

# Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings

ARTHUR OSBORNE



1950 - 2000  
*50<sup>th</sup> Aradhana*

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# The Wind

I am a pipe the wind blows through,  
Be still, it is the wind that sings.  
The course of my life and the things that I do  
And the seeming false and the seeming true  
Are the tune of the wind that neither knows  
Good and ill, nor joys and woes.  
But the ultimate awe is deeper yet  
Than song or pipe or storm;  
For pipe and tune are the formless wind  
That seemed for a while to take form.  
And words are good to escape from words  
And strife to escape from strife,  
But silence drinks in all the waves  
Of song and death and life.

Arthur Osborne

# Contents

THE WIND . . . . .	3
FOREWORD <i>by Kitty Osborne</i> . . . . .	9
ARTHUR OSBORNE <i>by Lucia Osborne</i> . . . . .	10
 <b>SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI</b>	
The Look That Pierced . . . . .	23
Ramana Still Lives . . . . .	27
The Ascent . . . . .	30
The Maharshi's Place in History . . . . .	33
The Essential Teaching of the Maharshi . . . . .	46
The Nature and Function of the Guru . . . . .	50
Self-Realisation as Taught by Bhagavan . . . . .	59
Stilling the Mind Through <i>Vichara</i> as Taught by Bhagavan . . . . .	61
Why Bhagavan Ignored Symbolism . . . . .	65
Effort, Grace and Destiny . . . . .	68
Physical Supports of Grace. . . . .	73
The Two Kinds of Guru . . . . .	76
Austerity . . . . .	79
Vegetarianism . . . . .	82
The Collaborator . . . . .	86
Sri Bhagavan's Teaching — The Literary Testimony . . . . .	93
Happiness . . . . .	98
 <b>HINDUISM</b>	
Advaita . . . . .	101

# Contents

## HINDUISM (continued)

Bhakti Marga and Jnana Marga . . . . .	102
The Threefold Scripture . . . . .	105
The Name . . . . .	109
Krishna, Teacher of Dharma . . . . .	117
The Swami Vivekananda Birth Centenary . . . . .	133

## BUDDHISM

Buddha and Ramana . . . . .	136
The Four Noble Truths . . . . .	142
Some Consequences of Anatta . . . . .	145
Ignorance and Sin . . . . .	148
The Tibetan Doctrine of Incarnate Buddhas . . . . .	153

## ISLAM

Islam and Advaita . . . . .	158
Is Sufism Islamic? . . . . .	159
Shirk and Tawhid . . . . .	162
The Lesser and Greater Jihad . . . . .	164
The Sufi Path of Love . . . . .	171
A World-Sanctifying Religion . . . . .	176
The Sufi Science of Lataif . . . . .	180
Paradise and Nirvana . . . . .	182
Al-Khizr . . . . .	189
Jnani, Prophet and Avatar . . . . .	191
Petitionary Prayer . . . . .	197
The Meaning and Use of the Rosary in Islam (Sunni) . . . . .	202

# Contents

## ISLAM (continued)

“We Will Show Them Our Signs” . . . . .	202
“Which, Then of Your Lord’s Bounties Will You Reject?” . . . . .	206
The Will to Perversity . . . . .	210
Shari’at and Tariqat . . . . .	215
The Miracle of the <i>Koran</i> . . . . .	217
The Place of Islam in History . . . . .	220

## CHRISTIANITY

An Aggressive Teacher . . . . .	224
Spiritual Traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church . . . . .	227
“Cast Not Your Pearls Before Swine” . . . . .	237
“Many Are Called But Few Are Chosen” . . . . .	241
Jnana and Bhakti in Christianity . . . . .	245
“Render Unto Caesar...” . . . . .	247
I and My Father Are One . . . . .	251
“Be Ye Therefore Perfect...” . . . . .	256
Can a Christian Follow the Maharshi? . . . . .	259
Christian Healing . . . . .	265
A Christian View of Reincarnation . . . . .	269
Traces of Reincarnation in the West . . . . .	272
The Basic Christian Symbol . . . . .	278
The Cult of Suffering . . . . .	280
Christian Free Will . . . . .	284
Good and Evil . . . . .	287
Was Christ an Avatar? . . . . .	291
Predestination and Prayer . . . . .	292

# Contents

THE CONCEPT OF PROGRESS. . . . .	296
THE QUESTION OF PROGRESS . . . . .	304
1 – Progress and History . . . . .	305
2 – Progress in Religion . . . . .	328
COMPARATIVE RELIGION	
Comparative Religion as a University Discipline . . . . .	348
A New Approach to Comparative Religion . . . . .	354
Modern Idolatries . . . . .	365
Moral Philosophy . . . . .	370
Rene Guenon . . . . .	374
The Symbolism of the Quest in the <i>Odyssey</i> . . . . .	378
Hermetic Symbolism . . . . .	381
The Symbolism of Numbers . . . . .	390
The Relations Between Religion and Art . . . . .	394
Shakespeare's Morality Plays . . . . .	402
The Death Wish . . . . .	409
POEMS	
A Testament . . . . .	412
The Guru . . . . .	426
To Arunachala . . . . .	427
To Bhagavan . . . . .	429
Brief Eternity . . . . .	432
The Tiger . . . . .	433
The Indewller – II . . . . .	433
The Initiatic Death . . . . .	434
The Dark Night . . . . .	435

# Contents

## POEMS (continued)

Desolation . . . . .	436
The Lady of Shalott. . . . .	437
Complete Your Work! . . . . .	438
The Sleeping Beauty . . . . .	439
Anatta . . . . .	440
The Two Windows . . . . .	441
To Whom? . . . . .	442
The World . . . . .	443
The World – II . . . . .	444
The Shakti . . . . .	445
Ergo Non Sum . . . . .	445
The Dream-Self . . . . .	446
Others – II . . . . .	447
The Expanse . . . . .	448
Fantastic Things . . . . .	449
To Christians . . . . .	450
What Remains? . . . . .	451
The Song . . . . .	452
This Dream . . . . .	453
The Poet . . . . .	454
Day and Night . . . . .	455
The Waning Moon . . . . .	456
The Elixir of Youth . . . . .	457
Otherness . . . . .	458

## APPENDIX

List of articles by Arthur Osborne . . . . .	460
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## Foreword

There is not much one can say as a foreword to this collection of the various writings of Arthur Osborne...his words speak for themselves. This is the second collection of articles, mainly gleaned from the earlier editions of *The Mountain Path* when he founded it...and initially, before getting world-wide contributions, he also wrote many of the articles himself under various pseudonyms. Most of these he abandoned as time went by and the magazine acquired a larger and more international readership and list of contributors. Abdullah Qutbuddin carried on longer than many of his other aliases and I have a suspicion that he had more than a sneaking fondness for H. Sebastian Gubbins.

Although founding *The Mountain Path*, putting it together, writing many of the articles and doing the editing was very hard work, he never seemed to make it so. As a child I could, without anxiety, interrupt him when he was working and he just picked up again where he left off. It was only when he was trying to do something practical with his hands...like making toast...that he had to make a supreme effort to concentrate, and we interrupted him at our peril!

My father was a man of towering integrity, that comes out in all his writing, and in spite of his great erudition he never used a complicated word when a simple one would do. This was because he believed implicitly in the value and the essential simplicity of truth. It was the core of the man and basis of his love for Ramana Maharshi and his quest for Self-realization.

24<sup>th</sup> December 1999  
Bhagavan's 120<sup>th</sup> Jayanti

KITTY OSBORNE  
Tiruvannamalai

# Arthur Osborne

By LUCIA OSBORNE

ARTHUR WAS BORN in London, September 25TH 1906. His father was a school headmaster, his mother one of those simple gentle-women as loveable as she was unpractical. From her Arthur must have inherited his bent for poetry, for she spent much of her time writing poems amidst her flowers.

When still a schoolboy Arthur wanted to become a farmer and used to spend a lot of his free time in their garden helping his father. But his father had other plans for him, particularly after he won an exhibition in English literature open to schoolboys of the whole of England. So he took his degree in history at Oxford and could have stayed on as a don and later professor but he rejected this career because he was seeking a purpose and meaning to life and he realized that research into particular periods in history would not supply an answer. As he himself expressed it later in his autobiography, it typified a rejection both conscious and instinctual of the meaningless life which was all he knew. Christ said that he who seeks shall find. Perhaps in one who does not even know that there is anything to seek for, rejection is a beginning of the search.

After coming down from Oxford, Arthur travelled for a while to Italy and other places and then came to Poland where we met and after a while got married. In Poland he spent four years, the greater part of them teaching at a maritime college and acting as secretary to the Anglo-Polish Society. He managed its affairs with his usual efficiency, even writing plays for their entertainment which used to bring the house down, they were so funny. A friend introduced him to René Guénon's early books. The first may have been *Introduction Generale al 'Etude*

*des Doctrines Hindoues*. The impact was tremendous. His restlessness and discontent fell away with the realization that life had a meaning after all. When he read the sentence “Being is One” he felt immediately that it was true, that he had always known that it was true but did not know that he knew. If Being is One and there is no other, then ‘Who am I?’ I can not be other than the One Being, therefore to realize one’s true Self is to realize the Identity with the absolute One Being. This was the beginning of the quest from which he was never to turn aside. In René Guénon’s teaching the implication was kept well to the fore that Being is One and therefore by realizing one’s true Self one realizes one’s identity with the One. All religions teach this in essence, in Eastern religions openly, in the Western ones veiled behind esoteric terminology. Esoterically then religions are unanimous, diverging only in their external application, ritual, social organisation and code of conduct.

The same words one might have read before many times but suddenly they strike home like a lightning flash of truth. And this happened to Arthur when he read the words: “Being is One”. René Guénon expounded with vast erudition and brilliancy about the necessity of upholding tradition scrupulously with all the observances and ritual that it enjoins, that traditionally a spiritual authority controls the whole of a civilization and that a civilization which breaks away from its spiritual roots cannot endure. His uncompromising axiom that religions are either initiatic or counter-initiatic led occasionally to a rigidity of judgement, as for example when asserting that no Hindu believed in reincarnation, and with regard to Buddhism.

Arthur read all the books of René Guénon which he was able to obtain, dealing with mysticism, esoterism, symbolism and social applications of the basic truth. He translated into English René Guénon’s *La Crise du Monde Moderne (The Crisis of the Modern World)* which appealed to him as a beautifully

condensed and fundamental work. René Guénon went through it with detailed comments and suggestions which were applied. He was very punctilious about details of translation and about preserving his long sentences and careful system of punctuation. The translation had his full approval and was published. Arthur had an extensive correspondence with Guénon about it. It seems to have been well received by readers and a second edition was called for.

The group which gathered round René Guénon had been following a guru of whom Guénon approved, and they were urging us to join them and receive initiation. This we did when Arthur got a job as lecturer at the Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. There we both followed a rigorous *sadhana* based largely on ritual, prayers and invocation. The discipline of it was a good preparation and very helpful at the time. We did not fit into the social life of Bangkok with all it implies and were content to lead a life withdrawn from such activities. Our spiritual practices took a good deal of our time in any case. The general consensus of opinion among the students of the university was, as I came to know, that Arthur was the wisest teacher they ever had. They called themselves Osbornians.

About Ramana Maharshi we heard for the first time already in Poland. Just that one of the group was in India in the ashram of a sage Ramana Maharshi. It created a curious feeling of nostalgia. In Bangkok Arthur received two booklets, probably *Who am I?* and *Upadesa Saram* or *Spiritual Instruction*. The photograph of Ramana Maharshi in one of them was so impressive that it strengthened our resolve to go to India and see him. After three years at the University Arthur got six months leave. Two friends from the group arranged for us to go first to Kashmir as it would have been far too hot in Tiruvannamalai at the time for our three small children, the eldest Kitty not yet five, Adam about three and Frania six or seven months old. It was the beginning of the hot season. So we stayed in that

beautiful valley for several months continuing our spiritual practices as before. Our friends were also there. In September Arthur went back to Bangkok alone as the war was drawing nearer Thailand and women and children were advised not to return there for the present. So at last I went with the children to Tiruvannamalai—Arunachala which was the abode of Ramana Maharshi. Our friend<sup>1</sup> had kindly put his house there at our disposal. But to return to Arthur's story. A little while after his return to Bangkok the Japanese invaded Thailand and all the Westerners were interned for the duration of the war. We had no news at all of each other till Arthur's release four years later. In camp also Arthur pursued his spiritual practices which made him rather conspicuous in such a confined place with scarcely any privacy. Several people got interested and asked questions. The replies convinced them of the truth of his expositions. One of them later came to Tiruvannamalai and became a devotee of Ramana Maharshi. Characteristically enough, Arthur made a flower garden in camp which was occasionally rocked by bombs. Throughout his internment Arthur felt strongly Ramana Maharshi's support and Grace. It was strange that he should have turned to Sri Bhagavan and felt his Grace while pursuing the initiatic practices given by a Western guru.

When the Japanese surrendered Arthur came to Tiruvannamalai. He came with the preconceived idea imparted to him by the above-mentioned group that Ramana Maharshi was not a guru, great as he was, that he did not give initiation and had no disciples.

Sri Bhagavan did not immediately reveal himself to Arthur. The first impression was less than his photographs had made. The change came a few weeks later during a festival for which huge crowds came to Tiruvannamalai and the ashram. The people were sitting in the courtyard in front of Sri Bhagavan, Arthur

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<sup>1</sup>David McIver.

in the front row. What happened Arthur describes in his autobiography: “He sat up facing me, and his luminous eyes pierced into me, penetrating, intimate, with an intensity which I cannot describe . . . then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.” Then for the first time in life he began to understand what the grace and blessing of the guru could mean. It was this initiation by look that vitalized him and made him follow Sri Bhagavan’s teaching by using Self-enquiry, the *vichara* “Who am I?”, which with his intellectual bent of mind suited him to perfection as *sadhana* (quest). Actually he realized that the decision was not his; it is always due to Grace. Later he learnt that other devotees also had had such an experience and with them also it had marked the beginning of active *sadhana* under Sri Bhagavan’s guidance. So he went about with a lilt of happiness in his heart, feeling the blessing and mystery of the Guru. Even outwardly Sri Bhagavan was exceptionally gracious to him, smiling when he entered the hall, signing to him to sit where he could watch him in meditation. Once He even asked a devotee sitting in front of Arthur and hiding him to move a bit to the side. The *vichara*, the constant “Who am I?”, began to awaken an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly and also simultaneously of the Self within. “The specious theory that Bhagavan was not a guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace,” he writes in his reminiscences and he perceived now that far from his teaching not being practical guidance it was exclusively that, turning the questioner to practical considerations of *sadhana*, of the path to be followed in accordance with his aptitude.

This initiation and its consequences changed Arthur’s attitude of mind. Soon he found that he could not continue the practices into which he had been initiated previously and which represented a less direct path. He forced himself to continue them for some time out of a sense of duty and then asked Sri

Bhagavan's permission to drop them. Sri Bhagavan gave it immediately, saying: "Yes, all other methods only lead up to Self-enquiry." There is a full explanation of this question of guruship in Arthur's reminiscences, putting it in the right perspective, but here I will limit myself simply to mentioning that he wrote a letter to be handed over to the guru in Europe containing a definite statement that Ramana Maharshi was a Guru and did give initiation and guidance. This letter he showed to Sri Bhagavan who read it through carefully, handed it back and said in English: "Yes, send it." This was quite exceptional as his usual practice was to hand letters back to the giver without saying anything or occasionally just briefly nod. Arthur also asked permission from his former guru to stop his initiatic practices and invocation but surprisingly enough this was not received with good grace. It looked rather like anger. This and the denial that Sri Bhagavan was a guru led to a rift in their relations or rather our relations with them. Arthur had my fullest sympathy. Such behaviour contrasted oddly with Bhagavan's attitude in similar cases. Once he immediately gave permission to a Brahmin to leave the Hindu fold and become a Catholic. When His mother started expostulating He told her not to worry, that it was all right for this man.

Up till now Arthur still considered going back to the Chulalongkorn University but Sri Bhagavan obviously meant to keep him at Arunachala. Conditions in Thailand were such that it made it impracticable to return there for the present and later the question did not arise any more. Released internees were being evacuated back to England and given priority and all the chances and help for readjusting their interrupted careers. The British High Commissioner out of kindness, concerned about our future, kept on urging us to return to England and finally he wrote that the last boat was leaving on such and such a date. We did not even show these letters to Bhagavan. We simply could not envisage leaving him and living somewhere

else. From a worldly point of view it was very unpractical, a sort of divine madness. There were three children to be educated and no adequate prospects here for a man with Arthur's qualifications. He did have a hard time of it later when work became necessary. First he took up a job on a newspaper, as if in preparation for the work on *The Mountain Path*, and after four years as a principal of a school. These jobs he did successfully as far as work was concerned with his usual efficiency and thoroughness but conditions were far from congenial.

