate knowledge of our religion. In addition to being an instructor, my wife is one of the two auditors of the Centre. Both of us feel quite at home with the teachings of Swami Shivapremanandaji. "Spirituality", according to him, "consists in the practice of integrity, compassion, purity of heart, selflessness, sublimation of the passions and humility of spirit". Swamiji's role is to explain what these actually mean and their relationship with ordinary life under the different circumstances in which we find ourselves. He says,

"All of us on this earth differ from each other, just as each leaf differs from another while belonging to the same tree. Thus, individually apart, we all belong to the common tree of our species, drawing the psychological sap from the same mixed source of creation, from the

reservoir of good and evil, the positive and negative, God and the devil in us. Our fears and anxieties, hopes and disappointments, desires and frustrations, all share a common streak in each of us, welling up from the same primordial psyche that is being shaped and reshaped, refined and tarnished, anchored and let to flow freely for a while by the forces of history, with religions and ideologies serving as handmaidens, giving ideas as to who we are, what we want to be, where we have supposedly come from and where we want to go”.

SWAMIJI’S IMPRESSION

Swamiji’s teachings have made a vivid impression on our thinking, especially his deep knowledge of human nature, as much as the scriptures, including the Bible. As his secretary, I have observed him closely and learned to appreciate his straightforwardness, even if at times expressed rather bluntly. Most of his students like and enjoy de-mythification, including about Yoga. He has reminded us often:

“Emotionalism in *Bhakti Yoga* experienced by singing *kirtans* and *bhajans* (devotional chants and songs) by itself does not purify the heart, although they can be momentarily uplifting, nor can long hours of *japa* or saying the rosary mechanically, nor getting up before dawn to practise concentration and meditation as per *Raja Yoga*, nor contemplation on the *mahavakyas* (great affirmations) and *vidyas* of the *Upanishads* (metaphysical themes) as per *Gyana Yoga*. Real *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) consists of leading a life of ethical idealism and selfless service, keeping watch over one’s motives, and being free from hypocrisy and egotism, passions and prejudice. *Sadhana* is more a process as to how we think and express ourselves through our attitude and conduct, rather than merely an act in itself. Without such a basis, spiritual exercises are like pouring water into a leaking pot”.

As a production manager in a large factory, I have a lot to cope with in regards to problems of a human nature amongst the workforce. Swamiji’s teachings have helped me greatly in promoting accord through a common sense of purpose, discipline through motivation, harmony through mutual appreciation and performance by attention to individual welfare. A wide window of Yoga has opened up before me thanks to the way Swamiji teaches about God and spiritual values, as much as by his personal example. Without being bound by dogmas, nor indulging in self-serving fantasies about God, I have found peace in my heart by feeling his presence, within and around, as an “infinite spirit expressed through love and truth”.

Having found so much benefit at the Centre, both physical and spiritual, it gives both me and my wife great joy to be able to serve others through it. I come to the Centre every day after work. Swamiji has gathered around him such a fine group of people helping to make it a real spiritual home for all of us. I remember with fondness those of my friends who are no longer physically present but whose inspiring memory of love and kindness brings so much peace and happiness to me. As Swamiji says, a Centre does not exist in well-furnished, splendid buildings, but relies on the human element of those who serve idealistically, creating a spiritual home for all those who need such a refuge. My wife and I are proud to be a part of it.

YOGA IN URUGUAY - III

By Sofia Aguiar

I developed an interest in India when I was a child, having great admiration for the spiritual ideals of that remote land related to me mainly through stories I heard from my German grandmother. In 1968, I learned from a friend that there was a *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Montevideo where she was a student. She also told me that the Centre's guide, Swami Shivapremanandaji, was known for his integrity and had pioneered the teaching of Yoga in our country on a sustained basis.

However, due to circumstances and the fact that my interest was still in its early stages, it was not until 1974 that I joined the Centre when I came to know that Swamiji had arrived to give courses on *Vedanta* and *Raja Yoga*. I attended all the classes which made a deep impression on me due to their wisdom which was expressed in a practical manner. I then read all Swamiji's books which I could find. A regular practice of *Hatha Yoga* also improved my health. The teachings of Yoga helped me a great deal to overcome my mental rigidity which I had developed during childhood. My mother was German and my father had Basque and Galician heritage and I was brought up very strictly. I now no longer see things in black and white terms. Yoga has helped to broaden my attitude to life and has helped to improve my understanding of others.