Holidays and any free days from work were spent in Tiruvannamalai. Once Arthur came unexpectedly after Sri Bhagavan's second or third operation on the arm. Bhagavan was resting on the verandah of the dispensary. Usually He was discreet in showing outward signs of His Grace but this time taken by surprise He gave Himself away. His face lit up with pleasure and love on perceiving Arthur on the steps. He looked at him for quite a while with indescribable tenderness and Grace. I was standing immediately behind him and so was an industrialist from Bangalore, Mr. Bose, who said to me afterwards that he had never seen Bhagavan look at any one in such a way, that He looked only at Arthur, not at us, and that his hair stood on end just watching it. And Arthur? He just stood there like a child, his face transformed. "Who could ever deserve such Grace?" was all he could say.

After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana Arthur wrote a number of articles about Him for papers. He collected these together and after editing gave them to the ashram to publish as *Ramana-Arunachala*. The second book to be written was *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* published in England by Rider & Co. Later he wrote *The Incredible Sai Baba* also published by Rider & Co. and the *Rhythm of History* published by Orient Longmans in Calcutta. The next book was *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism* published by Riders and later *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* and *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words* published by Riders.



While in Calcutta he had also written a book for young people, *Gautama the Buddha* with a foreword by the Dalai Lama, and *The Question of Progress* which was a series of lectures given in Madras to university professors. These books, particularly about Ramana Maharshi have been instrumental in spreading His teaching and doctrine far and wide, having been translated into a number of languages in the West (French, German, Spanish) and here in India into vernaculars. They have brought many seekers to the path and to the last he received letters thanking him for having written them. For many his lucid and simple though erudite expositions written from real understanding and always keeping himself in the background were an eye-opener and the impact was a turning point in their spiritual life.

After his usual spell of four years in Calcutta as school principal, things took such a turn that we retired to Tiruvannamalai to a simple life of *sadhana*. We both had become vegetarians long ago and this simplified matters. The children were and still are abroad. Before leaving Calcutta a stream of boys and teachers came to see Arthur and bid him good-bye, many actually weeping. They presented him with a memento printed in gold letters and beautifully framed to be hung up in a conspicuous place on the wall. I found it without the frame among some papers. They wrote among others:

. . . This hour of parting is painful indeed. It is painful as it now makes us turn our eyes to see that in some untrodden regions of our hearts there has grown up during all these years a splendid shrine of love and admiration for you

. . . We will remember you as a friend who was ever ready to share our sorrows and delights, as a philosopher who infused into our hearts an abiding faith in our avocation and as a guide who lighted up many an unknown alley in our journey . . . .

The station was crowded with people come to bid him good-bye and the compartment was so full of flowers there was scarcely room to move. Arthur was genuinely surprised.

*The Mountain Path* was started in 1964. Arthur and Ganesan, who became the managing editor, simultaneously thought of it and this was an indication for its inception. Everyone agreed that Arthur was the person to take it up. He did so with remarkable success, with the help of Ganesan who was given full responsibility to look after its practical side such as printing, page-making, distribution and the financial part of it. Arthur was only concerned with editing and its literary content. It really became an instrument for setting forth the traditional wisdom of religions in all ages as testified to by their seers and to clarify the paths available to seekers in modern times, and above all to spread Ramana Maharshi's teaching and message. Within the short span of six years it has achieved an international reputation. Single-handed he did the editorial job of several people, often writing articles under various pseudonyms if the contributions were not suitable. He gave up book-reviewing in other periodicals so as to have more time for our journal. Letters of appreciation and gratitude continue coming, thanking for the help and guidance.

As already mentioned in my letter to the readers of *The Mountain Path* (July 1970 issue), Arthur had prepared me for his death already, towards the end of 1967 when in his usual good health. He also added that the cause would be his heart. He never had any heart trouble till then nor later to the last day, and yet it was the heart which gave out in the end. Immediately after this warning he set to work preparing complete issues of *The Mountain Path* for a whole year and a number of editorials in a remarkably short time, badly overworking. Then his health collapsed for the first time. Within a week or so he recovered and told the managing editor Ganesan that he had been saved this time for *The Mountain Path*. Arthur's

face was so full of peace and serenity that, as Ganesan told me much later, he was under the strong impression of being in the presence of a realized man. A few months later came the second collapse from which he never fully recovered. During our stay in Europe last year he was several times on the point of death. When he had a bad attack of emphysema he must have experienced dying many times, as any movement or change of position brought on an attack of suffocation lasting long enough to be fatal. Yet he came through it all and I was hoping that he would be with us till the end of next year, 1971, or even fully recover as it would have been the end of another of his four-year cycles to the rhythm of which his life had run so far. But it was not to be. Looking through his reminiscences I found a page towards the end which I did not read before because it was crossed out. It is revealing. “. . . In order to safeguard against any trace of hesitance, I began to practice dying—that is being in readiness to lay down life or the mind completely. There must be no stipulation that perception of a body and the world should be restored again after dying, because that would be bargaining, not surrender. If they are restored, all right; if not, all right . . . Also the readiness to die must not be because life is sour or oppressive or futile. That—the suicide’s attitude—carries with it the obverse, that if conditions were changed and made attractive one would cling to life. That is not surrender but rebellious rejection of the terms of life offered. I had the feeling: ‘I am ready to give up my life but it is not accepted . . .’”

St. John of the Cross said that there comes a time in the life of a spiritual seeker when activity is taken away from him so that he can wholly go inwards. And according to *The Mystical Theology*: “In the exercise of mystical contemplation leave behind the senses and the activities of the intellect . . . that thou mayest arise as far as thou mayest, by unknowing towards union with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge.” This seemed to have happened to Arthur in the last two years. That was

probably the reason for his having prepared so much material for *The Mountain Path* in advance. Everything possible was done to relieve him of all concern about it.

On the 8th of May he left this earthly scene. His death, peaceful and serene was like a ripe fruit falling off a tree. The intervals between his breathing became longer without any sign of struggle till the last breath. Shortly before, when bending over his feet, I heard his voice so clearly, distinctly saying, "Thank you".

After Sri Bhagavan's Mahanirvana I thought we would be desolate but instead of grief there was a feeling of serenity and sometimes elation. He was everywhere and most of all in our hearts, the awakened living inner Guru. Of course, hard moments there were too but there is the consoling Presence of Arunachala-Ramana alive and guiding through the maze of illusion and ignorance. And now? There is also serenity and hard moments; many feel it. But all one has to do is forget oneself and turn to the heart and he is present more than ever. No separation. After Bhagavan's Mahanirvana Arthur wrote two poems expressing the heartache of absence and the healing peace of presence for both types of devotees or moods:

## ABSENCE

Lonely they go, with a heavy heart,  
the simple folk whose sunlight was his smile.

.....

.....

Silent they sit before his tomb,  
Or pace around.  
Bereaved they go in a sad life  
And well I know

The heartache for the living graciousness  
The outer world will never hold again  
For eyes of ours.

## PRESENCE

.....

.....

A living quietude throbs in the air  
Peace in the earth and solace in the trees  
And the great Hill rose tender and aware  
Simple as Truth.

His Presence so pervaded, it has been  
No wonder or fulfilment, only Grace,  
At any sudden turning to have seen  
The majesty of the beloved face.  
And then I sat in silence, as of old,  
Before Him. Like a sudden wave  
His mighty peace surged through me to enfold  
In Knowledge-Being beyond birth and grave.

.....

.....

It applies now also!

RAMANA  
MAHARSHI

# The Look That Pierced

IT WAS SHORTLY BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR that some friends sent me pictures of Bhagavan Sri Ramana and copies of some of his books. Under the influence of the French writer, Rene Guenon, who was reinterpreting forgotten spiritual traditions to the West, I had already understood that all beings manifest the One Self or Pure Being and that I, in my essence, am identical with the Self. This means that it is possible to realize this Supreme Identity and become One in very fact and that the purpose of life is to do so. Until this is achieved, the illusion of separate life in one form or another must continue and, with its sufferings and frustration, obscure the radiance of Pure Being. I knew that this task was the great, heroic quest, the quest of the Sangrail and the Golden Fleece, and that it required constant effort on a prescribed path under the guidance of a Guru. I was making efforts to find and follow such a path, but people for whom I had the utmost respect had assured me that Bhagavan was not a Guru and that his teaching, however sublime, did not constitute practical guidance on a path that men could follow. I was enormously impressed by the books and pictures, by the spiritual power and beauty in them, but classed them reluctantly as a luxury rather than a utility.

In December, 1941, the Japanese invaded Thailand where I was a university lecturer and I was arrested and interned. There followed three-and-a-half long years of internment until the Japanese surrender in 1945. There was ample time for *sadhana*. More and more Bhagavan became the support of my strivings, though I did not yet turn to him as to the Guru. As soon as the evacuation could be arranged I went to Tiruvannamalai, arriving there in October.

I entered the Ashram hall on the morning of my arrival, before Bhagavan had returned from his daily walk on the Hill. I was a little awed to find how small it was and how close to him I should be sitting; I had expected something grander and less intimate. And then he entered and, to my surprise, there was no great impression. Certainly far less than his photographs had made. Just a white-haired, very gracious man, walking a little stiffly from rheumatism and with a slight stoop. As soon as he had eased himself on to the couch he smiled to me and then turned to those around and to my young son and said: "So, Adam's prayer has been answered; his Daddy has come back safely." I felt his kindness, but no more. I appreciated that it was for my sake that he had spoken English, since Adam knew Tamil.

During the weeks that followed he was constantly gracious to me and the strain of nerves and mind gradually relaxed, but there was still no dynamic contact. I was disappointed, as it seemed to show a lack of receptivity in me, and yet, at the same time, it confirmed the opinion I had accepted that he was not a Guru and did not give guidance on any path. And Bhagavan said nothing to change my view.

Until the evening of Kartigai when, each year, a beacon is lit on the summit of Arunachala, there were huge crowds for the festival and we were sitting in the courtyard outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row before it. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me, penetrating, intimate, with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said: "You have been told; why have you not realized?" And then quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.

Thereafter love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. Next morning, for the first time sitting before him in the hall, I tried to follow his teaching



by using the *vichara*, *Who am I?* I thought it was I who had decided. I did not at first realize that it was the initiation by look that had vitalized me and changed my attitude of mind. Indeed, I had heard only vaguely of this initiation and paid little heed to what I had heard. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had had such an experience and that with them also it had marked the beginning of active *sadhana* under Bhagavan's guidance.

My love and devotion to Bhagavan deepened. I went about with a lilt of happiness in my heart, feeling the blessing and mystery of the Guru, repeating like a song of love that he was the Guru, the link between heaven and earth, between God and me, between the Formless Being and my heart. I became aware of the enormous grace of his presence. Even outwardly he was gracious to me, smiling when I entered the hall, signing to me to sit where he could watch me in meditation.

And then one day a sudden vivid reminder awoke in me: "The link with Formless Being!" And I began to apprehend the meaning of his *Jnana* and to understand why devotees addressed him simply as 'Bhagavan' which is a word meaning God. So he began to prove in me what he declared in his teaching that the outer Guru serves to awaken the Guru in the heart. The *vichara*, the constant *Who am I?* began to evoke an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly and also simultaneously of the Self within.

The specious theory that Bhagavan was not a Guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace. Moreover, I now perceived that, so far from his teaching not being practical guidance, it was exclusively that. I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of *sadhana*, of the path to be followed. It was that and that only that he was here to teach. I wrote and explained this to the people who had misinformed me and,

before sending the letter, showed it to him for his approval. He approved and handed it back, bidding me send it.

Daily I sat in the hall before him. I asked no questions, for the theory had long been understood. I spoke to him only very occasionally, about some personal matter. But the silent guidance was continuous, strong and subtle. It may seem strange to modern minds, but the Guru taught in silence. This did not mean that he was unwilling to explain when asked: indeed, he would answer sincere questions fully; what it meant was that the real teaching was not the explanation but the silent influence, the alchemy worked in the heart.

I strove constantly by way of the *vichara* according to his instructions. Having a strong sense of duty or obligation, I still continued, side by side with it, to use other forms of *sadhana* which I had undertaken before coming to Bhagavan, even though I now found them burdensome and unhelpful. Finally I told Bhagavan of my predicament and asked whether I could abandon them. He assented, explaining that all other methods only led up to the *vichara*.

From the moment of my arrival at Tiruvannamalai there had been no question of my leaving again. This was HOME — even at the very beginning when I was so mistaken about Bhagavan, even when material prospects seemed bleak. Perhaps that was why Bhagavan in his graciousness bestowed the initiation on one who sought but had not the wit to ask!



## Ramana Still Lives

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI HAS PASSED AWAY . . . . EVEN so, we would still remember him with all the love we are capable of, we would still celebrate his Jayanti as a miracle of grace bestowed upon us, but it would all be past history. For the benefit and the reassurance of any who may feel doubts on the subject, I wish to record here that Bhagavan himself gave an answer to the question.

When the sickness that had gripped his body threatened already to be fatal, some devotee besought him to put it away from him and to will his recovery and continued life for their sake. Their plea was that they were utterly dependent on him that they needed his continued grace and guidance and could not carry on their *sadhana* without him.

Bhagavan's answer was curt and to the point. All that he said to them was: "You attach too much importance to the body." This then is the final and conclusive answer, Bhagavan's own answer to those who think that he lives in any less real way since the body's death, that his guidance is in any way broken or weakened, that he is in any less complete sense the Sat-Guru; they attach too much importance to the body.

The grace at Arunachala is so potent, so vibrant today, so searching and intimate in its effect, that one wonders whether those who find a change in it have been there to see. Some there were who even formerly were insensitive to Bhagavan's grace, but it is not a question of such people here, since he who complains of having lost a treasure must once have possessed it or at least part of it. Those who found nothing formerly can complain of having lost nothing now. And yet, those who really possessed the treasure know that they have lost nothing.

What, then, is the difference today? There is a difference, and its reality none can deny. Indeed, who most feel the present guidance are, on the whole, those who most enjoyed the graciousness of Bhagavan's physical manifestation. The very receptivity to his grace which made them so susceptible to the beauty of his physical form, so apprehensive of losing it, in some cases even so despondent to think what would ensue, makes them now aware of his continued Presence. There is difference: the beloved voice is not heard nor the divine form seen; but this has become strangely unimportant to those who had thought they would feel it most. For they have found a lightness and a happiness in the very air of Tiruvannamalai, an immaculate peace beyond the rough handling of destiny, an immortal wealth despite their loss.

But is this the same as actual guidance by Bhagavan? It is, and in the most direct and personal way. Indeed the guidance seems more active now than formerly in those people who meditated little before but were contented rather to feast their eyes upon him and listen to the sound of his voice, are now being drawn more and more to sit in silent meditation before the Samadhi and to gather together in the old hall redolent with his presence. As one sits there, it is nothing vague or diffused that one feels, but the same intense inner stirring, the same lifting up, the same blissful certainty that was felt under his watchful eye, there is the same variation from day to day in mode and potency of guidance, the same response to devotion and to any earnest plea for help.

But, it may be asked, cannot this be felt elsewhere? Is Bhagavan now confined to Tiruvannamalai? He never was. His grace flowed out upon all who turned to him. To imply that the guidance was confined to Tiruvannamalai either now or formerly would indeed be attaching too much importance to the body. Now, as formerly, it is felt in the heart of the devotee independent of all outer aids; but it is also true that now, as

formerly, there is great beauty and potency in a visit to Tiruvannamalai. Many have compared it to the recharging of their spiritual battery and the comparison is no less apt now than it used to be. Although Bhagavan goes out to all who invoke him, he is no less gracious now than formerly to those who make the effort to come to him at Tiruvannamalai. One feels there that he is pouring out an abundance of grace of which there are all too few recipients.

At this time of Jayanti we celebrate the birth of him who is deathless. Many are able to pay their homage at Tiruvannamalai as of old. Others gather together in groups in whatever town or country they may be; and some give praise alone with Bhagavan in the secrecy of their heart. Those who are sensitive and watch the signs feel that the force we now celebrate is waxing, not waning. The numbness that overtook many after the Master's apparent departure is wearing off. A gladness of response is replacing it. The guidance to which they respond is growing so potent, so intimate, that for any to deny its existence causes them the same surprise as if a blind man were to deny that the sun is shining.

“I am not going away,” Bhagavan said. “Where could I go? I am here.” He is here at Tiruvannamalai, here in the hearts of his devotees. He is Bhagavan, the Inner Guru, the Self that guides to the Self.



# The Ascent

THERE IS ONE FLANK OF THE MOUNTAIN WHERE THE ascent is sheer with no pleasant groves to rest in on the way, where however, to compensate for this, the path is direct and the crest already visible from the plains below and throughout the ascent. This is the direct path as taught by Bhagavan. There are no stages on this path. Indeed, followers of Bhagavan are apt to be impatient when they hear of stages or degrees of Realisation upon some indirect path and to say: "What does all this mean? Either a man has realised the Self or he has not." This attitude is right as regards their own path but not necessarily as regards others, for there are paths on which the wayfarer does not aim at realisation of the Self, the ultimate and supreme Truth, or at any rate not directly and the term 'realisation' is used with a different meaning, to signify merely the attainment of some higher state which, however, is equally transient and illusory within the ultimate reality of the Self.

However, although the wayfarer on the direct path does not attain to any higher states along the way, he may be blessed with glimpses of pure Self-realisation, beyond all states, which will suffuse and irradiate his whole life. Speaking of pure Self-realisation and the direct path to it, Bhagavan affirmed quite definitely both that there are no stages in Realisation and that realisation is not normally permanent when first attained except in very rare cases. It may come in occasional flashes but cannot be permanent until the *vasanas* (inherent tendencies impelling one to desire one thing and shun another) have been eradicated.

Two modes of conscious planned ascent are indicated whatever name one may give them (apart from the occasional transportation of the mystic and the uncharted elevation of certain saints); that of the man who ascends in stages, becoming

stabilized this lifetime in some higher state, possibly with some higher posers, but with no direct and often even no theoretical knowledge of the supreme state of Self-realisation; and that of the man who envisages the supreme truth of Identity, strives towards it, perhaps has occasional glimpses of its Realisation but, until attaining it, is not established in any higher state. Which is preferable? The question is unrealistic, since each aspirant will follow the path that accords with his temperament and that his destiny makes available.

Another question that may be raised at this point is that of the benefit of those below. Reverting to the symbol of the mountain; should the hill-dweller who is facing downwards, having established a homestead not too high up from which he can supply the sufferers in the plains below, not be considered preferable to one who has turned his back on them and struggled up on his lone path to the summit? He might be if the symbol held good, but it does not. It is cancelled out by Christ's saying that to him who attains the kingdom of heaven all else is added. It is therefore he who has the greatest power to help others.

Not many are there with discrimination who take the direct royal road and who can follow the ever-present living inner Guru in the Heart, who is the core of their being. When expedient he may appear in a human form. Embodied or not makes no difference for He is not the body as Bhagavan kept on reminding us. Once a devotee, Miss Merston, intercepted Him on Arunachala to ask whether she should return to England after several years of absence or stay on, and Bhagavan replied: "Remember, wherever you go or stay Bhagavan is always with you, watching over you."

Many there are whose complicated minds make them seek byways. More often than not they become attached to self-styled gurus misguided and misleading others, and thus genuinely deluded. It is a sign of the times—the time of false Christs and false prophets of which Christ warned his followers. Some such

are widely known and publicized, others almost unknown. They make the highest possible claims for themselves or allow their disciples to make them; this one is Christ at his second coming, that one God incarnate. How far are they self-deluded and how far consciously deluding others is usually hard to say. A man may spend years in solitude, practising yogic discipline, as a result of which various powers may develop, both internal powers such as vision and audition, and outward-directed powers such as telepathy and hypnotism. Then the ego, forgetting that its own immolation is the ultimate goal of the process, may pride itself on what it has acquired, regarding this as realisation. In some cases this capital, accumulated during the time of training, may be gradually exhausted, like an overdrawn bank account, and the guru survive on his former reputation, if at all; but in other cases it may continue or even grow with the growth of the ego. For the ego will grow; there is no food on which it flourishes more than the adulation of disciples. The seeker needs to use great caution in estimating not only the guru but the purity of his own motives, for any impure motive may be reflected outwardly in an imperfect guide. And then not only will he not be led forward into greater purity but will be infected by the imperfections of the guide, drifting into a worse state than before; for qualities of the ego are as infections through psychic contact as a disease is through physical.





# The Maharshí's Place in History

A NEW DEVELOPMENT has come about in Hinduism since the time of Ramakrishna. Because, ancient as it is, Hinduism is still capable of development. That means that it is still living, for development is the quality of life, rigidity of death. It is surprising how little this development has been noticed; it just seems to be taken for granted. It is of fundamental importance.

In order to appreciate it one must see clearly what Hinduism is. It is a fusion between an organization of life and worship on what might be called the horizontal plane and paths to beatitude on the vertical. Of course, not every Hindu takes a path to beatitude—he can still be a Hindu without that. But he cannot be without the horizontal affiliation, that is to say without either being integrated into the Hindu social system or having renounced it, like a sannyasin. And this horizontal modality of Hinduism is so complex that it would be hard for an outsider to fit into it even if he tried. As for his becoming a sannyasin, that would mean adopting the Hindu pattern of life in order to renounce it, which seems rather absurd.

For this reason, Hinduism is not and cannot be a proselytising religion. It is also not an intolerant religion. For those who do follow a path to Beatitude there are a number to choose from, and, for instance, one whose path is through the worship of Rama will not condemn or try to convert another whose path is through the worship of Krishna. Why should not this apply also to one whose path is through the worship of Christ?

What has been happening since the time of Ramakrishna is that the path of Beatitude is being detached from the social organization of life, so that people from outside the Hindu community can receive spiritual guidance from its gurus without needing to integrate themselves into that community. This is a change of tremendous importance, since it enables the spiritual

influence to radiate out beyond the limits of the organization. For anyone who is interested in drawing historical parallels, it is not unlike the change which St. Paul brought about when, revolting against the orthodoxy of St. Peter and St. James, he decided that those who came to Christ from outside Judaism need not accept the Jewish law and ritual. However, the parallel cannot be pushed too far. The circumstances were different, since what then began as a new path to Beatitude for those who were seeking soon developed into a religion for a whole community with its own law and ritual and its own social organization.

What is similar is that, now as then, a materialistic world has broken away from religion and many are looking around desperately for guidance. People are giving up religion and, even for those who seek, the paths to Beatitude are becoming lost or inaccessible for the guidance is no longer reliable. Divine Providence always meets the needs of its children, but not always in the same way. In the time of St. Paul it did so through the establishment of a new religion; today it does so by making spiritual guidance available outside the formal structure of the religions. This is happening in various ways; in the resurgence of non-denominational Christian mysticism through inspired teachers such as Joel Goldsmith, in the spread of Buddhism in the West, not as a creed for the many but as a path for the few, and in this new development in Hinduism, making the path to Beatitude available outside the structure of Hindu orthodoxy.

The proof that this new development in Hinduism is a valid and not a heretical one is that it has been brought about from above, by the masters themselves, beginning with Ramakrishna and culminating in Ramana Maharshi.

It was Vivekananda who was the most spectacular in introducing this new trend with the Vedanta Societies he founded in the West; but it was not his innovation. Ramakrishna was not mistaken in saying that Vivekananda would complete his work. That work has two aspects; to restore Hinduism to

vigour and self-respect in India and to make it known as a spiritual current in the West, a current available to Western seekers. Both were carried to completion by Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna himself had no foreign disciples, but he dreamed once that he was in a Western town of large, modern buildings, surrounded by Westerners, and he interpreted it to mean that he would have many disciples in the West. After his Mahasamadhi, his wife, Sarada Devi, whom all the disciples revered as the Holy Mother, quite naturally and without argument initiated foreign disciples, even though she spoke only Bengali, which they did not know. All the other disciples approved of this, and of Vivekananda's more spectacular action in the West, and followed in the same direction.

Since then this has become the regular practice with Hindu Gurus. All or almost all of them accept foreign disciples without expecting them to integrate themselves into the Hindu social system or practice Hindu religious ritual.

This practice culminated in Ramana Maharshi. There was something mysterious about the initiation he gave—no laying on of hands, no mantra, no outer form at all; only the mouna diksha, the silent initiation. Although silent, this was a definite event, not a gradual process. He himself confirmed this in various oblique ways when necessary, asserting that, from the point of view of the disciple, the Guru-disciple relationship is a necessity and explaining that a spiritual practice (and he was constantly enjoining one) only has potency for those who are initiated into it. For those who experienced his initiation no conformation was necessary. If they were in his presence it was given through a penetrating look of terrific power; if at a distance perhaps through a dream or vision, perhaps formlessly. In any case, the disciple felt taken up, swept forward on a wave of power, thenceforward guided and supported. And in any case there was nothing specifically Hindu about it, nothing to make it available to members of one community only and inaccessible to others.

That was one advantage of the silent initiation. Now that he is no longer in the body we see another also—that it can still continue, whereas formal initiation could not. He himself indicated in various ways before leaving the body that his guidance would continue; for instance, when some devotees complained that he was leaving them without guidance and asked what they were to do without him, he replied: “You attach too much importance to the body.” The implication was obvious; the body was going, he was not. And indeed, he said: “They say that I am going, but where would I go? I am here.” Not “I shall be” but “I am”. The body could go, but the formless Self, with which he was in constant conscious identity, just is, eternally, here and now.

This continued initiation and guidance is not just theory; it happens. I will quote a case of it described quite recently in a letter from a man in a Yorkshire village of whom we had no previous knowledge, published in the January 1967 issue of *The Mountain Path*.

“On August 13<sup>th</sup> (1966), without any shadow of doubt, Sri Bhagavan bestowed his Grace on me. Instruction was also implicit in his Grace. And further, even though I could not admit it to myself at once (although I knew it to be so) it was initiation and an indication that a Guru-disciple relationship had been created.”<sup>1</sup>

This formless initiation and guidance of Bhagavan, spreading invisibly through many countries, has not been institutionalised. This also is in conformity with the needs of the age, when many who respond to it would not be in a position to join an institution and many also would not wish to be dependent on one. It is supported outwardly by the books on or by the Maharshi and by *The Mountain Path*, and in some towns the followers of the Maharshi meet together in a society where they can meditate and discuss and listen to talks. This is a great facility where it exists, but it has nothing of the formality or compulsion of an institution; and there are many for whom even membership of such a society

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<sup>1</sup>*The Mountain Path*, January 1967, p. 85.

is not available. Many also, by temperament, do not desire it. We see now the wisdom of Bhagavan in establishing a path which can be followed in solitude and silence, without singing or chanting, without the knowledge of any sacred language, independent of the forms and ritual of any religion.

## PATH AND DOCTRINE

A spiritual path rests on a doctrinal basis, just as a scientific experiment does on a theoretical basis. To make them universally available, outside the ritual of any religion, the paths the Maharshi taught were simple and direct; and therefore the doctrine on which they were based was universal and free from philosophical technicalities. I say 'paths' because in fact there were two. He would often say: "Ask yourself 'Who am I?' or submit". As simple as that, and he declared that these two paths both lead to the same goal.

The one that he offered first was always Self-enquiry. Only if some one complained that he found this too difficult or that it did not suit his temperament did he tell him in that case to submit, assuring him that submission would lead to the same goal. Let us therefore start with a consideration of Self-enquiry and the doctrinal basis he provided for it.

## THE PATH OF ENQUIRY

Self-enquiry is not analysis; it has nothing in common with philosophy or psychology. The Maharshi showed this when he declared that no answer the mind gives can be right. (And, indeed, in this it resembles a Zen koan). If it had a mental answer it would be a philosophical conundrum, not a spiritual practice; and it was as a spiritual practice that the Maharshi prescribed it. So any one who tells you what the answer to the enquiry is shows by that very fact that he has not understood it. It does not mean arguing or saying that I am not this or not that; it means concentrating on the pure sense of being, the pure I-am-ness of me. And this, one discovers, is the same as pure consciousness, pure, formless awareness.

So far is it from being a mental practice that the Maharshi told us not to concentrate on the head while doing it but on the heart. By this he did not mean the physical heart at the left side of the chest but the spiritual heart at the right. This is not a physical organ and also not a yogic or tantric chakra; but it is the centre of our sense of being. The Maharshi told us so and those who have followed his instructions in meditation have found it to be so. The ancient Hebrews knew of it: “The wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart is at his left,”<sup>2</sup> it says in the Bible. It is referred to also in that ancient Advaitic scripture, the *Yoga Vasishtha*, in verses which the Maharshi quoted as Nos. 22-27 in his *Supplementary Forty Verses on Reality*. Concentration on the heart does not mean thinking about the heart but being aware in and with the heart. After a little practice it sets up a current of awareness that can actually be felt physically though far more than physical. At first this is felt in the heart, sometimes in the heart and head and connecting them. Later it pervades and transcends the body. Perhaps it could be said that this current of awareness is the ‘answer’ to the question ‘Who am I?’ since it is the wordless experience of I-ness.

There should be regular times for this ‘meditation’, since the mind accustoms itself and responds more readily. I have put the word ‘meditation’ in inverted commas, since it is not meditation in the usual sense of the word but only concentration on Self or on being. As Bhagavan explained: “Meditation requires an object to meditate on, whereas in Self-enquiry there is only the subject and no object.”<sup>3</sup> Good times are first thing when you wake up in the morning and last thing before going to sleep at night. At first a good deal of time and effort may be needed before the current of awareness is felt; later it begins to arise more and more easily. It also begins to occur spontaneously during the day, when one is

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<sup>2</sup>*Ecclesiastes*, X, 2.

<sup>3</sup>*The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, Sri Ramanasramam, Ch. V.

not meditating. That explains Bhagavan's saying that one should keep up the enquiry constantly, not only during meditation. It comes to be more and more constant and, when lost or forgotten, to need less and less re-awakening.

A man has three modes of manifestation; being, thinking and doing. Being is the most fundamental of the three, because he can't think or do unless he first is. But it is so covered over by the other two that it is seldom experienced. It could be compared to the cinema screen which is the support for the pictures without which they could not be seen, but which is so covered over with them that it is not ordinarily noticed. Only very occasionally for a brief glimpse, does the spiritually untrained person experience the sheer fact of being; and when he does he recalls it afterwards as having been a moment of pure happiness, pure acceptance, pure rightness. Self-enquiry is the direct approach to conscious being, and therefore it is necessary to suspend thinking and doing while practising it. It may lead to a state when conscious (instead of the previous unconscious) being underlies thinking and doing; but at first they would interrupt it, so they have to be held off.

This is the path; the doctrine on which it is based is Advaita, non-duality, which might be rendered 'Identity' or 'No-otherness'. Its scripture for the Maharshi's followers is his *Forty Verses on Reality* together with the *Supplementary Forty Verses* which he later added.

In this he declares: "All religions postulate the three fundamentals; the world, the individual and God."<sup>4</sup>

Not all in the formal way, for there are also nontheistic religions; but essentially this is what we start from. Whether I am educated or uneducated, my own existence is the basis from which I start, the direct awareness to which everything else is added. Then, outside myself, my mind and senses report a world of chairs and

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<sup>4</sup> *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 2 (from the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, published by Sri Ramanasramam).

tables and trees and sky, and other people in it. Mystics tell me that all this is illusion, and nowadays nuclear scientists agree with them. They say that the red book I am holding is just a cluster of electrons whirling about at high speed, that its redness is just the way my optic apparatus interprets a vibration of a certain wavelength, and similarly with its other qualities; but anyway, that is how it presents itself of my perception. I also have a feeling of some vastness, some power, some changeless Reality behind the vulnerability of the individual and the mutability of the world. It is about this third factor that people disagree, some holding that it is the real Self of the individual, others that it is a Being quite other than him, and others again that it does not exist at all.

The verse continues: “But it is only the One Reality that manifests as these three.” This implies that Self-enquiry is the quest of the one Reality underlying the apparent trinity of individual, world and God.

But the mistake inherent in dualism does not consist in supposing that God is a separate Being from you but in supposing that you are a separate being from God. It is not belief in God that is wrong but belief in the ego. Therefore the verse continues: “One can say, ‘The three are really three only so long as the ego lasts.’ ” Then the verse turns to the practical conclusion, as Bhagavan always did in his teaching: “Therefore to abide in one’s own Being, where the ‘I’ or ego is dead is the perfect State.”

And that is what one is trying to do by Self-enquiry; to abide as the Self, the pure Being that one essentially is, casting aside the illusory reality of the ego.

Feeling one’s insignificance before that mighty Power, one may worship It in one of Its manifestations—as Krishna, say, or Christ or Rama, but: “Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realizing It without name and form.”<sup>5</sup> That means appreciating Its Infinity, realizing that It alone is, and leaves no room for a separate me subsisting apart from It. Therefore, the verse continues: “That



alone is true Realization wherein one knows oneself in relation to that Reality, attains peace and realizes one's identity with It."

And this is done by Self-enquiry. "If the first person, I, exists, then the second and third persons, you and he, also exist. By enquiring into the nature of the I, the I perishes. With it, 'you' and 'he' also perish."<sup>6</sup> However, that does not mean blank annihilation; it only means annihilation of the illusion of separate identity, that is to say of the ego, which is the source of all suffering and frustration. Therefore, the verse continues: "The resultant state, which shines as Absolute Being, is one's own natural state, the Self."<sup>7</sup>

Not only is this not a gloomy or dismal state or anything to be afraid of, but it is the most radiant happiness, the most perfect bliss. "For him who is immersed in the bliss of Self-realization arising from the extinction of the ego what more is there to achieve? He does not see anything as being other than the Self. Who can apprehend his State?"<sup>8</sup>

Note that in speaking of the unutterable bliss of Self-realization Bhagavan says that it is achieved through the extinction of the ego, that is the apparent individual identity. So that, although nothing is lost, something does have to be offered in sacrifice; and while being offered it appears a terrible loss, the supreme loss, one's very life; only after it has been sacrificed does one discover that it was nothing and that all has been gained, not lost. This means that understanding alone cannot constitute the path. Whatever path may be followed, in whatever religion, the battle must be fought and the sacrifice made. Without that a man can go on all his life proclaiming that there is no ego and yet remain as much a slave to the ego as ever. Although the *Forty Verses on Reality* are a scripture of the Path of Knowledge, Bhagavan asks in them: "If since you

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 31.

are a single being, you cannot see yourself, how can you see God?”<sup>9</sup> And he goes on to answer: “Only by being devoured by Him.”