In the course of time, I became an instructor of *Hatha Yoga*. This brought me into contact with many students which helped me not to be so distant and self-absorbed. The past 18 years of

association with the Centre has been a rich experience for me. I became a council member and secretary for public relations. I am not a practising Christian in the sense that I am not a churchgoer, but I find so many similarities between Christian values and the teachings of Yoga as taught by Swamiji. I have learned that the practice of any religion consists in living up to its ideals in everyday life and that prayers are much more than a series of words recited in an act of worship but, rather, a way of expressing one's spiritual aspirations. As Jesus said, "God hears what is in your heart". Yet I enjoy the *satsanga* at the Centre and also participate in spiritual retreats conducted by Swamiji.

Being an architect by profession and a follower of Yoga, I know that it is far easier to design a building and structure according to one's drafts but far more difficult to create the interior, understanding the intricacies of what may already be within and to restructure it according to one's ideals. Swamiji says, "Destiny is what you make of what you have, within and without, tapping inner resources, potentialities, and making the best use of the circumstances and opportunities rather than sitting around and saying that 'It is my *karma* as to what I am and how I suffer'. Rather, it is through self-effort that one should try to overcome suffering and to better yourself and your situation. It is only after doing so, that one should accept with fortitude what cannot be helped. You do not know what your destiny is without trying to find out what it can be through self-effort".

Thus, I am learning more and more about my destiny by listening to Swamiji's teachings: "Catch hold of the first opportunity for anything good that comes by. Do not wait for a better one to appear the next time, for there may not be a next time. If you have found a friend or teacher of integrity, do not let that person move away through your indifference or selfishness, but sustain such a friendship by sharing the best in you".

YOGA IN URUGUAY - IV

By Olga Gutierrez

When I was about 40 and my daughter was old enough to take care of herself and my husband was content with a settled and predictable household life, like many housewives of my age I felt

that I was in a spiritual vacuum. `So it was that at the beginning of 1973 I came to the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* on the recommendation of some of my friends. The *Hatha Yoga* classes were of a high standard and the *satsangas* inspiring. What impressed me the most, however, was that all who served there were motivated by a selfless, spiritual idealism. At first, I had thought that they were paid personnel, but I soon realised that they only served there because of their love for their ideals.

I have felt the protection of strong family ties since I was a child, along with the security of ethical and moral values learned from my parents. My ancestry is part German on my father's side and part English on my mother's. I am married to a Uruguayan of Spanish descent. Like most of my fellow countrymen, I was raised as a Christian but without being dogmatic. I married early and my husband and I have an understanding family life, each respecting the other's sphere of interest outside the home. My daughter is following a career as a lawyer, as does her husband, and I have two handsome grandchildren who bring me much joy. Like many others, I have passed through various ups and downs in my life. Traditional religious teachings did not help me much and I was troubled by what I saw as contradictions which gave rise to doubts. By and by, listening to Swami Shivapremananda in his classes and reading his books, I found my path and made peace with myself.

Soon after joining the Centre, I came under the influence of Margarita Mendoza. Her selfless devotion and dedication were exemplary. She was then the deputy headmistress of a grammar school and had spent a lifetime in teaching. After a few years, I became an instructor of *Hatha Yoga* and also a staff member. After Margarita passed away, I succeeded her as Swamiji's housekeeper when he was in town. I became a council member and am at present in charge of training instructors. I am also deputy to the General Secretary.

The teachings of Yoga have never created any conflict with my liberal Christian background. On the contrary, they helped to clear many of my doubts and enabled me to understand myself much better. However, I must say that this has been possible thanks to Swamiji's line of interpretation. For example, I found Krishna's threat of punishment in hell in the *Bhagavad Gita* every bit as distasteful as that in the Bible. Swamiji's sayings found a common chord in many of our hearts.

HEAVEN AND HELL – WORDS OF SWAMIJI

“Heaven and hell are within each one of us and in our surroundings. When truth and love, goodness and kindness, justice and commonweal, understanding and tolerance, clarity of reason and purity of devotion reign in our hearts and in our relationship with each other both at home and in the community, we experience heaven and the presence of God. In their contradiction we are in hell, both within and without, suffering the absence of God. We experience heaven in a work well done, in a duty carried out as best we can, in an obligation well fulfilled, in nourishing and carefully tending a loving relationship and in the inspiration of realising a spiritual ideal. However, when our hearts are ruled by passion and prejudice and contort with resentment and malice, when our heads simmer with anger and our nerves tense with bitterness, and when words and looks are used as daggers and actions are plotted and executed to destroy the welfare and happiness of others, we experience and find ourselves in hell.

Eternal heaven and hell are mere wishful thinking. The roots of *satchidananda* in our souls gives an inner awareness (*chit*) of an eternally existent (*sat*) heaven (*ananda*) but, due to our attachment to physical existence, we like to make it an abode of happy denizens forever enjoying rivers of milk and honey. In Islamic heaven, even *houris* are provided. How cloying would that be! Naturally, not wanting our enemies to be around, we want to invent a befitting place like hell for them.

It is doubtful if the inducement of heaven has made anyone behave better, or that the threat of punishment in hell has been enough to prevent people from committing evil deeds. Otherwise, society would not need so many law enforcement personnel. It is also equally unfair of God to send anyone to an eternal hell when an imperfect judge in a civilised society does not normally even punish the worst criminal for more than 15 to 30 years’ life imprisonment, with a provision of one third remission for good behaviour. Nor does it make sense when, according to the second commandment in the *Bible*, God who is supposed to be merciful, threatens to punish not only the idolaters but up to the fourth generation of their descendants, when an ordinary judge would not deem it just to punish children for the crimes of their fathers”.

The above quotations from Swamiji’s class talks are indicative of his line of teachings, providing a wholesale reassessment of the scriptures. According to him, the classical texts of Yoga also represent “the vision of their authors in the light of their spiritual search, their minds

reflecting the shape of their values and thinking according to the times in which they lived, as well as their own wishes that as yogis they would attain omnipotence and omniscience (so much for modesty!), and that their bodies would become as light as a feather (*anima*) or as heavy as a mountain (*laghima*), as per *Raja Yoga*.

The *siddhis* (occult powers) never attracted me, nor did psychic experiences. I only wanted to try to become a better mother, a better wife, a better friend and a better human being, to have a measure of control over my destiny, to be better able to come to terms with adverse conditions that are beyond my power to change without complaining, and to find peace in my heart and be at peace with others. The Centre has provided me with a unique field in which to fulfil these needs. It is surprising how many people come to the Centre, not just to attend *Hatha Yoga* classes or *satsangas* but also to find someone to talk to, to be able to unburden themselves, to seek a sympathetic understanding and even a shoulder to cry on. That I can be useful as a spiritual friend to those who need me, as well as being a *Hatha Yoga* instructor and staff secretary, has been and is an ample reward in my life and has given me much happiness.

A WINDOW OF YOGA IN CHILE

By Anita Palma

Yoga came to Chile relatively later than to Europe and the USA, or even to Brazil and Argentina. Chilean people, however, have deep spiritual roots. Most are Catholics but are not close-minded. Being so close to the high Andes throughout its length of over 2,500 miles with a width of only 150 miles before it borders the Pacific Ocean, there is a tendency to mysticism in the Chilean unconscious. Red Indians sparsely settled the region over 10,000 years ago before the coming of the Spanish Conquistadors early in the sixteenth century.

The native tribes were quite primitive, unlike the Incas of Peru, the Mayans in Central America or the Aztecs in Mexico. Being few in number, they were absorbed into Spanish culture over the course of the centuries. Although Chileans are mainly of Spanish descent, German immigrants also started to arrive from the middle of the nineteenth century. From the beginning of the twentieth century, other immigrants started to come from other European countries such as

Italy and Yugoslavia. The result is that Chile now looks more like a modern Mediterranean nation with a dash of Red Indian blood. There are 13 million inhabitants.

My grandparents were descendants of the Spanish colonisers and were devout Catholics but, for reasons unknown to me or my parents, converted to the Baptist faith. In my adolescence, I was obliged to read the Bible daily but, even then, many doubts arose in my mind concerning God's wrath in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, including innocent children, why a human being was imperfect in spite of being created in the image of God, and why there was so much suffering and so many calamities in the world. All these questions worried me and, when I spoke about them to my parents, they took me to our pastor who thought that I was possessed by the Devil and made me kneel down while he laid his hands on my head to drive him out. This was not a pleasant experience and soon I became anti-religious and began to doubt the existence of God.

I studied biochemistry as a profession which I still practise part-time at the age of 83 (in May 1991). In due course, I was married and later lived for some years in La Paz, Bolivia and also in Montevideo, Uruguay on account of my husband's business career. In the 1950s when I was already in my 40s, after years of indifference to religion, I came across a book by Yogananda entitled 'Autobiography of a Yogi'. This was my first introduction to Yoga and it fascinated me. I began to read all the books on Yoga that I could lay my hands on in the libraries in Santiago and Montevideo, and also bought what books I could find in bookstores.