This brings the path of enquiry to the same point as the path of surrender, since in either case the ego must be sacrificed. It is a very profound verse. It recalls the Hebrew saying: “No man can see God and live.” Many people see visions of God in one form or another, but that is not seeing God. The mind and senses of a man knot themselves together into what wrongly supposes itself to be an individual entity separate from the Universal Being which it aspires to see. But that Universal Being is the true Self of it. Only by surrendering their illusory individual entity to be devoured out of existence can the mind and senses become true instruments for perception by what is thereafter understood to be their true Self, so that, as the Maharshi sometimes said, the only way to see God is to be God.

## THE PATH OF SURRENDER

There are many who are drawn rather to a path of love, devotion and surrender than to one of inner quest, that is of Self-enquiry. For them too the Maharshi reduced his teaching to the simplest essential when he said: “There are two ways: ask yourself ‘Who am I?’ or submit.” No matter whether the ego submits to God with form or without form or whether in the form taught by one religion or another, so long as it utterly and completely submits. But what can induce it to submit? Not the hope of any heavenly reward, because that would be bargaining, not submission. Only love can evoke submission; therefore the path of surrender is also the path of love.

For people who take this path also Bhagavan composed a scriptural basis for it; in this case *The Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala*, that is the first of the *Five Hymns to Arunachala*.

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 21.

Before speaking of this path, however, let us anticipate an objection. That is that philosophers have written countless books and articles, and still do, maintaining that God is either the very Self of you or totally other than you, each side denouncing the other and declaring it at fault. How then can a Master regard it as a mere matter of temperament which one believes? How can he offer a choice to his followers? Ought he not to state definitely that one is right and the other wrong?

Actually, the reason for disagreement is only that the two declarations are inadequately worded. Is Supreme Being the very Self of me or totally other than me? We obviously cannot answer that until we know who or what is the 'me' about whom the question is asked. The very self of whom? Other than whom? So once again we are driven back to Self-enquiry. I feel myself to be an individual entity with likes and dislikes, abilities and disabilities, before a vast Presence, an illimitable Potency, which I can only dimly apprehend. Can that presence be the same as Me? It is certainly not the same as this individual entity; but is this individual entity the reality of me? It was not here before birth; it will not be after death; it has grown and evolved and will decay and disintegrate. The mistake, then, as I said in speaking of verse 2 of the *Forty Verses*, is not in supposing there to be a God separate from me but in supposing there to be a me separate from God. There are only two things to do: one is to sacrifice this apparent individual entity (as Bhagavan declared even in speaking of the Path of Knowledge when he said that it must be devoured by God); the other is to find out what is the reality of me. The answer is not a form of words but an experience. It is better to have it than to describe it. The individual yearns for its own destruction in Union with the Universal. Bhagavan says in the *Garland*: "Unite with me to destroy Thee and me and bless me with ever-vibrant joy, Arunachala!"<sup>10</sup> The destruction of separate

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<sup>10</sup> *Marital Garland of Letters*, v. 56 (from the *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*).

selves is the gateway to ever-vibrant joy. The whole tone of the two scriptures is different. Where the *Forty Verses* were hard as granite and sharp as steel, the *Garland* is one of the great mystical love poems of all time. Never have I read anything so moving and compelling, even in translation.

Death is promised, but at the same time resurrection: “Hast thou not bartered Thyself for me? Oh, Thou art death to me, Arunachala!”<sup>11</sup> But it is I who am the gainer by the exchange: “Thou art the Primal Being while I count not in this or the other world. What didst Thou gain then by my worthless self, Oh Arunachala?”<sup>12</sup> The loss of individual entity is the gain of Divine identity: “The moment Thou didst welcome me, didst enter into me and grant me Thy divine life, I lost my individuality, Oh Arunachala!”<sup>13</sup>

Thus the two paths come to the same goal. The difference is rather of emphasis. In the Path of Knowledge initiative is rather with the seeker: “To seek and abide in the Reality that is always attained is the only Attainment.”<sup>14</sup> In the Path of Surrender the burden of initiative is thrown on the Lord, though even so some effort must be made: “Weak though my effort was, by Thy Grace I gained the Self, Oh Arunachala!”<sup>15</sup> In the same sense, Bhagavan has said ( and it remains true now as in his lifetime): “Submit to me and I will strike down the mind.” Probing into the Truth behind one’s apparent individual entity and sacrificing that apparent entity in love to God both lead to the illimitable bliss of Pure Being. Theorising about the outcome leads nowhere.

And what, it might be asked, of the other two paths, yoga marga and karma marga; did Bhagavan not teach them also? It is of the very essence of this new development of Hinduism

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 62.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 93.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 95.

<sup>14</sup> *Forty Verses*, v. 35.

<sup>15</sup> *Marital Garland*, v. 45.

that ritual and technique are simplified to the utmost to make it available to those also who are not Hindus or who, being Hindus, are more or less cut off from the traditional forms of Hinduism. It would have been incongruous, therefore, if Bhagavan who brought this development to its completion, had given instruction in a highly technical approach such as yoga. Indeed, he specifically says in *Self-enquiry*: “As there are elaborate treatises on the elements of ashtanga yoga, only as much as is necessary is written here. Any one who desires to know more must resort to a practising yogi and learn from him in detail”.<sup>16</sup>

Karma marga, on the other hand, in the sense of disinterested, harmonious action, free from self-interest, doing what is right simply because it is right, regardless of praise or blame, profit or loss as Sri Krishna taught Arjuna in the *Gita*, is particularly suited to modern times; and both the paths that Bhagavan taught, Jnana and Bhakti, were to be combined with karma marga. It is possible to follow either of them as a recluse shut off from the world, but that was not Bhagavan’s teaching. Time and again some one would ask his authorisation to renounce the world, but he did not give it. He always taught that the battle was to be fought in the life of the world, in the midst of family and professional life. “If you renounce it will only substitute the thought of renunciation for that of the family and environment of the forest for that of the household. But the mental obstacles are always there for you. They even increase greatly in the new surroundings. Change of environment is no help. The one obstacle is the mind, and this must be overcome whether in the home or the forest. If you can do it in the forest, why not in the home? So why change the environment? Your efforts can be made even now, whatever the environment.”<sup>17</sup>



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<sup>16</sup> *Self-Enquiry*, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Vol. 1, p. 6.

# The Essential Teaching of the Maharshi

HINDUISM IS NOT A PROSELYTISING RELIGION. INdeed, it is by no means easy for any one not born a Hindu to become one, since it is not only a religion but a social structure into which a newcomer could not easily fit. The religion of a Hindu consists of two elements (and indeed, he has no word corresponding at all exactly to 'religion'): a pattern of life and worship and a path to Beatitude.

Hinduism is also not an intolerant religion. By no means all follow a path to Beatitude, though many recognize that they ought to. Even for those who do there are many paths to choose from. One who follows a devotional path may, for instance, worship God in the form of Rama. If he does it will never occur to him to refuse recognition to those who worship God in the form of Krishna or try to convert them. Why then should he try to convert those who worship God in the form of Christ? If told that they or the Buddhists believe theirs to be the only valid path to Beatitude he is likely to smile pityingly.

Mystics in any religion, that is those who know from experience, perceive that the experience is universal and beyond doctrine and usually find it easy to understand that it can be approached through other religions also. And Hindu doctrine is openly mystical. It declares plainly: "The unreal has no being, the Real no not-being."<sup>1</sup> The whole Truth is in that sentence. The Real is not something that has been in the past or will be in the future; it does not depend on religion or doctrine; it cannot be made real, it just IS, now and eternally.

Since Ramakrishna Paramahansa a remarkable change has taken place in Hinduism. The gurus have separated the path to

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, II-16.

Beatitude from the Hindu pattern of life by giving initiation to non-Hindus. It was Swami Vivekananda who was most spectacular in introducing this change with Vedanta Societies in America; but it was not his innovation. Ramakrishna himself had a dream which he interpreted to mean that he would have many followers in the West. Sri Sarada Devi, wife of Sri Ramakrishna, whom all his disciples revered as 'The Holy Mother', had foreign disciples. She and all the other disciples approved of Vivekananda's action. Since then the saints and gurus have continued the practice. It culminated in Ramana Maharshi.

This development is of tremendous importance for it means that they can not merely appreciate the wisdom and beauty of it but find actual guidance on the path of Beatitude.

In his lifetime the Maharshi initiated his disciples silently, with no forms or ritual. We see the wisdom of this now, because the same silent initiation continues although he has shed the body. This is not just theory; there have been many cases of it.

The Maharshi's teaching too was independent of any specific religion. This does not mean that he deprecated ritual or religion. He appreciated them for those who are helped by them; but in our modern, materialistic, individualistic world there are many who are outside their pale or can find no guidance in them, and yet seek. It was for such that his guidance came. And it was not for one generation only.

His instruction was of the most simple: to seek Reality through the enquiry 'Who am I?' However, this is not a mere mental enquiry. It is not philosophy or psychology. He indicated this by saying: "No answer that the mind gives can be right." It is rather clinging to one's actual sense of being, of I-am-ness, and experiencing that in full consciousness while suspending thought. One sign that it is not mental is that the Maharshi advised, while meditating in this way, to concentrate not on the head but the heart at the right side, the spiritual heart. The ancient Hebrews knew of this: "The

wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left."<sup>2</sup> Not to think about the heart but to experience with or in the heart.

He taught the Unity of Being; but it is not a question of whether God exists apart from you but of whether you exist apart from God, as he showed in his *Forty Verses on Reality*, his great exposition of doctrine. "All religions postulate the three fundamentals—the world, the soul and God; but it is only the One Reality that manifests itself as these three. One can say, 'The three are really three' only so long as the ego exists. Therefore to inhere in one's own Being, where the 'I' or ego is dead, is the perfect state."<sup>3</sup>

But it is no use arguing about it; it has to be experienced: "It is due to illusion born of ignorance that men fail to recognize That which is always and for everybody the inherent Reality dwelling in its natural Heart-centre and to abide in it, and that instead they argue that it exists or does not exist, that it has form or has not form, or is non-dual or dual."<sup>4</sup>

Doctrine must be transcended, because the only answer is experience and the ultimate experience is Identity: "Under whatever name and form one may worship the Absolute Reality, it is only a means for realizing It without name and form. That alone is true Realization wherein one knows oneself in relation to that Reality, attains peace and realizes one's identity with It."<sup>5</sup>

There are many, however, whom this path of direct inner quest does not suit. They are drawn to a more devotional way. For them too the Maharshi provided guidance. He often said: "There are two ways: ask yourself 'Who am I?' or submit." And indeed, if the mind cannot realize its own nothingness and universality, the only thing is for it to submit to the Universal. If it does it will eventually be absorbed ("I came to devour

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<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiastes*, X, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Forty Verses on Reality*, v. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, v. 34.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, v. 8.



Thee, but Thou hast devoured me; now there is peace, Arunachala!”<sup>6</sup>), so the two paths lead to the same goal. For those who are drawn to the more emotional approach the Maharshi wrote the *Marital Garland of Letters to Arunachala*, the supreme mystical love poem, beginning: “Thou dost root out the ego of those who meditate on Thee in the heart, O Arunachala!”<sup>7</sup>

But if the ego is eradicated no void remains; pure Being takes its place: “Hast Thou not bartered cunningly Thyself for me? O, Thou art death to me, Arunachala!”<sup>8</sup> What is destroyed is only the illusion of duality, of two separate beings: “Unite with me to destroy Thee and me and bless me with the state of ever-vibrant joy, O Arunachala!”<sup>9</sup> And the mind wonders at the Grace of it: “Thou art the Primal Being, whereas I count not in this or the other world. What didst Thou thus gain by my worthless self, O Arunachala?”<sup>10</sup>

The two paths are not incompatible. Many do in fact combine them. Nevertheless a person is apt to be drawn more to one or the other. Therefore guidance was provided on both.

The Maharshi often said, “The Guru is One.” Whatever Guru one may follow it is only a manifestation of the Inner Guru, the Christ in you, and his function is to lead you back to the Source. Nevertheless, until the heart is purified various impulses may masquerade as the inner Guru and it is safer (and indeed usually necessary) to have an outer Guru. In this spirituality dark age an enlightened Guru is not easy to find. Therefore the silent initiation was instituted, for Providence always meets the needs of its children. Those who turn to the Maharshi for help will not be left without guidance.



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<sup>6</sup> *Marital Garland of Letters*, v. 28.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 62.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 56.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 93.

# The Nature and Function of the Guru

MAN'S MIND IS poised between the Spirit and the outer world which reflects the Spirit. Turned inwards it receives intuitions of the Spirit; turned outwards it receives sense data of the manifested world.

That is how it should be, but in fact it is apt to become engrossed in the outer world, according it a fictitious reality and forgetting that it is a manifestation of the Spirit. That leads to its forgetting the Truth of the Spirit and becoming obtuse on the inward side through which spiritual influence should flow. Therefore the Spirit, unable to penetrate directly through the inward side, manifests outwardly in order thus to attract the attention of the mind and turn it inwards. This outward manifestation is the Guru. The Tamil poet-saint Tayumanavar refers to the Guru as a decoy: "Eating and sleeping, suffering and enjoying, bearing a name and having a place of birth, it appeared as the Silent Guru, like a deer used to decoy other deer." Understood thus, whatever serves to proclaim the reality of the Spirit to a man and to turn his mind inwards can be called a Guru; and in this sense the Sage Dattatreya could say that he had many gurus.

Those rare persons who are already near to spiritual awakening can be illumined by the Inner Light acting directly with no outer agency, and for them, as the Maharshi said, no outer Guru is necessary. For those who come near to this, reminders coming from natural forces, creatures and episodes may spark the illumination, as Dattatreya indicated. For most people, however, the Guru takes the form of an outer individual—a deer used to decoy other deer.

This indicates the need for a Guru and shows what his function is. For any one to whom the Golden Gates do not open

spontaneously and for whom some spiritual discipline is necessary in order to make him poor enough to pass through the eye of a needle, a Guru is necessary. And the function of the Guru is not primarily to teach him doctrine or theory. There is no doctrine or theory that cannot be learned from books; and yet a book does not normally act as a Guru. There was a time when doctrinal truths were normally kept secret or revealed only gradually, stage by stage. D. T. Suzuki quotes a Ch'an Master as saying: "Ask of your self, inquire into your self, pursue your self, investigate within your self, and never let others tell you what it is, nor let it be explained in words."<sup>1</sup> Not only did he not give the disciple an explanation in words but he even forbade him to accept one if offered. This can be compared to an arithmetic master not telling his pupils the answers to their sums until they have worked them out. There are some modern arithmetic books in which the answers are given at the end, but still the pupils have to work the sums out; the answers serve only to check whether they have done the work rightly or not. There is no merit in knowing the answers if you have not done the work. So it is with the expositions of doctrinal theory so easily obtainable nowadays. The *Chandogya Upanishad* goes even farther than the Ch'an Master whom Suzuki quotes, for there the Guru gives the pupils a wrong explanation to see which of them will be taken in by it and which will see through it and come back for a correction.

It follows, then, that the function of the Guru is not to expound doctrine. He may do this incidentally, but the expositions can be obtained just as well from books. This is what the Maharshi meant by saying that he taught in silence: not that he did not give expositions but that they were not his essential teaching. Some of his disciples never asked him any questions of doctrine at all—they knew all that before coming. In the compilations of question and answer which his Ashram

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<sup>1</sup> *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism*, p. 320, Rider.

<sup>2</sup> *Talks With Ramana Maharshi*, and *Day by Day With Bhagavan*.

has published<sup>2</sup> it will be seen that most of the questions are asked by visitors or newcomers. The real function of the Guru is to awaken a spiritual current in you and turn you inwards, impelling you on towards liberation from the illusion of the ego-self into realization of universal Being.

This implies that the need for a Guru is not a specifically Hindu dogma and does not need to be illustrated by quotations from Hindu scriptures. It is a fact of nature as universal as physical parenthood. What is, perhaps, specifically Hindu is the unequivocal equating of the Guru with God. As the Maharshi said: "God, Guru and Self are the same." This also, however, although concealed for contingent reasons in most religions, is a universal truth and is therefore capable of exposition outside the technical terminology of any tradition.