MEETING TWO SWAMIS

Chileans have been interested in the spiritual culture of India through the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Annie Besant, J Krishnamurti, Mahatma Gandhi, Yogananda, and others. In the late 1950s, a small group in Santiago formed a branch of the *Self-Realisation Fellowship of California* and, in the early 1960s, another small group organised itself as *Suddha Dharma Mandala*. However, to my knowledge, Swami Shivapremanandaji was the first to pioneer a comprehensive teaching of Yoga in Chile from 1965. I met Swamiji for the first time in 1962 in Montevideo where I was staying at the time. He was then Director of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Milwaukee, USA, which he had

founded in 1961 having been deputed by Swami Sivanandaji of Rishikesh to spread the teachings of Yoga in the West.

The universal spiritual message of Yoga and its broad vision of God had for many years opened up within me a deep yearning to search for a higher meaning to life. Religious dogmas never appealed to me. I disliked fundamentalists and ideologues. Exclusive claims to truth did not make sense because they helped to create antagonism between different groups of humanity. It was just before Pope John XXIII initiated the Second Vatican Council in 1962 that I found my spiritual home in Yoga.

One day, in 1961, I read in a Montevideo newspaper that a Swami was coming to town. His name was Swami Chidananda who later became President of the *Divine Life Society*. He was travelling in the USA. A small group of people interested in Yoga had written to the Uruguay ambassador in New Delhi to see if a Swami would be willing to come to Montevideo for a few months to teach Yoga. Through some connection, the ambassador was directed to Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. As Chidanandaji was already in the USA, he was asked to visit Uruguay. This was at the suggestion of Swami Shivapremanandaji, although Swami Chidanandaji had suggested that Swami Vishnudevananda should go instead.

Chidanandaji stayed in Montevideo for four months and during this time he pioneered the teaching of Yoga in Uruguay. I attended all his classes. A group was informally constituted as the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre*. A year later, this group along with another in Buenos Aires, wrote to Swami Sivanandaji asking if another Swami could be sent to South America from time to time to help consolidate the Centre in Montevideo and establish one in Buenos Aires. Chidanandaji had already returned to India and as Swami Shivapremanandaji was already in the West on a permanent basis, he became the obvious choice.

Thus, it was in 1962 that I met my future Guru. Shivapremanandaji at first came to Buenos Aires where I went to meet him with the Montevideo group. He taught there for three months and founded the *Sivananda Centre* which was registered as a charity. He then came on to Montevideo to consolidate and expand the already existing Centre and register it as a charity. Swamiji stayed in Montevideo for four months and I attended all his classes which took place nearly every day on such topics as the *Upanishads*, *Raja Yoga*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, meditation and *Hatha Yoga*. It was thanks to Swamiji that we were able to gain a deeper insight into

understanding of the totality of Yoga. The same can be said of his students in Buenos Aires where Swamiji returned when he left us.

Soon, however, Shivapremanandaji was asked by Sivanandaji to return to Milwaukee where he was needed. In 1963, I returned to my home country and resolved that the next time Swamiji came to South America, I would invite him to Chile to found a *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Santiago. Swami Sivanandaji passed away in 1963. The second visit by Shivapremanandaji to South America took place in 1965 when he was Director of the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in New York which had been founded by Swami Vishnudevananda from his base in Canada.

YOGA COMES TO CHILE

Shivapremanandaji first came to Buenos Aires and then travelled on to Montevideo to help the consolidation and growth of the two Centres. I lost no time in inviting him to Chile, having already formed a group with a group of friends who shared a common interest in Yoga. Thus, thus the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* came into being in Santiago. Swamiji gave a series of lectures at the University of Chile, the National Library and a few cultural institutions, as well as registering the Centre as a charity in August 1965. We found this process quite straightforward. However, our trustees had to be vouched for by the Indian ambassador, with checks being also made in Delhi and at the *Divine Life Society* in Rishikesh.

Our Centre in Santiago gradually came to be regarded as the most prestigious institution of its kind. Swamiji returned to South America in 1967 and, again, in 1969 but only stayed for short periods of time as he still had responsibility for the Centre in New York. From the early 1970s, he started to visit for longer periods and eventually took charge as President of the three *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centres* on a permanent basis, replacing those he had earlier put into that role after having been voted in by the membership. The number of Yoga teachers in Chile, as well as Argentina and Uruguay, have mushroomed since the 1970s. However, ours was the only one, along with its sister Centres in Argentina and Uruguay, which were run entirely by volunteers without remuneration. This included Swamiji himself who took over the training of the *Hatha Yoga* instructors, and also guided others to lead other activities such as *satsanga* and meditation and philosophy classes, as well as looking after the general management of the

Centre. The only paid personnel were the accountant and a caretaker who also cleaned the building.