Being *is*. Once the illusion of a separate individual 'me' is dissolved, this universal Being is felt as the sole reality of me and I call it 'Self'. So long, however, as the psychosomatic instrument appears to subsist as a real and separate entity I call it 'me' and regard pure Being as 'other', that is as 'God'. It is the same Being. It is only belief or disbelief in the reality of the illusory ego which makes pure Being appear to be God or Self. God or Self manifested outwardly in human form as a decoy to lead one back to the Formless Self is the Guru. Thus God, Guru and Self are One.

It is said in the *Upanishads* that he who knows Brahman is Brahman. For that matter, every one is, every cat and dog is, in the sense that there is no other than the One Self manifested in all beings. This is not pantheism. It does not mean that the sum total of all beings added together makes up God but that God manifests as all beings without ever ceasing to be the universal Unmanifested Self. The nearest analogy (though all analogies are incomplete) is a dream, since all the dream creatures are manifestations of your mind, having no existence outside you, while you continue as you were, complete and unchanged, before, during and after the dream. Actually there never has been a doctrine of pantheism. The best

definition of the term would probably be: “A Western misinterpretation of Eastern doctrines”.

The difference between the Guru or Realized Man and others is that the Guru is consciously identical with the Spirit, implying by the word ‘consciously’ not merely theoretical understanding but the living awareness or experience with which one knows that one is a man. Even so, saying that the Guru is no different from God does not mean that he has the power of God. There is an important distinction made by the Sufis according to which a Realized Man cannot say “I am God” but can say “I am not other-than-God”. The former saying might imply the supreme blasphemy, that the ego is the Self; the latter denies the existence of the ego. Illustrating the identity between the Realized Man and God, there is another often-used analogy, also imperfect but nevertheless significant: he is identical as the water in a tumbler is with that of the Niagara Falls—of the same substance but differing vastly in scope and power.

It is not only in his state of being but functionally also that the Guru is held to be not other than God. Supreme Being, as God, is the Source, Father or Creator of the individual. But in becoming individualised the creature loses his awareness of Identity. Then God materialises as Guru to lead him back to the Source or Father. This is the basis of the Christian doctrine of the Divinity of Christ and his Identity with the Father. It is no mere historical accident that Christ was Divine and One with the Father but the expression of a profound truth. Christ, as he himself said, is the Way; and it is God who is the way back to God. So it is with the Guru. Not only his state but his function is divine. As the Maharshi often said: “The Guru is One”. In however many different forms he may appear, it is the one divine spirit of guidance wearing different masks.

This, of course, is giving its loftiest meaning to the term ‘Guru’, implying one poised in constant conscious Identity with Universal Being and consciously performing a divine function. It was in this sense that the Maharshi always used the word.

“The Guru is one who at all times abides in the profound depths of the Self. He never sees any difference between himself and others and is quite free from the idea that he is the Enlightened or Liberated One while those around him are in darkness or the bondage of ignorance. His self-possession can never be shaken under any circumstances, and he is never perturbed.”<sup>3</sup>

A Guru in this full and perfect sense is a very rare phenomenon. It follows therefore that many who function as gurus must have a lesser qualification. A guru may be simply one who has been initiated into that function as a priest has been ordained into the priesthood. A certain power and grace will flow through him, although he is not a realized man. Even though he is, the term ‘realized’ may mean something very different from the constant state of conscious identity which the Maharshi and his followers imply by the term; it may imply spasmodic realization or merely the realization of some higher state of phenomenal being.

By the law of symbolism every person one comes in contact with reflects some possibility within oneself; one’s relations with him reflect one’s inner economy, so to speak, that is the ordering and disposition of one’s potentialities. Just as the outer Guru in the full and perfect sense of the word reflects the inner Guru or Self in the Heart, so the incomplete or imperfect guru reflects various potentialities in the disciple. He will transmit the spirit of guidance, but it may come through tainted by his individual qualities, like water flowing through an unclean pipe. The individual strain may not greatly weaken or corrupt the spirit of guidance but it may pervert it completely. In the *Koran* Allah is spoken of as He who guides aright and He who guides astray. To one with an anthropomorphic conception of God as a benevolent old man this would sound blasphemous, but once one conceives of God as pure impersonal Being it becomes obvious that both the out-going and the in-coming tendencies express Him. From the universal view point of a man’s totality

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<sup>3</sup> From *Spiritual Instruction*.

of lives from the going-out into manifestation to the re-absorption into pure Being, like the simultaneous view of the whole course of a river seen from the air, the course of each lifetime fits into place; but from the point of view of the aspirant, the wise choice of a guru in this lifetime is of vital urgency.

This raises the practical questions—how to avoid the false guru who misguides? How to find a true guru? How to distinguish the true from the false? How to recognise whether and to what extent a guru is potent for good? Or whether or to what extent he is realized? Unfortunately there is no guaranteed method. Things are not so easy. Knowledge of doctrinal theory is certainly no safeguard. It may afford protection against some errors but not against a false guru; there are cases of people with impeccable theoretical grounding being led astray. The best safeguard is inner purity and sincerity, since inner qualities are reflected outwardly in the persons with whom one is brought in contact. Impure forces cannot gain a footing unless there is some ally in the citadel to give them entrance. But inner purity and sincerity are not easy of attainment; one in whom they were perfect would no longer need a guru.

If one does not have the rare blessing of meeting a perfect Sage such as the Maharshi, it is better to let caution outweigh enthusiasm in accepting a guru, for the benefit that may accrue is less than the harm. On the side of benefit it is to be remembered that no one can lead others farther than he has gone himself, so that if the guide has not attained the Goal his disciples are not likely to either. On the other hand, faults of character are no less infectious than physical diseases. That is why Hindu Sages warn aspirants so insistently to seek the company of saints and to avoid the impure. And to the influence of his guru, for good or bad, a man is susceptible as to none other, since the relationship is one which invites such influence.

Of course, a guru who has not attained the Supreme Goal may be wise and benevolent and a great aid to his disciples within his limitations; only not all are — there is the danger. So

flattering is it to be regarded as a guru that even an ego which has been severely disciplined may rise up again and develop faults such as arrogance and hypocrisy, craving flattery, shouting down opposition or criticism or accepting praise which does not belong to him, allowing himself to be treated as what he is not. That is the beginning of a decline which can be expected to grow worse and to infect his followers. It is no use taking a guru unless one has implicit faith in him, and one should be very wary in bestowing implicit faith.

People are caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, a trustworthy guru is no longer easy to find, and on the other hand they believe that they have no hope of spiritual development without a guru. I will repeat what I have said elsewhere about the position of such people. "What of the predicament of those who in our times seek an authorised and realized guru and do not find one? As they look around they perceive, not in one religion but all, an aridity in the channels where Grace once flowed. They hear strident voices proclaiming themselves gurus but would do well to remember Christ's prediction that there would be false Christs and false prophets to deceive, if it were possible, even the elect. Christ's saying that he who seeks will find is a universal law; but a law must have some technique, some means of action; what is this in an age when the former life-lines to those struggling in the turbulent waters of samsara have been withdrawn or have rotted and become unfit to bear the weight of a man? Willing to follow an authorised and realized guru in any religion, they look around and do not see one."<sup>4</sup>

They must have implicit faith in God. The Guru, after all, is only the intermediary between the individual and God, between man's outward-turning mind and inner essence. If the submission and aspiration are strong enough the Grace will flow, even without a visible channel. "There certainly are laws

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<sup>4</sup> 'Guidance and Orthodoxy', from *The Mountain Path*, October 1965, p. 212.



regulating the flow of Divine Grace, but the Grace is more than the law. Or it might be more accurate to say that a commonly applicable law is overridden by an emergency law. That guidance comes only through regular channels may be the commonly applicable law; but Divine Providence will not therefore leave men without succour in their time of need. To deny this possibility of overriding the regular law would be to attempt to tie the hands of God.”<sup>5</sup>

One hears of more and more cases nowadays of the Spirit blowing where it listeth, of Grace and intuitional understanding descending directly on some aspirant without the mediation of an outer guru or the formalities previously held necessary. And while legalists may still try to bind men with the letter of the law, the Masters themselves bring about a relaxation. “If ours is a time of emergency when a relaxation has come about in the formerly rigid laws of orthodoxy, the first persons to see this and react to it would naturally be the guides themselves; and it is noticeable that all the prominent gurus of India from the time of Sri Ramakrishna onwards have diverged from the orthodox pattern ....”<sup>6</sup>

One response to the peculiar needs of the time is the possibility of following a Guru who is no longer physically embodied. One case is Ramana Maharshi; another is Sai Baba;<sup>7</sup> there may be others too. When the Maharshi was a youthful Sage on the sacred mountain of Arunachala he always refused to accept initiation.<sup>8</sup> Being identical with its Source, he could not subordinate himself to the channels through which it flowed. When disciples gathered round he refused to designate himself a Guru, since for the enlightened there can be no others and therefore no relationship;

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, p. 212.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> For whom see *The Incredible Sai Baba*, by Arthur Osborne, Rider, London, and Orient Longmans, Calcutta, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> See ‘Initiation Rejected’, by Nagamma, *The Mountain Path*, October 1965.

but he explained that from the point of view of the disciple the Guru-disciple relationship is a reality. He declared that there is no difference between Realization with a body and without. For him who is established in conscious Identity with Pure Being the body is only an appearance and nothing is either gained or lost by its dissolution. From this it follows that one who is a Guru when embodied can be a Guru equally when disembodied. When some disciples asked before his body's death what they could do if he left them without guidance he replied cryptically: "You attach too much importance to the body," indicating that its disappearance would make no difference to the guidance.

The initiation that comes thus to his followers is independent of ritual, but it was in his lifetime also: a sustained, penetrating look, a dream or vision or just the inner certitude of having been taken up. Those who have been taken up by him since he left the body are in no less certainty as to his guidance than those who followed him already in his lifetime.

Formless initiation is one of the relaxations of orthodoxy that has come about in recent times. It had been used also by Sai Baba and Swami Nityananda;<sup>9</sup> perhaps by others too. Sai Baba died as far back as 1918 and yet he too appears to his followers in dream and vision and guides and supports them.

The Guru is the Spirit of Guidance. Ultimately this is to be found within oneself. Whatever awakens it is acting as Guru. "The purpose of the outer Guru," the Maharshi said, "is to turn you inwards to the inner Guru." And yet in this regard also there is no easy formula, no guarantee against error, for just as the aspirant may be misled by false outer gurus reflecting undesirable qualities in himself, so he may dignify various inner urges with the name of "Guru". Constant vigilance and intelligent purity are necessary.



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<sup>9</sup> For an article on whom see *The Mountain Path*, April 1965, p. 108.

# Self-Realization as Taught by Sri Bhagavan

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SAGES IS THAT SELF-REALIZATION is one, whether a glimpse or ultimate. The only difference is that it remains a glimpse when the mind is not pure enough to hold it. After such a flash sadhana may begin in true earnest to still the mind so that thoughts, desires, vasanas, etc., whatever one may call it, do not hide our true nature which is ever present.

Sri Bhagavan says that in Nirvikalpa Samadhi the mind is temporarily immersed in the Self, like a bucket immersed in water, which is drawn out again by the rope of mental activity. In Sahaja Samadhi the mind is merged like a drop of water in the limitless sea. The drop, in essence the same as the sea, has only lost its limitation, having become the sea.

“These distinctions in Realization are from the standpoint of the others who look at them; in reality, however, there are no distinctions in release gained through jnana.

“One Should enquire into one’s true nature.

“The Consciousness of ‘I’ is the subject of all our actions. Enquiring into the true nature of that Consciousness and remaining as oneself is the way to understand through enquiry one’s true nature.

“Then there would shine in the Heart a kind of wordless illumination of ‘I-I’. That is, there would shine of its own accord the pure Consciousness which is unlimited and one, the limited and the many thoughts having disappeared. If one remains quiescent without abandoning that (experience) the egoity, the individual sense of the form I-am-the-body, will be totally destroyed and at the end the final thoughts, viz., the ‘I’-form also will be quenched like the fire that

burns camphor. The great sages and scriptures declare that this alone is Realization.

“The meditation on the Self which is oneself is the greatest of all meditations. All other meditations are included in this. So if this is gained the others are not necessary.”

Sri Bhagavan wrote with the authority of full spiritual knowledge. Even so he would add: “Thus say the sages.” Like all his expositions Self-enquiry is concerned with practical questions of the path to Self-Realization. In reply to questions such paths as meditation on one’s identity with the Self and breath-control are described but he himself prescribes only Self-enquiry or submission to the Guru. He would say: “There are two ways: ‘Ask yourself–Who am I?’ or ‘Submit and I will strike down the ego’.”

How to practise these paths is fully dealt with in *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* [a revised sixth edition of which has been brought out by Sri Ramanasramam in 1996].



# Stilling the Mind Through *Vichara* as Taught by Bhagavan

*Self-enquiry as taught by Sri Ramana offers a highly practicable method suited to modern conditions. The quest is universal. 'Circumstance, time and Grace are aids to the quest.'*

THROUGH THE POTENT Grace of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, the path of Self-enquiry was brought within the competence of men and women of this age, was indeed fashioned into a new path that can be followed anonymously in the conditions of the modern world, with no forms or ritual—nothing to distinguish a person outwardly from the world wherein he moves. This creation of a new path to suit the needs of the age has made Arunachala the spiritual centre of the world. More than ever, now that He has shed His physical body and is one with Arunachala as He has always been, the Grace and guidance that emanates from Him to those who turn to Him and seek His aid is centred at Arunachala. It is the Holy place and centre and many are drawn there, both those who were disciples of the Maharshi in his lifetime and those who have come later.

In *Vivekachudamani*, translated by Bhagavan while he was living in the Virupaksha Cave, Shankara also enjoins Self-enquiry as a shortcut and royal road to Self-realisation.

Bhagavan says that knowledge of the Truth of the Self is obtained by Self-enquiry and not by any number of actions, which lead only to purification of the mind and not to Realisation. . . . It is mainly through enquiry that he who is competent achieves knowledge of the Self; circumstance, time and Grace are aids to the quest. Such a man must be tireless in practice, and be able to discriminate between the Real and the unreal or hold on to the essential and reject the inessentials. The *sine qua non* of the quest is an ardent desire for liberation and faithfully following the path shown by the Guru.

We cannot do better than quote what Bhagavan says about Self-enquiry in *Reality in Forty Verses*:

11. Is it not ignorance to know everything else without knowing the Self which is the source of knowledge?
12. What is neither knowledge nor ignorance is (real) knowledge. Knowledge of (objects) cannot be real knowledge. The Self which shines without there being anything else to know or be known is knowledge. Know that it is not nothingness.
14. If the first person exists the second and third persons will also exist. If the reality of the first person is enquired into and the first person (ego) ceases to exist, the second and third persons will also cease to exist and all will shine as One.
25. Attaching itself to a form (that is the body) this formless ghost of an ego comes into existence. Attaching itself to a form it endures. Attaching itself to a form it feels (experiences) and grows. On relinquishing one form it attaches itself to another. But when sought after, it takes to flight. This know.
26. If the ego is, everything else is too. If the ego is not, nothing else is. Indeed the ego is everything. Therefore the enquiry what it is really means giving up everything illusory.
28. Just as one would dive into the water to recover an article that had fallen in, one should dive deeply into oneself with speech and breath restrained, and find out the place from which the 'I' arises. This know.
30. When the mind, turning inward, inquires, "Who am I?" and reaches the heart, that which is 'I' (ego) sinks crestfallen and the One (Self) appears of its own accord as 'I-I' . . . the real Self.

When a man begins to practise the *vichara*, his attempted concentration is always disturbed by thoughts, but that is no cause for despondency. Indeed it can be turned to advantage, since in this way he can see his thoughts objectively, as on a screen, and can discover the weaknesses and impurities that have to be overcome. When asked about this the Maharshi replied: “Yes. All kinds of thought arise in meditation. That is right; for what lies hidden in you is brought out. Unless it rises up, how can it be destroyed? Thoughts therefore rise up spontaneously in order to be extinguished in due course, thus strengthening the mind.”<sup>1</sup>

This is an indirect but necessary use of the *vichara* in discovering and dissolving lower tendencies by knowledge. This is necessary before the ego which consists of them can dissolve into the Self. There are paths in which this process and others are clearly differentiated and different methods are employed for them. If this is not so with the use of the *vichara*, it is not because the process can be omitted, but only because the *vichara* is a universal weapon, and the supreme Wisdom and silent guidance of the Maharshi turn it in the direction that is necessary without the *sadhaka* needing to know how or why this is being done. In any case investigation into the mechanism of the mind does not lead to Self-knowledge for it leaves unanswered the one essential question: who am I so constructed and affected? For this it is necessary not to analyse the influences and reactions of the ego but to discover the Source of it, behind all this.

The Maharshi also describes how, in what is really a later stage, the *vichara* is used more directly to deal with thoughts as they rise: “Even when extraneous thoughts sprout up during such enquiry, do not seek to complete the rising thought, but instead deeply enquire within, ‘To whom has this thought occurred?’ No matter how many thoughts thus occur to you, if you would with acute vigilance enquire immediately as and when

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<sup>1</sup> *Maharshi's Gospel*, 1, p.29.

each individual thought arises as to whom it has occurred, you would find it is to 'me'. If then you enquire 'Who am I?' the mind gets introverted and the rising thought also subsides. In this manner, as you persevere more and more in the practice of Self-enquiry, the mind acquires increasing power to abide in its Source."<sup>2</sup>

"Since every other thought can occur only after the rise of the 'I'-thought, and since the mind is nothing but a bundle of thoughts, it is only through the enquiry 'Who am I?' that the mind subsides. Moreover, the integral 'I'-thought, implicit in such enquiry, having destroyed all other thoughts, gets itself finally destroyed or consumed, even like the stick used for stirring the burning funeral pyre gets consumed."<sup>3</sup>

Self-enquiry practice as the Maharshi enjoins is the most purely *advaitic* method, since its quest of the Self never admits the duality of seeker and sought. This means that it is the most central and direct and the least affected by the character of the religion in which it is used.

At the highest level and for some maybe the easiest way from the start, depending on their temperament and spiritual qualifications, would be to ignore thoughts and let them pass over like waves in the sea. Under the waves all is quiet. Bhagavan said: "If one fixed the attention on the Self or the Heart and ignored all thoughts which come up, remembering that they do not really affect one, the mind will be controlled. Just as by holding one's breath it is possible by practice to withstand the onslaught of one wave after another, so is it possible to get over any number of thoughts if one can hold on only to the 'I'."



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<sup>2</sup> *Who am I?* pp. 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.



# Why Bhagavan Ignored Symbolism

ALL THAT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE TRUTH AND profundity of symbolism in the foregoing articles may make the reader wonder why Bhagavan said so little about it, in fact practically ignored it. The answer is that symbolism is a great aid on indirect paths but is not necessary on the direct path of Self-enquiry or in the Advaitic doctrine on which this is based.

There are three levels of perception: physical, cosmological and metaphysical.

Seen from the physical level everything is a meaningless conglomeration of accidents and man is a stranger pushed around in an alien world by laws he did not make.

On the cosmological level the world is a vast book of symbols manifesting the attributes of God and reflecting His Being. Realities of the physical plane reflect or symbolise those of a higher plane, as is declared in the cryptic Hermetic saying: "As above, so below". Man is made in the likeness of God. The symbols can provide a path by which to trace one's way back to the Symbolised. The universe is a mirror reflecting Being. So are you, since man, the microcosm, corresponds to the macrocosm.

Still higher, on the metaphysical plane, attention is drawn back from the symbols to the Self. The world is not studied as a book of symbols but dismissed as a distraction, a dream, an illusion. As Bhagavan says in *Who am I?*: "Just as it is futile to examine the rubbish that has to be swept up only to be thrown away, so it is futile for him who seeks to know the Self to set to work enumerating the tattvas that envelop the Self and examining them instead of throwing them away. He should consider the phenomenal world in reference to himself as merely a dream."

Let us consider the question ‘Why?’ from these three levels. There can be few aspirants who have not at one time or another asked themselves this question. Why was I created? Why was I given an attraction to the world and then told to fight it? Above all, why is there a world at all?

On the level of physical science there is no answer to these questions. It is unlikely that there ever will be, because they lie outside its purview; but even if there were, it would neither confirm nor contradict those on the other two planes, being of a different nature.

From the cosmological level the answer, as given, for instance, in the *Taittiriya Upanishad*, is that the Supreme desired to create, to be multiple. “Having created all this He entered into it. Having entered into it, He became both the manifest and the unmanifest, both the defined and the undefined, both the supported and the unsupported, both the intelligent and non-intelligent, both the real and unreal. The Satya (Real or True) became all this, whatever is.” (11, VI, 1). This does not mean pantheism. Indeed there has probably never been pantheism. The most satisfactory definition of the term would probably be: “a Western misrepresentation of Eastern doctrines.” The Supreme remains utterly unaffected and undiminished by his manifestation in the universe, just as a man does by his reflection in a mirror. The same answer to the question is given in Islam also in the well-known hadith in which Allah says: “I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be known.”

Man or the universe is a book in which God’s previously virtual potentialities are writ large. But ‘previously’ does not imply that this takes place in time. Time exists in God, not God in time. If we say that God was originally unmanifested, ‘originally’ refers not to a point in time but to the original state, which is timeless and eternal and therefore exists now and has never not existed nor will ever not exist, unchanged and

unaffected by the simultaneous manifestation of Divine Being in the universe and in each individual being.

The metaphysical explanation is again on a higher plane, more simple and more direct. If the Maharshi was asked why there is a world he would reply: "Who says there is a world?" Or: "For whom is there a world?" Thus the questioner was driven straight back to Self-enquiry. This individual *me* sees a world outside it, but what is this individual *me*? Surely the first question to solve is what I am before coming to what I perceive. Who says there is a world? The individual *me* does, but is that the reality of me? First let me discover that and then see whether it perceives a world outside itself or not. Thus the question why there is a world is dismissed as being based on an unproven premise, that is that there is an individual being who sees a world outside him. The validity of this premise must first be established or refuted before any deduction based on it can be fruitfully examined.

Thus it can be seen that, just as the physical mode of perception is below the level of symbolism, so the metaphysical is above it. While symbolism is of immense value on less direct spiritual paths, it is not needed on the path of Self-enquiry.

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# Effort, Grace and Destiny

IT IS SAID in scriptures and by gurus that an aspirant must make effort on the path but that Grace also is necessary and that in the end Realization is bestowed by Grace, not achieved by effort. It is said in the *Upanishads* that the Atma chooses whom It will.

This is a hard saying. Those in whom the spiritual urge is powerful do not worry their heads over it but strive because they must, because they are drawn to without any thought of reward. Those, however, in whom the mind is too active and the Spirit too weak are apt to be puzzled and ask why they should make any effort if the final achievement is not to be won by effort but bestowed by Grace. They also ask why the Atma should choose one rather than another. For such people I will try to clarify the saying.

Who is the 'you' that has to make effort, and who is the 'God' or 'Atma' that chooses and that bestows Grace on one rather than another?

The essence of a man is pure Spirit or, which comes to the same, pure Being or pure universal Consciousness. This Spirit prowls in the lion, spreads in the tree, endures in the stone; in man alone it not only lives but knows that it lives. The difference between man and other animals is not that man has greater ability (in many ways he has less), but that he knows that he is man; he is self-consciously man. This is through the human mind which, looking outward, knows and dominates the world, looking inward, knows and reflects Being as the Essence and Source of the world. However, the ability to do this implies also the ability to not do it, to regard oneself as a complete autonomous individual and forget the inner Reality.

The various religions express this simple truth through myth, allegory and doctrine and are apt to be puzzling. In the *Koran* it is said that Allah offered the trust to the heavens and earth and the mountains but all declined it; only man accepted and was untrue to it. Religions assert that God gave man free will, which implies the freedom to rebel. In Christianity it is said that man is fallen on account of original sin. The *Book of Genesis* gives the story of how man fell into the domain of opposites, the differentiation of good and evil. All these are allegories of the simple truth stated above.

The mind creates an ego, a seemingly complete, autonomous individual self, which, although illusory, seems to be the reality of one. This is the state known in Hinduism as ‘ajnana’ or ignorance, in Christianity as ‘original sin’, in Islam, in its more violent form, as ‘kufir’ or ‘denial’, in its milder form, recognizing the Spirit as real but believing the ego also to be real, as ‘shirk’ or ‘association’ (of other with God).

This is the obstruction to Self-Realization. Therefore it has to be removed. That is why the Masters say that Self-Realization is not something new to be achieved but an eternally existent state to be discovered or revealed. Therefore they compare it to an overcast sky—the clear sky does not have to be created, only the clouds covering it to be blown away; or to a pond overgrown with water-lilies—the water is there all time and only has to be revealed by clearing away the plants that have overgrown it.

To do this constitutes the effort of which the teachers and scriptures speak. The mind has created the obstruction; the mind has to remove it. But merely to recognize this, to recognize, that is to say, that the ego is (according to the Advaitin) an illusory self or (according to the dualist) a creation of the Spirit, to which it should be submitted and totally passive, is far from constituting the full effort required. Indeed, it increases the obligation for total effort and therefore, so to speak, the guilt in not making effort.

The effort involves the will and emotions as well as the understanding and therefore has to be persistent, determined and skilful. The ego has put out tentacles which cling to the world, and either these have to be lopped off or the ego itself killed. It craves the admiration or submission of other egos, and therefore humility is enjoined. It craves enjoyment of creation in its own right instead of being a mere channel through which the Spirit perceives and enjoys, and therefore celibacy and asceticism are sometimes prescribed and self-indulgence is always, in all religions, forbidden. The attempt to lop off the tentacles of ego has been compared in mythology to a battle with a many-headed giant who grew two new heads for each one lopped off. The only way of disposing of him was to strike at the heart and kill the entire being, not deal with the heads individually. The campaign must be skilful and intelligently planned as well as ruthless. What wonder if different Masters in different religions have prescribed different ways of conducting it. The goal in all cases is the same: the taming or destruction of the ego or the discovery that it never really existed.

Methods such as I have been alluding to consist largely in curtailing the ego's outer manifestations so as to induce the mind to turn inwards to the Self or Spirit behind it. It is also possible to proceed in the opposite direction by turning inward to the Spirit and thence deriving strength to renounce the outer manifestations. This is the path of love and devotion, worshipping God, submitting to Him, calling upon His Name, striving to serve and remember Him with one's whole life. Either path can be followed, or both together. A third part is that of questioning the very existence of the ego by Self-enquiry.

All this is effort. Then what about Grace? Grace is the natural flow of the Spirit into and through the mind and faculties. There is nothing capricious or erratic about it. Bhagavan said: "Grace is always there: it is only you who have to make yourself receptive to it." It is likened traditionally to the sunlight falling

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 16.

on a flower garden: if one bud opens and not another it is not due to any partiality on the side of the sun but only to the maturity or immaturity of the buds. Or if the sunlight penetrates one room but not another it is simply because the doors and windows are open in one and in the other shut.

Why then is it said that the Atma chooses whom it will and that the final Realization comes by Grace, not by effort? In order to remove the insidious idea that the ego-self can continue to exist and attain something called 'Realization', whereas all it can do is to immolate itself and be replaced by the realized state of the Spirit, which is ever-present Grace. The mind makes efforts to remove obstructions; it is hard for it to understand that it is itself the final obstruction. The very desire for Realization has to be carefully watched and can become an impediment, for it implies some one to achieve something. At the end all that the mind is called on to do is to keep still and allow the Grace to flow unimpeded—but that is the hardest thing of all for it to do.

Till in the end,  
All battles fought, all earthy loves abjured,  
Dawn in the east, there is no other way  
But to be still. In stillness then to find  
The giants all were windmills, all the strife  
Self-made, unreal; even he that strove  
A fancied being, as when that good knight  
Woke from delirium and with a loud cry  
Rendered his soul to God.

On the devotional path this danger of supposing that it is the ego who strives and attains, this warning against desires, even the desire to get Realization, is expressed in the attitude that true service of God must be for love alone with no thought of reward. He who asks for reward is a merchant, not a lover.

The impossibility of achieving when there is no one to achieve explains why a Guru will never answer the question: “When shall I attain Realization?” It implies the false presumption: “There is an individual me; when will it cease to exist?” whereas the Guru realizes the ultimate truth that: “There is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the Real.”<sup>1</sup> Not that the unreal ego will cease to be at such and such a point in time, but that it is not now, never has been and never could be. Therefore the attitude of mind which questions when one can attain Realization or whether it is one’s destiny to be realized in this lifetime is an obstruction sufficient to prevent Realization, being an assertion of the temporary existence of the unreal. Similarly, if you assert that you cannot attain Realization in this lifetime you are thereby preventing yourself from doing so by postulating the existence of a ‘you’ who cannot attain.

And yet, paradoxically, it is also an impediment to assert that no effort need be made, on the pretext that, as “there is no being of the unreal and no not-being of the Real”, one is That now and has therefore no need to strive to become That. It sounds plausible, but it is an impediment because it is the pseudo-self, the illusory unreal, that is saying it. The Master can say that there is nothing to achieve because one is That already; the disciple can’t. Bhagavan would sometimes say that asking the best way to Realization is like being at Tiruvannamalai and asking how to get there, but that could not be the attitude of the devotee. He expected the devotee to make effort, even while appreciating the paradox that there is no effort to make. In the same way he could say that for the Realized Man there is no Guru-disciple relationship but add that for the disciple the relationship is a reality and is of importance.

For the disciple effort is necessary, but it is also necessary to remember that effort can never attain the final goal, since he who makes the effort must dissolve, leaving only the Spirit. The Spirit, which is the true Self, replaces the illusory ego-self



when latter has removed the obstructions; and that is Grace. The Spirit flows into the vacuum which remains when the ego-self dissolves; doing so is the 'choice' which the Spirit makes. It is for the aspirant to create the vacuum by removing the obstructions.



## Physical Supports of Grace

IN EVERY RELIGION physical objects serve as a support of Divine Grace. A tooth of the Buddha, a hair of the Prophet, a fragment of the true Cross has been enough to draw pilgrims through the centuries. At the time of the Reformation in Europe the attack was immediately turned upon such physical supports—relics, shrines, rosaries and so forth. The Reformers did not know that they were undermining religion; they were earnest and devout; but what resulted from the iconoclasm of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the rationalism, agnosticism and atheism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>. They made reason the arbiter of faith, rejecting whatever had no rational explanation, and even today there are critics and historians who praise this attitude, not seeming to realize that to subordinate the spiritual to the mental is an inversion of the natural order of things and leads inevitably to the rationalism that denies the Spirit altogether.

Actually it may be possible to give a rational explanation of the physical supports of Grace. It may be that they serve as radiating

centres equivalent in a sense to the transmitters of physical radiation. However, those who attacked them knew nothing of such possibilities, nor do those who admit such possibilities today understand that spiritual forces stand in no need of their rational explanations but work whether explained or not.

Whether explained in terms of radiation or not, Grace does emanate from a physical support. Is it imagination? If Bhagavan had been asked he might have agreed that it is, but only in the sense that the whole world including one's own body, is imagination. It is as real as the mind that questions its reality.

Some, however, have wondered whether it is legitimate to use physical supports of Grace on such a direct and purely spiritual path as that enjoined by Bhagavan. It was with some such doubt that an English devotee who had never yet been able to come to Tiruvannamalai wrote to me asking for some object, such as a small stone, from near the tomb but felt that his request might be inappropriate. It was quite appropriate. Although he taught the purely direct and spiritual path of *vichara*, Bhagavan never discouraged any from observing the rites of their religion or from using any physical supports so long as they were helpful. The path he taught was universal; it included devotion and disinterested activity as well as knowledge. Indeed his devotional hymns to Arunachala are a constant support to the devotees. His very coming there was a recognition of the physical manifestation of Grace, since Arunachala has been through the ages the supreme centre of silent initiation, of Shiva manifested as Dakshinamurti, teaching in silence. No one could be more insistent on its actual sanctity. He said: "Mount Kailash is the abode of Shiva but Arunachala is Shiva Himself." He saw the sacred hill as the form assumed by pure Spirit for the support and guidance of men. Now that the physical body of Bhagavan—the most precious of all physical supports of Grace—has been withdrawn from us, the Hill emits power and Grace for his devotees even more than before.

When I was asked for some token from the hill I was able, fortunately, to quote the approval of Bhagavan in a similar case. Once when he was walking on the hill he said to Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami who was with him: "Some devotee from a far-off land has asked for a stone to be taken from the most holy part of the hill and sent to him. He thinks that some part of the hill alone is holy; he does not know that the whole hill is Arunachala; he does not know that Arunachala Himself is the hill." And picking up a small stone, he added, "I sent him a stone like this."

Bhagavan would sometimes give a devotee some object as a vehicle of Grace, but very seldom, as he had normally nothing to give. In his youthful years he would sometimes cut a stick from the hill, fashion it into a staff for walking and give it to somebody. Sometimes also he would touch an object that was shown to him and give it back. When I left for Madras and showed him the life-size portrait of him that I was taking with me he held it in his hands before giving it back and said: "He is taking Swami with him!"

It may not be inappropriate to end this article with the strange story of how I received a shoe-horn from him. We were sitting outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his usual couch. There was a sudden clatter and we saw that a metal shoe-horn had fallen to the ground near the couch. How it came to fall there no one could say—there was no breeze and no monkeys or squirrels were playing about. The attendant gave it to Bhagavan who examined it and began demonstrating its use as a spoon. I was sitting in the front row and explained its use as a shoe-horn. Bhagavan who did not like anything to be wasted asked me whether I would like it. And so I received a gift from him who had nothing to give; from the Divine Giver who had all to give!