We keep our membership fee low so as to make classes accessible to all. The philosophy and meditation classes which take place on Wednesdays and Saturdays are free of charge. There are *Hatha Yoga* classes in the morning and evening on a daily basis. Swamiji stays with us for at least three months each year or for two months twice a year, the rest of his time being given to his other two Centres in Buenos Aires which is his headquarters, and Montevideo. He also visits Europe every two years, stopping over in New York, on his way out and also on his return journey. Swamiji has frequently lectured in the Catholic University, the University of Chile and several cultural institutions in the municipality of Santiago.

The Catholic Church has a benevolent attitude towards us and towards Yoga in general, probably because Yoga is not considered to be a religion and the movement is not big enough to be seen to pose a threat. The public regards Yoga mainly as a physical discipline, although we have our share of Hare Krishna supporters as well as those interested in Transcendental Meditation, Theosophy and Baha'i. Apart from our group, most *Hatha Yoga* instructors operate on a commercial basis. When in town, Swamiji also leads spiritual retreats for his students which take place in nearby Catholic monasteries who are happy to open their doors to us as they do not regard us as belonging to any cult.

NO RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

As such, the church going students at our Centre do not experience any religious conflict, as Yoga regards Jesus Christ as an incarnation of God, and Moses as a leading prophet of humanity. There are also many like me who are not the Church going type. Those who are dogmatic in their Christian beliefs stay away from us. However, more than half of our members are only interested in *Hatha Yoga*. Socially, we are a mixed bag. There are professionals, business men and women, office secretaries, as well as housewives. As can be expected, women predominate, not just because they have more time. Many have regular jobs as well as looking after the housework. It is simply that women tend to be more interested in keeping fit, while the men are generally lazy! After returning from work, men would much rather watch television than come to a Yoga class. It may also be because women have more emotional and spiritual needs.

For me and others like me, Swamiji has made a profound impression through his philosophy of life and his interpretation not only of the spiritual teachings of Yoga but in making us re-examine our Christian backgrounds in a brighter light because of his great knowledge of the Bible. Although a renunciate monk who was born into a Brahmin family, his great grandfather being cousin of Ram Mohan Roy and co-founder of the *Brahmo Samaj* reform movement in India in the 19th century, Swamiji cannot be pinned down to any particular religion. For him, ‘anyone who loves integrity, compassion and selflessness, duty, honour and responsibility, as well as the sublimation of passion, along with moral courage and humility, is a religious person whether or not he or she goes to church, believes in a heavenly deity or gets up early in the morning to meditate.

To Swamiji, “God is not an anthropomorphic deity to be found in a heavenly abode, but the eternal, infinite, universal and transcendental spirit which is immanent in us all and present everywhere. This is in contrast to a personal God such as our Father in Heaven, Krishna or Jesus Christ, which is an idealised spiritual form of an individual’s devotion and aspiration that the same infinite spirit assumes in order to be relatable to the seeker”. Swamiji says, “Integrity and purity of heart are the highest practices of religion, while compassion, devotion and ethics are its soul, irrespective of whether you are a Christian, Jew, Hindu, Moslem or Buddhist”. Such a ‘Window of Yoga’ has been opened in Chile through which the “fresh breeze of the infinite spirit can flow in, clearing away the cobwebs of religious exclusivity and bigotry, pride and prejudice, malice and dogmatism, selfishness and egolatriy”.

SWAMIJI’S WAY

Swamiji does not like any showmanship, whether religious or political, being completely free from it himself. He is uncomfortable in the company of those whom he sometimes calls, “performing holy men and holy women” but takes them in his stride as a part of life. He avoids wearing flowing robes himself, trying his best to appear as a simple human being. He does not give any Sanskrit names to his students even while acknowledging the need in some to put on a persona if that helps him or her to be true to or try to measure up to its meaning. Otherwise, the farcical side does not escape him.