*CS&O*

# The Two Kinds of Guru

FOR THOSE WHO aspire to proceed beyond belief to experience in religion, it has normally been held necessary to follow a guru or spiritual director. It is not really correct to translate the word 'guru' as 'teacher' because, although he may incidentally expound doctrine, his main function is the transmission of an influence which will fortify the disciple in his inner quest and his guidance of the disciple, verbally or in silence, on the quest. What, then, is the nature of the guru?

Ramana Maharshi said: "The Guru is the formless Self within each one of us. He may appear as a body to guide us, but that is only his disguise." And the author of the article from which this is quoted goes on to say: "It appears from this that to be consciously the Self is to be consciously the Guru."<sup>1</sup>

This statement involves the following doctrinal position. The Supreme Spirit (Paramatma) is the true self (Atma) of each person (jiva) and would naturally give right spiritual understanding and guidance, but in most cases the conscious mind is shut off from this by the ego-sense (ahankara), that is the belief in one's existence as a separate individual entity. The impulse arises to return to one's Source but the mind is too estranged to perceive and follow the path directly. Since one mistakes oneself for a separate human being, one can respond to the guidance only through a manifested Guru whom one mistakes for another human being, although he himself is aware of his universal nature. Therefore the Tamil poet saint Thayumanavar compares the Guru to a deer being used as a decoy to capture another deer. The Maharshi said that the function of the outer Guru is only to awaken the inner Guru in the heart.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Human Status of the Maharshi' by T.N. Krishnaswami, *The Mountain Path*, April 1967, p. 152.

The above refers only to the ideal or perfect Guru who is in a state of constant, unwavering consciousness of his universal nature (and it will be observed that in writing it I have spelled the word 'Guru' with a capital letter). But this is a very rare thing. Usually a guru or spiritual director is a member of a spiritual hierarchy who has been vested with the authority and function of directing others without having himself broken free from the existential (as distinct from theoretical) illusion of his individual state. With regard to the guru in this sense I will limit myself to five observations.

1. The power that is conveyed is to be regarded as valid within its limits, just as is the power to perform sacraments that is conveyed to a priest by his ordination.

2. Nevertheless, too great expectations are not to be placed on such direction, since a guide cannot normally lead others farther than he has gone himself.

3. A guru who has not transcended the individual state is liable to individual failings. Being revered as a guru may particularly, for instance, give rise to the faults of arrogance and hypocrisy. Such faults are infectious and liable to be caught by the disciples. The guru may be compared to a pipeline bringing the waters of life to thirsty men; if the pipe has not been well cleaned inside, the waters that quench their thirst may also carry the germs of typhoid or cholera.

4. This is an age when traditional forms are losing their rigidity. All the Hindu spiritual masters since Ramakrishna have recognized this, including the Maharshi. It is a time when "the spirit bloweth where it listeth" and many cases of spontaneous awakening to Truth without the mediation of a guru are reported. These, of course, need further effort and discipline to establish them firmly, but so also does the initiation given by a guru.

5. The Maharshi indicated before shedding the body that he would still be the Guru. Ample evidence has accrued (if any were needed) that this is so.

Perhaps this last point needs to be amplified, as it is not usual for a Guru to continue to function as such after physical death, though there have been cases.

According to the ancient traditional teaching reiterated by the Maharshi, a man does not become one with the Self by attaining Liberation (or Realization); he simply realizes his innate, pre-existing oneness. Also he does not merge in the Absolute at death (thus becoming, as some have supposed, incapable of performing an individual function) since he already was one with the Absolute. The Maharshi stated explicitly that there is no difference between the Jivan-Mukta (Liberated while embodied) and the Videha-Mukta (Liberated after death). Once when asked whether a Liberated Man (he always used the Sanskrit term 'Jnani' meaning 'Man of Knowledge' for this) still continued to perform a function after death he answered curtly, "Some may." This assertion is also to be found in the *Brahma Sutras*, one of the three basic Hindu scriptures. When some of his followers asked him shortly before his own death what they could do for guidance after he left them he made the curt reply: "You attach too much importance to the body." The implication obviously was that only the body was leaving them; he was not.

In saying that there is ample evidence that this is so, I put in the parenthesis "if any were needed" so as not to seem to be suggesting that the Maharshi's words need any corroboration. They do not. The sort of evidence I have in mind is testimony of those many who have found guidance and support from the Maharshi either in dream or vision or formlessly since his death. Two examples that could be quoted are the verse "A Beacon Still" by S.P.Mukherji in the January 1964 issue of *The Mountain Path* and the article 'How the Maharshi came to me' by G.N.Daley in that of January 1967.

Finally, reverting to the two types of guru it should be said that the distinction is important because it sometimes happens that the theoretical explanation of the first type, the Sad-Guru

or Divine Guru, is used to justify one who is in fact of the second type, the appointed functionary. This can cause theoretical confusion and actual danger.



## Austerity

THE INTRODUCTION TO “Who am I?” contains within it the germ of the intellectual explanation of religious austerity. Everyone is involved in the unending search for happiness. So long as the person mistakes the body or individuality for the Self he seeks pleasure from events and contacts, but in the measure that he approaches the true Self he discovers that true happiness which, being his real nature, requires no stimulus to provoke it.

If a man renounces the extraneous and fitful happiness given by pleasure for the deep, abiding inner happiness, there is no austerity—he is simply exchanging the lesser for the greater, the spurious for the true. More usually, however, a man’s pursuit of pleasure (or his hankering after it even if he does not pursue it) is itself what impedes his realisation of the Self, being due to his false identification with the ego. Therefore he normally has to renounce the pursuit of pleasure not after but before the attainment of eternal, indestructible happiness, not because it has ceased to be pleasure but because he realises, partly through faith and partly through understanding and pre-vision, that indestructible happiness does exist and is his goal and his true nature and that it is shut off from him by his mistaken identity and by the indulgence of desires and impulses that this entails. That is to say that he has to renounce the false attraction before it has ceased to attract. Therefore the renunciation hurts him and is austerity.

Religious austerity may bear fruit without understanding the intellectual basis of it and there may be many who practise it without this understanding; nevertheless, this is its basis. To some extent every spiritual seeker must follow the two-fold method of turning his energy away from the pursuit of pleasure and towards the quest of happiness, away from the gratification of the ego and towards the realisation of the Self. They are two complementary phases of one activity. However, a method may concentrate more on one phase or the other.

That taught by Bhagavan concentrated almost entirely on the positive phase, the quest of the Self, and he spoke very little of the negative, that is, of austerity or killing the ego. He spoke rather of the enquiry that would reveal that there was no ego to kill and never had been. This does not mean that Bhagavan condoned ego-indulgence. He expected a high standard of rectitude and self-control in his devotees but he did not dictate any actual programme of austerity.

The basic forms of austerity are celibacy and poverty, further heightened by silence and solitude. Let us see in more detail what was the attitude of Bhagavan in such matters.

In speaking of celibacy one has to remember that the traditional Hindu society with which Bhagavan was familiar has no place for the worldly celibate; either a man is a householder or a mendicant. When any householder asked Bhagavan whether he could renounce home and property and turn mendicant, he always discouraged it. "The obstacles are in the mind and have to be overcome there," he would say. "Changing the environment will not help. You will only change the thought 'I am a householder' for the thought 'I am a mendicant'. What you have to do is to forget both and remember only 'I am'." He similarly deprecated vows of silence and solitude, pointing out that the true silence and solitude are in the heart and independent of outer conditions.



Yet Bhagavan showed a benevolent interest in the personal and family affairs of his devotees—their marriages and jobs, the births and sicknesses and education of their children, all the cares and obligations that family life entails. His injunction was to engage in it like an actor in a play, playing one's part carefully and conscientiously but with the remembrance that it was not one's real self.

Neither did he denounce the small indulgences common to the life of a householder. Indeed, there was a time when he himself chewed betel and drank tea and coffee. The only specific rule of conduct that he advocated and that some might call austerity was vegetarianism. He spoke of the benefit of restricting oneself to *sattvic* food, that is to vegetarian food which nourishes without exciting or stimulating. I have also known Bhagavan to say different things to different kinds of people. But they should be taken to suit particular occasions and not as a general rule.

The standard set by Bhagavan was uncompromisingly high but it did not consist of disjointed commands and restrictions. It was a question of seeking the true Self and denying the impostor ego, and in doing this he approved rather of a healthy, normal, balanced life than of extreme austerity. It is true that there was a time when he himself sat day after day in silence, scarcely eating, seldom moving, but that was not austerity; that was immersion in the supreme Bliss after the Self had been realised and there was no longer any ego to renounce, that is, when austerity was no longer possible. His abandoning it was not indulgence of the ego but compassion for the devotees who gathered around. He said that even in the case of the *jnani* the ego may seem to rise up again but that is only an appearance, like the ash of a burnt rope that looks like a rope but is not good for tying anything with.



# Vegetarianism

*The Bodhisattva...desirous of cultivating the virtue of love, should not eat meat, lest he cause terror to living beings. When dogs see, even at a distance, an outcast...who likes eating meat, they are terrified and think: 'These are dealers of death and will kill us!' Even the minute beings living in earth, air and water have a very keen sense of smell and detect at a distance the odour of the demons in meat-eaters, and they flee as fast as they can from the death which threatens them.*

*From the Lankavatara Sutra*

IS THERE ANY benefit from not eating meat? Or perhaps the question should be put the other way round: is there any harm in eating meat? I am not considering the question from a medical but purely from a spiritual point of view. One's body is not a mere tenement; so long as one remains an individual being it is a part of that being and, as de la Mare quaintly remarks:

It's a very strange thing,  
As strange as can be,  
That whatever Miss T. eats  
Turns into Miss T.

Various spiritual paths include physical as well as mental and emotional disciplines, aiming at a total harmonisation. On the one hand vibrations set up by a spiritual technique affect the body, while on the other hand the bodily state can facilitate or impede spiritual progress. Diet, therefore, cannot be a matter of indifference.

Considered theoretically, there is something to be said for eating meat; more to be said against it. In favour of it one can say that a sort of alchemy is carried on by the human body

through which the lower orders of life are transmuted to the higher. But on the side of abstaining there is the consideration that the subtle essences of the food eaten are absorbed as well as the physical substance, and therefore one who eats meat is liable to strengthen his own animal tendencies. Apart from this, compassion forbids that I should expect other creatures to lose their lives in order to nourish mine. So does *vairagya*, the quality of equal-mindedness, which is so important in seeking Realization.

A factual survey of the religions shows no uniformity. The Jews can eat all meat except that of the pig and can drink alcohol. The Muslims are forbidden both pork and wine. Moreover the ban, though primarily on the pig, extends to all animals that do not chew the cud. Apart from this, however, the assertion in the *Koran* that God has created the animals as food for man seems to carry the implication that animal food is not merely permitted but enjoined. A remark by St. Augustine shows that during the early centuries of Christianity the ban on non-ruminative animals was observed by Christians also. He justifies it symbolically by comparing such animals to people who gulp down information without 'ruminating' upon it, thereby implying that the subtle qualities of the animals eaten are absorbed. The Chinese, like Christians of later centuries, observe no ban. The Vedic Aryans, and indeed the Hindus down to the time of Buddha, ate meat, even beef, and drank alcohol. Today, Brahmins (except so far as they are Westernised) are both vegetarian and teetotallers. So are certain other castes which seek to assimilate themselves to the Brahmins. The Kshatriyas and most of the low castes are meat-eaters. Even among the Brahmins vegetarianism can be variously interpreted: a Bengali Brahmin eats fish, whereas an orthodox South Indian Brahmin abstains even from eggs. Buddha, living in a meat-eating community, allowed his followers to eat meat provided it was not specially killed for them.

What this diversity amounts to is that in a physical matter such as the food eaten, different trends of spiritual influence require different modes of adaptation.

For practical purposes the important question is whether there is any regimen which is suitable for aspirants in general in the conditions of the world today, and if so, what? Because rules governing action are not static and for all time, changing conditions of life require new adaptations, as may be seen, for instance, in the gradual adoption of vegetarianism in Hinduism. To some extent different religions still carry their separate obligations, but there are various indications that for aspirants in general, and certainly for those who are not following the strict orthodoxy of any religion, vegetarianism is indicated. One quite often meets aspirants who find spontaneously that their path brings them to a point where they feel an inner aversion to meat or even a physical inability to take it. It so happens that I have just today, while writing this, received a letter mentioning such a case: "He himself had stopped eating animal food because his body suddenly refused to accept it and he at first could not understand and rebelled somewhat until it gradually dawned on him that this might be a sign of spiritual development."

It is also noticeable that most Hindu ashrams, while indifferent to orthodoxy in general to an extent that would have been unthinkable in an earlier age, are very particular about vegetarianism. Outstanding examples of this are Sri Ramanasramam and Anandashram, the ashram of the late Swami Ramdas. Special food is provided for Western visitors, but even this is vegetarian.

But above all, the Maharshi. In general he refused to give instructions for physical discipline. When asked about postures for sitting in meditation he replied simply: "One-pointedness of mind is the only good posture." When asked about celibacy he would not enjoin it but said that married persons also can

attain Realization. But when asked about diet he quite emphatically prescribed vegetarianism: "Regulation of diet, restricting it to *sattvic* (i.e. pure and vegetarian) food taken in moderate quantities is best of all rules of conduct and the most conducive to the development of *sattvic* qualities of mind. These in turn help one in the practice of Self-enquiry."<sup>1</sup> The passage quoted continues with a Western lady pleading that a concession should be made for Westerners and with Bhagavan refusing to do so. It should be added that in '*sattvic* food' he included milk, though an animal product, but not eggs, which are considered too stimulating or *rajasic*.

It was characteristic of Bhagavan that he would never enjoin vegetarianism on any devotee unless asked, but if asked he was quite categorical about it. It often happened in his lifetime, as it still does today, that even without asking his devotees would develop that aversion to animal food which I have mentioned as a general feature in the aspirant in modern times.

In conclusion, it can be said quite definitely that vegetarianism is beneficial to those who follow a spiritual path in the conditions of the modern world, and especially to those who aspire to follow the path of the Maharshi.



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<sup>1</sup> *The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*, p.157 of the Rider & Co. edition, and p. 189-90 of the Sri Ramanasramam 7<sup>th</sup> edition.

# The Collaborator

IT IS SURPRISING HOW OFTEN THE FOUNDER OR RE-novator of a religion has been accompanied by a collaborator or companion, often a younger relative, sometimes the 'beloved disciple', who has in some way completed his work, whether the human or esoteric or institutional or some other aspect of it. It seems, in fact, to be the regular course of events.

Let us look first at the two historical Hindu avatars, Rama and Krishna. Rama, like Christ, left behind no book, no body of teaching. That was done by his Guru, Vasishtha, in the *Yoga Vasishtha*, one of the most sublime of scriptures. Apart from this, his life, as a pattern of dharma, was itself his gospel. The *Ramayana*, the story of his life, is a story of perfect rectitude, perfect dharma. But a pattern of dharma is woven rather in relationship than alone, and we see Rama accompanied in exile, in war and in final victory by Sita, the perfect wife, Lakshman, the perfect brother, and Hanuman, the perfect servitor. None of these lacked character or became colourless through being perfect. It is a mistaken idea that weaknesses give character. They undermine it.

Of these three it is Lakshman who fills the role we are here considering. The younger brother of Rama, he voluntarily accompanied him into exile when Rama accepted his exclusion from the throne and departed for his fourteen-year sojourn in the forests. Lakshman behaved towards him throughout with unswerving loyalty and to Sita with friendliness and devotion. It is the relationship of these three as well as the perfection of Rama in himself that provides the pattern of dharma in the *Ramayana*.

Krishna also was accompanied in the earlier part of his life by his brother, this time his elder brother, Balaram. They were carried safely into exile together as infants, thus escaping the tyrant Kamsa who wanted to destroy them. They grew up as

village lads together and returned and overthrew the tyrant together. Together also they assumed leadership of the Yadava tribe and became its defenders against outside enemies. They are depicted together in the various legendary (and symbolical) exploits of childhood and youth. Naturally, Krishna is always the leader, but Balaram is not by any means a pale shadow of him. He is depicted as massive where Krishna is nimble, simple where Krishna is adroit, and an uncompromising upholder of dharma. He is said to have been given to intoxication. In the symbolism of the various religions intoxication has stood for divine ecstasy. A number of the ancient texts refer to Krishna and Balaram jointly as the Avatar.

During the latter part of Krishna's life Balaram is less to the fore and it is rather of the 'beloved disciple' Arjuna that we hear, the disciple to whom the *Bhagavad Gita* was proclaimed. Indeed, Arjuna and Krishna are spoken of in some ancient texts as Nara and Narayana incarnate on earth, Nara being archetypal man and Narayana the Lord.

Now from Hinduism let us turn to its international offspring, Buddhism. Buddha is often depicted in iconography accompanied by his younger cousin, the beloved disciple Ananda. Ananda was far from being the most advanced of the disciples; in fact he is sometimes referred to as backward. As late as the death of Buddha he went aside and wept with chagrin because he had not yet attained Realization, although a number of the other disciples had. But he was the beloved disciple and devoted personal attendant of Buddha, and he himself was conspicuous for love and compassion. It is characteristic that when the women disciples wanted permission to join the Sangha and feared to approach Buddha direct lest he should refuse, it was to Ananda that they went to plead their cause; characteristic too that his plea was successful.