Swamiji has not given *sannyasin* initiation to any of his long-devoted students, as he says that *sannyasa* or renunciation, is in the heart and, as long as it is kept pure, it does not matter

whether one puts on a robe or not. If anyone requests him to be ordained as a *sannyasa*, he tells them to go to the *Sivananda Ashram* in Rishikesh if they are still not content with what he has explained to be his philosophy of life. When a student asks Swamiji for *mantra* initiation, he gives him or her a few pertinent *mantras* to choose from, explaining the meaning of each, and allowing them to choose according to their personal inclination. He reminds them at the same time that this does not make him a *guru*, because he simply does not like the idea of being a *guru* of anyone. However, in effect, Swamiji is so to a number of people without having adopted that title. Swamiji says that the real *guru* is God in your heart, even though you may have many little ‘*gurus*’ such as the fly which taught the Sage Dattatreya tenacity, and a dog which taught him devotion and loyalty. This is also a contribution that Swamiji has made to the Window of Yoga in Chile.

A favourite saying of Shivapremanandaji is that “no one is good enough to be a spiritual master of anyone, human nature being so deficient”. He says, “Knowledge can be taught but spirituality is a personal responsibility and has to be cultivated by oneself alone, because no one can impart it or trigger it by a magic touch.” There are half a dozen books by Swamiji in Spanish which contain his teachings, mostly transcribed and edited from his class talks. These have made him widely known in Chile as well as in Argentina and Uruguay. He has taught us, “Freedom of thought is a basic right of all, and no one should impose on others a particular ideology or belief through undemocratic means, including the diktat of a *guru*, Rights and obligations are interrelated, as are liberty and responsibility, personal freedom and self-discipline.” Swamiji has made his students very aware of these values. He cannot stand self-important people. I have actually seen him squirm in their presence out of displeasure. He is a stickler for punctuality, and the Centre is run by a liberal minded and highly responsible crew.

ON BEING TRUSTED

I would like to relate two cases to illustrate how Swamiji is trusted by those Chileans who know him, although he does not care about politics while being highly democratic in outlook. During the Marxist regime (1970-73) of the late President Salvador Allende, his deputy foreign minister once sought Swamiji out for an interview to clarify some of his thoughts. I remember, soon after the military coup, when Swamiji was visiting Chile in 1974 at a time when our Centre was located in a large, rented flat near Government House, a major of the Chilean Intelligence

Service used to attend our *satsanga* in civilian dress. He had earlier met Swamiji in New York while working there for the Chilean government and became a devotee. He trusted Swamiji so much that he used to keep his shoulder-holstered service revolver in Swamiji's bedroom because he did not like to bring a gun hidden under his suit jacket into the *satsanga* hall during our prayer meetings. He is now retired and comes to the Centre when Swamiji is in town.

In 1978, we bought our present building in the middle-class suburb of Providencia in Santiago. As Swamiji does not like to ask for donations, we did not make a fund-raising drive but paid for the property gradually through membership fees, one of the council members having loaned the down payment and given the collateral. After the military coup, we had to display on the wall of the reception hall a permit signed by the general in charge of the Santiago district allowing us to hold a public gathering which was then prohibited without permission. The Centre's prestige was such that we were allowed to conduct all our activities without interruption, even though karate schools were closed down.

I also remember that one of the daughters of General Pinochet joined the Centre for some time and used to come to the morning *Hatha Yoga* class when, unknown to others, two of her bodyguards in civilian dress patrolled the footpaths around the building but did not enter it. She was correct and decent and never made her presence felt. Our Centre must have been vetted and found safe enough for the dictator's daughter to attend. From 1990, Chile has had an elected civilian government headed by Patricio Alwyne whose ancestors came from Wales. He is a leader of the Christian Democratic Party which is now (1991) in power, so too in Germany and Italy. Our Centre continues to function as usual, unaffected by any political change.

Now, I will let two of my colleagues relate briefly how they came to Yoga and give their backgrounds.

YOGA IN CHILE - II

By Hector Calderon

By training I am an electrical (now electronic) engineer. My ancestors came from Spain a long time ago. Somehow, I chanced upon a book on *Hatha Yoga* by Yogi Vitthaldas 27 years ago and

started to practise the exercises on my own. A year later, I saw an announcement in a newspaper about a public lecture to be given by Swami Shivapremananda and I went to listen to him. It was his first visit to Chile. In spite of my childhood Catholic upbringing and having gone to a Jesuit school, I liked what he said. It made sense. The message was clear and rational. It fitted into my engineering mind and I was among the first to join the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* when Swamiji founded it.

At first, I had thought that Yoga meant only physical exercises and that was enough for me because I had my Catholic faith after all. But listening to Swamiji and later on reading his books and those of others, I knew that there was more to it. I learned that Yoga has a universal philosophy and that this was not opposed to traditional western values. Swamiji told us that Yoga is a state of mind, a way of life, that material and spiritual aspects cannot be separated, that improvement in our human nature and conduct is its goal, without dogmatism or the imposition of any doctrine claiming a divine origin, and that life should be ruled by moral and spiritual values.

This broadened my idea of religion and fitted into my pragmatic outlook, having observed how close-minded some of my committed Catholic friends were and the contradiction I saw between their beliefs and their actions. Swamiji's teachings have helped me to have a better understanding of myself and the people with whom I relate. Except for five years in Rio de Janeiro where my professional career took me, I have been continuously associated with the *Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre* in Santiago in different capacities, including as an instructor of *Hatha Yoga*. The teachings of Yoga, as interpreted by Swamiji, have made me happier, more self-confident, more of a realist and have helped me to find inner peace.

We have learned a lot of things from Swamiji, in addition to the classical teachings and *Hatha Yoga*. He simply cannot stand self-pity and says, "If anything goes wrong, you are at least 50% to blame, and so accept your share, learn from your mistakes and do not pass on the blame to others to feel sorry for yourself". He has taught us personal responsibility and the value of commitment. A favourite joke of his is: "Do not tell me you have not been able to keep your word because you were run over by a lorry".

YOGA IN CHILE - III

By Lucila Broughton

My father was of British ancestry and a freemason. My mother was of Spanish origin and a Catholic. Religion did not mean much in my early life. As a child, I was fascinated by the pictures and statues of the Buddha seated in the lotus posture in deep meditation with his hands positioned in a *mudra* (hand gesture). This inward, contemplative aspect was the first thing that drew me to Yoga, to the Orient and to India. In the 1940s, as a child, I could not find in Chile anyone who would satisfy my spiritual hunger. As a student of music, however, I learned that Yehudi Menuhin had benefited greatly through the practice of Yoga. So, I started buying books available on the subject and began to practise *Hatha Yoga* on my own. I then joined an organisation called the *Great Universal Fraternity* which taught Yoga in the mid-1970s and remained a member for 2 years.

One day in 1978, I saw an announcement in a Santiago newspaper that Swami Shivapremanandaji was coming to town and I went to listen to his public lectures. Since then I have been a devoted follower. I joined the *Sivananda Centre* and eventually became an instructor and also helped out in other roles. The ancient wisdom of the *Vedas* found an echo in my soul. Swamiji's teachings have been vitally important in my personal development and have given me a strength which I had through I did not have as well as depths to my understanding of life. I am a housewife and piano teacher. Yoga has taught me to be creative in music which I love, to be more honest and to appreciate better the happy moments while taking in my stride the unhappy ones without any feeling of bitterness. It has prepared me to look forward to the next life with peace and strength and, when the time comes, to leave this one without reproach or sadness. Yoga has helped me to be at peace with myself and with others.

CONCLUSION

By Anita Palma

After my three friends have spoken about how Yoga has influenced their lives, I would like to conclude with my own impressions. Now pushing 84, my only regret is that I could not have started much earlier. Over 30 years of the practice of Yoga has helped to keep me fit, both physically and mentally. As I said earlier, I still work part time to keep my mind active. I go to concerts and visit the Centre three times a week to supervise the management and attend a meditation class and *Satsanga*, even subbing as a desk secretary. When Swamiji is in town, I attend all his classes. I have made my peace with the Biblical God because I have learned from Swamiji that the “same infinite spirit is reflected in different forms in the mind of man according to the nature of his spiritual aspiration, insecurity and anxiety, while the pure light expresses itself according to the clearer or darker transparencies of his individual consciousness”.

Swamiji has taught me that the essence of my soul is a spark of the same infinite spirit in a state of embodiment, and the “same spark twinkles as myriads of God’s light in the souls of humanity, awaiting individual discovery and realisation”. Thus, I have lost the fear of death. In the spirit of the *Bhagavad Gita*, although I know that in a few years my body will return to earth “from dust to dust and ashes to ashes”, my soul will continue to burn in the light of God and merge in it eventually, “for winds cannot blow it out and torrents cannot drown it”.

I have learned that it is through my errors that I punish myself, not God, and that “heaven and hell are within our minds and the circumstances of life”. This philosophy has inwardly strengthened me and given me peace of mind because I know that I am not alone, that God is in me and I am in Him. I have a deep respect for the Christian values of peace and love and forgiveness which, according to Swamiji, represent the soul of my religion. I have come back to Christianity through Yoga. Ours is the smallest of Swamiji’s three Centres in South America, the one in Buenos Aires being the largest and the one in Montevideo being much bigger than ours. But our hearts are as big as any of those who are closest to him there. Can there be anything greater than pure love for one another among all humanity?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SWAMI SHIVAPREMANANDA

Swami Shivapremananda was born in India on 26 July 1925. He studied at St. Paul's Collegiate School in Darjeeling, and subsequently at the St. Xavier's College in Calcutta (now Kolkota) University. In 1945, he chose the vocation of spiritual ministry and entered the Ashram (Divine Life Society) of Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh at the foothills of the Himalayas. There he studied various branches of Yoga and comparative religions and philosophies. From 1949 to 1961, he taught at the Yoga-Vedanta Academy and was the editor of *The Divine Life* and *Wisdom Light* monthly magazines as well as other philosophical publications. During this period, he was also a private secretary to Swami Sivananda and a trustee of the Divine Life Society.

Swami Shivapremananda took part in social work for the poor under the auspices of the Sivananda Eye Relief Camps, in 1957-58, in Sourashtra. His interest in Eastern mysticism drew him to some monasteries in the Himalayas and Tibet in the 1950s and, later, to Thailand, Cambodia and Japan. Swamiji stayed with Gurudev Swami Sivananda for 16 years and eight months.

In 1961, invited by educational and cultural groups and urged by Swami Sivananda, he went to Europe and the USA to share his knowledge and experience gathered in the course of many years. He has since lived in the USA, Europe, and South America, and founded and guided Yoga centres in many countries.

From 1961 to 1963, he was the founder-director of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and from 1964 to 1970, president and director of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centre in New York. Since his arrival in the West, he has been guiding Yoga centres in Europe and the Americas.

Swamiji became the president and rector of the Sivananda Yoga-Vedanta Centres in Buenos Aires (Argentina), Montevideo (Uruguay), and Santiago (Chile), which are the largest and most prestigious organisations of their kind in these countries, built up over the years since their inception under his guidance.

Swamiji was the author of eleven books on Yoga philosophy and psychology in Spanish which he wrote for his thousands of South American students. They are: *Talks on Yoga* (1965, 1990), *The Universal Philosophy of Yoga* (1969, 1991), *Introduction to Yoga Philosophy* (1971, 1975), *Philosophical and Psychological Aspects of Yoga* (1972, 1984), *The Immanence of the Eternal* (1973), *Window of the Soul* (1983, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1993), *Integral Yoga* (1992), *Yoga, an Attitude Towards Life* (2000), *Tryst with Destiny* (2002), *To Live is to be Happy* (2003), and *Meditation* (2004). More than a dozen booklets of his teachings have also been published. From time to time, he has lectured in the national universities of Argentina, Uruguay and Chile and the Catholic universities in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile.

Swami Shivapremananda used to go to Europe periodically to give seminars at various places, mainly in Great Britain and also in Belgium and Ireland. He also visited Holland, France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. He was well known as a teacher of *Hatha Yoga* and conducted retreats in many countries. His inclination, however, was mainly towards *Gyana Yoga* and *Raja Yoga*.

To promote a greater understanding of the spiritual teachings of the East through Western interpretation, Swamiji gave lectures in many universities in the USA, such as Columbia in New York, Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Stanford near San Francisco, the East-West Cultural Centre in Los Angeles, St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, and the American Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco.

He also lectured in the universities of Oxford, Stuttgart and Antwerp, as well as other educational institutions in Europe. Invited by the late Thomas Merton, he twice visited the Trappist monastery in Gethsemane in Kentucky in the early 1960s.

His book *Yoga for Stress Relief*, published in 1999 and 2000 by Gaia Books, England and Random, USA, has been translated from the original English and published in six other European languages.

Swamiji passed away peacefully after a lengthy illness in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 4th September 2019. His ashes were committed, at his request, by his close students to the ocean close to his Centre and home for so many decades. As a young man, Swami Ji had been given a sum of money by his parents in case he was in need. This he invested wisely enabling him in 2016 to donate a large sum to the Children's Hospital in Buenos Aires where a children's wing was renamed in his honour. Following his death, the proceeds for the sale of the flat which he

had been given by his students, as well as the Centres, were given to the same cause. As he said in one of his immaculately typed letters, ‘The Centres pay for the salary of my house keeper and the cost of food prepared. I have no other needs. Do not even have pocket money’. Staunchly independent to the end, Swami Ji’s legacy in terms of his personal character and many invaluable writings will live long in the memory of those fortunate enough to have met him but also for future generations through a website which is being created in his name.

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If you would like to find out more about Swami Shivapremananda and be able to read his books both in English and Spanish on line, a website is being set up in his name by students from Yoga Vedanta Sivananda Centre of Argentina in Buenos Aires.