The Semitic tradition is traced back to Abraham who rejected the corrupt polytheism of his community and restored a simple primitive monotheism. He was accompanied in this venture by his

younger brother, Aaron. In the early part of his career, while prevailing upon Pharaoh to release the Hebrews from their slavery in Egypt, Moses was the dominating, spiritual presence, Aaron his spokesman. Later, when founding a Hebrew religious community, Aaron was at the head of the priesthood and ritual. This does not mean that Moses was the temporal and Aaron the spiritual head of the community, for if that had been so Aaron would have stood higher. In tradition and in truth the spiritual authority is above the temporal power, which is, or should be, its outer instrument. Moses was the supreme authority, both spiritual and temporal, with Aaron simply as head of the spiritual organization.

The next stage in the decline towards modernism in the Hebrew tradition was the institution of kingship politically and of the devotional type of worship that Hindus call bhakti in religion; and this was brought about by David and Solomon. In this case the relationship was not of brothers or cousins but father and son: and Solomon seems to have been not the collaborator but the successor of David in his work. How many of the psalms David wrote himself and how many he collected is perhaps not very important; the important thing is that the psalms represent the 'bhakti' element in Hebrew religion and that it was David who both epitomised and established this.

Bhakti is naturally accompanied by tantra. If David introduced the Psalms Solomon brought the Proverbs; if David projected the Temple as the devotional centre of Israel, Solomon actually built it, with its elaborate symbolism. He would seem to have introduced into Judaeism the highly technical and symbolical type of religious approach such as is known in India as Tantrism and was known in the Mediaeval West as Hermetism. And indeed, Near East traditions perpetuated in the *Koran* represent him as the supreme master of occult knowledge and powers, while western traditions such as Hermetism, astrology and Freemasonry claim descent from him.

Just as the *Koran* refers to Abraham and Lot, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, so it does to Jesus and John, sometimes even



representing them as Prophets together, while not even mentioning any of the other apostles. In Mediaeval Christendom the esoteric or mystical Church was referred to as the 'Church of St. John' in contrast to the exoteric 'Church of St. Peter'. One of the symbolical supports for this is the fact that St. John alone of the apostles was at the foot of the Cross during the crucifixion and that Jesus, from the Cross, bade his mother, who was also there, regard John as her son and bade John regard her as his mother; and it is stated that she lived thereafter in the house of John. Mary is taken to symbolise Divine Grace and John's house the Mystic Church.

But who is this John? The cousin of Jesus became John the Baptist. He performed the necessary function of giving Jesus the initiation of baptism, while speaking of himself as the forerunner and of Jesus as one greater than himself, whose shoe he was not worthy to fasten. But then he was arrested and after some time executed by Herod for criticising that tyrant and John appears no more in the story. Then there was 'John the brother of James' who was one of the apostles. But was he the same as the 'apostle whom Jesus loved' who is mentioned in the Gospel of St. John as being present at the Last Supper and again at the foot of the Cross? Incidentally, the name 'John' is not used in either of these cases, although tradition has it that it was he. And was this John the author of the Fourth Gospel? And of the 'Epistles of St. John'? And of the Book of Revelations? Linguistic critics declare that the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelations show too diverse a culture and linguistic equipment to be by the same author. Some have even held that the 'John' referred to as the head of the esoteric Church and, in the *Koran*, as a Prophet with Jesus is a composite character, a function rather than a person, like 'Melchisedec' in the Epistle to the Hebrews. These questions do not concern us here.

Coming next to Mohammed, his 'beloved disciple' was his nephew Ali. While still a boy, Ali was the first male to accept Islam, being preceded only by Mohammed's wife Khadija. When Mohammed had to flee from Mecca it was the still youthful Ali

who took his place in bed to delay discovery of his absence. Come to maturity, Ali was given the prophet's daughter Fatima in marriage, and all 'Syeds' or lineal descendants of Mohammed spring from this marriage. He was one of the redoubtable champions of the early Muslims in war and earned the name 'Lion of Islam'. More important, he is regarded as the repository of Islamic mysticism, and most of the Sufi initiatic orders trace their descent through him. Indeed, he has been represented as the epitome of sainthood, as Mohammed is of prophethood. The Shi'as hold that Ali ought to have been accepted as first caliph and head of Islam after the death of Mohammed and that the caliphate should have been hereditary in his family. The Sunnis (that is the orthodox Muslims, among whom all the Sufi orders are included) reject this claim, but they still regard him with peculiar veneration.

It is interesting to note that the chosen 'collaborator' of the Master is not necessarily either his most advanced disciple or his successor. In the case of Buddha, the two most advanced disciples were held to be Sariputra and Mogdalyana, both of whom predeceased him. The disciple who presided over the first Sangha after the death of Buddha was not Ananda but Maha Kasyapa. In the case of Christ, St. Peter is said to have been architect of the Church and St. Paul was certainly the architect of the doctrine. In the case of Mohammed, the immediate successor was Abu Bakr, the first caliph. Umar, the second caliph, was the founder of the Empire. Uthman, the third caliph, drew up the official, uniform text of the *Koran*. Ali came only as fourth caliph and was a very unsuccessful one at that.

If this tradition of a collaborator has continued into modern times one would look for it only in one who, apart from being a saint, had the particular function of starting or restoring a spiritual current in the world; and indeed it is to be seen in the association of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Towards Ramakrishna, Vivekananda holds the combined position of Christ's two apostles, St. John and St. Peter. Like St. John, he

was the 'beloved disciple'. Ramakrishna was quite open about this and never concealed his partiality. Like St. Peter, he was the head of the surviving disciples and of the institution which was to perpetuate Ramakrishna's influence.

In thus speaking of Vivekananda, it seems necessary to discount the estimate on the one hand of those enthusiasts who want to make him equal to his Master, and on the other of those Western critics who quote a few of his sayings out of context in order to deny him any recognition at all. Sri Ramakrishna himself said that Vivekananda would complete his work but without being in a state of Realization (that the treasure he had been shown would be locked up again and the Mother would give the key back to him only after he had finished his life's work).

Before considering whether Vivekananda completed Ramakrishna's work the first question is what that work was. Hinduism was at a very low ebb when he appeared. Hindus were apathetic and half ashamed of it and were inclined to fall for missionary propaganda. The West was ignorant of it and inclined to be contemptuous. But a new age of spiritual quest and understanding among groups and individuals who rejected the modern materialism was dawning in the East and West alike, and a reawakened spiritual current in Hinduism was an essential basis for this. Sri Ramakrishna awakened this new current by his very being. He did not need to talk about it. Much, however, still remained to be done. It was Vivekananda with his dynamic personality and passionate enthusiasm who restored self-respect to Hindus in India and made Hinduism respected in the West. It was he who thereby prepared the field in which the seeds of new spiritual life could flourish. So the not very surprising conclusion is that things happened as Sri Ramakrishna had predicted.

Again a new trend has been started by Ramana Maharshi, a path of inner quest arising in Hindu India but available to the new age type of seeker outside the orthodoxy of any religion.

Does the pattern hold with him too? Has or had he a special lieutenant? And if so, who? To say, as has been done by various persons, that so and so is 'The Maharshi's Vivekananda' overlooks the fact that the pattern is always repeated with diversity; it would not be likely that there should be a similar type of helper in two successive cases. A number of people have been instrumental in spreading the Maharshi's influence—Ganapati Muni to the more tantric type of follower, the poet Muruganar to Tamil Advaitins, Prof. T. M. P. Mahadevan to the academic world, first Paul Brunton and then Arthur Osborne to the West; but none of these fill the role.

With the Maharshi also, let us first raise the question: what was the nature of his work? He was not establishing a new religion for a whole community but a path of inner quest for seekers; therefore no organization of society was needed. It was a path to be followed by each one in his own heart; therefore no institution was needed. But it was and is centred at his Ashram at Tiruvannamalai, and therefore some organization, some 'temporal power' was required. This was built up (and here the traditional pattern becomes evident) by his younger brother, the Sarvadhikari. The temporal power was kept quite separate from the spiritual; and the wisdom of that is now apparent. Had the two been combined, the Maharshi's Ashram would have become unable to function when he was no longer physically present to direct it; but since he had made it run independently during his lifetime it could continue to do so when his bodily presence was removed. Before leaving the body he allowed a will to be drawn up in his name stating that his Ashram was to remain a spiritual centre and to continue to be run by the Sarvadhikari and the latter's descendants. This shows that he did appreciate the need for it.

The answer to the question is, therefore, that the Maharshi also did have a collaborator but only in the domain of 'temporal power'. In the work which it was his function on earth to

perform this domain had no very great importance; but it was also not completely without importance or he would not have established it and made provision for its perpetuation.



## Sri Bhagavan's Teaching— The Literary Testimony

IT IS NATURAL to an age like ours, where the mind seems more than the Spirit, to judge the influence of a Teacher by the written records he leaves; but this yardstick does not always measure true. We have no writings of the Buddha. Christ wrote nothing. When Lao-Tsu declared his lifework finished and rode away to the west, he also had written nothing. The Warden of the Pass of Han Kow, through which he had to ride, begged to set down his teaching, so he stayed at the gateway to the town and wrote the *Tao Te Ching*, which became the scripture of Taoism. It is an amusing reflection that had he not done so, modern scholars would not have failed to dispute his existence and represent him as a fictitious person.

In the case of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi there are published works and something should be known about them, while remembering that they are not the real legacy. He taught in silence and continues to do so from his shrine at Tiruvannamalai and in the hearts of those who turn to him. When asked once why he did not go about preaching the Truth to the people at large, he replied:

“How do you know I am not doing so? Does preaching consist in mounting a platform and haranguing the people around? Preaching is simple communication of Knowledge, and it can really be done in silence only. What do you think of a man who listens to a sermon for an hour and goes away without having been impressed by it so as to change his life? Compare him with another who sits in a holy presence and goes away after some time with his outlook on life totally changed. Which is better; to preach loudly without effect or to sit silently, sending out inner Force? Again, how does speech arise? There is pure Knowledge, whence arises the ego, which in turn gives rise to thought, and thought to the spoken word. So the word is the great-grandson of the original Source. If the word can produce effect, judge for yourself how much more powerful must be preaching through silence.” All that is said here about preaching obviously applies equally to writing.

Silent teaching is indeed natural to the *Jnana-marga* where theory is at a minimum, being reduced to the one all-absorbing statement of Advaita: that there is only the Self.

Teaching by silence did not mean that Sri Bhagavan was unwilling to explain to those who asked. He always answered doctrinal questions fully and a certain number of his answers have been noted down and published by the Ashram. Outstanding among such records are the two diaries: *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* by Swami Ramanananda Saraswati and *Day by Day with Bhagavan* by Devaraja Mudaliar. Also a compilation of sayings arranged according to subject has now been published under the title, *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*. Only it must be remembered that these verbal explanations were not the real teaching; they were the preliminary explanations which are easy to understand but whose understanding does not in itself enlighten the heart. The real work is the awakening of Self-awareness in the heart, and this was and is made possible by the powerful yet subtle action of the silent Grace of Bhagavan.

Since his real teaching was by silence, Sri Bhagavan very seldom made any doctrinal statement except in answer to a question. For the same reason he very seldom wrote anything. Most of the books published as his are mere records of question and answer noted down at the time and subsequently published, but always with his approval. The only prose exposition actually written by Sri Bhagavan is *Self-Enquiry*, which was set down for the instruction of an early devotee. It is not altogether representative of Bhagavan's teaching, since it describes also yogic and other techniques which he did not enjoin. *Who Am I?* is more representative; in fact, is a beautiful, clear epitome of Bhagavan's teaching. This has been edited into a continuous exposition from answers given by Bhagavan to the questions of another early devotee. The only reason for the writing of these two expositions was that Bhagavan was observing silence at that time and therefore gave his explanations in writing.

These books, in their English form, do not record the exact words of Sri Bhagavan, but they do record exactly his teaching. Those that were written by him were written in Tamil, and the compilations also recorded answers mostly given in Tamil, even though some of the questions were put in English, and the diaries kept in English. Although Sri Bhagavan understood English, he gave all but very short replies through an interpreter, listening carefully the while and pulling him up at the slightest mistranslation. So far as concerns accuracy of meaning there is the further guarantee that all the books published during his lifetime were revised by Sri Bhagavan with meticulous care before going to print.

Bhagavan's replies and explanations were given in a matter-of-fact tone, often with laughter, and in vivid, picturesque language, although the translations may not always capture this. On the whole he deprecated theoretical discussion; he wanted his listeners to practise, not to theorise.

There are a few small verse books also. The *Thirty Verses* on the ways of approach to Realization were written by Bhagavan in Tamil on the request of the poet Muruganar as *upadesa* given by Shiva to the Rishis. Later Bhagavan himself translated it into Sanskrit and this Sanskrit version is chanted daily with the *Vedas* at the Ashram, as it was in Bhagavan's lifetime; that is to say, it is treated as a scripture.

The *Forty Verses*, with a supplement of a second forty, come the nearest to being a connected doctrinal exposition. They were compiled by Bhagavan over a period of months, also on the request of Muruganar. Not all are of Bhagavan's own composition; some of the verses in the Supplement, he took from old Sanskrit *slokas* which he put in Tamil verse. They are as concise as they are profound and on each verse commentaries have been written.

“That only is Knowledge in which there is no knowing or not knowing. To know is not true Knowledge. The Self is Knowledge, for It shines with nothing else to know or to make known. It is not a negation.” (v. 12).

However, a commentary on such a verse might well become the sort of arid philosophising that Bhagavan deprecated.

Since Bhagavan spoke always of Knowledge and Self-enquiry when asked about the Goal or the way, few except those who approached him personally realized what a powerful support devotion was in his teaching. As the verse quoted above shows, knowledge in the ordinary sense of a link between knower and known is not Knowledge as he meant it. That knowledge is being the self-effulgent Self. And the approach to it is through love as well as Self-enquiry. Self-enquiry is the mind's attempt to turn inwards, and it is love that draws it inwards. Knowledge of one by another and love of one by another are alike incomplete, but in their perfection Love and Knowledge are the same. Love for Bhagavan and Self-enquiry are the two ropes



pulling the mind of his devotee back towards the Self.

The *bhakti* element of love and devotion is more prominent in the *Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala*, especially in the first and longest of them, the *Marital Garland of Letters*, which has already been referred to. It is the great emotional support of the devotees, the supreme song of Divine Union where Love and Knowledge are fused as one.

“In my unloving self Thou didst create a passion for  
Thee, therefore forsake me not, Arunachala!”

— *verse 60.*

Apart from the books mentioned above, Bhagavan wrote a few short poems, some of them even humorous, as when, in parody of a poet's complaint against the stomach, he makes the stomach complain against the ego for overloading it and giving it no rest. He also wrote a few translations in prose and verse, mainly from Sri Shankara. And it should be mentioned as a sign of the high *advaitic* orthodoxy of his teaching that it coincides with that of Shankara.

His writings and translations have now been gathered together and published in a single volume as *The Collected Works of Sri Ramana Maharshi*.



# Happiness

THERE IS A difference between happiness and pleasure. When the hedonists spoke of happiness they really meant pleasure, that is a feeling of temporary and superficial happiness caused by some circumstance or event. The inevitable concomitant of this is suffering, for if anything causes pleasure its absence or opposite causes suffering; moreover, the vicissitudes of life are such that the two alternate so that whoever is subject to the one is to the other also. Therefore there is no security in pleasure but a constant, if submerged, anxiety. To be thus subject to pleasure and pain, joy and misery, is not real happiness; it is not security but bondage, not serenity but turmoil. There can be no finality in it, since it is dependent on outer conditions and as evanescent as they are.

True happiness is something very different from this. After saying that it is what every man seeks, Bhagavan goes on to say that it is man's real nature. In other words, happiness does not need to be caused by anything but is the natural state of man when nothing intervenes to over-cloud it. To some extent we all know this, for if a man is in sound health and the weather is fine and he has no griefs or worries, he experiences a natural sense of well-being and happiness. However, this is only a dim shadow of true happiness. It is due to the absence of outer impediments and is shattered when they arise, whereas true happiness is Self-awareness and cannot be broken by any storms in the outer world. It is the experience that is over-clouded by man's ignorant assumption of the reality of things and events and is re-discovered by his turning inwards to the Self. This explains the paradox why saints are always in a state of happiness although they may suffer persecution or martyrdom. All that they undergo belongs to a shadow-world and does not affect the reality of their constant experience. It is of this experience behind the stream of events that Bhagavan said: "You can acquire, or rather you yourself are, the highest happiness." It is similar to Christ's saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.

But if it is to this ultimate, imperishable happiness that Bhagavan refers, why does he say that all men seek happiness? Not all are so sensible. Few understand what true happiness is or where or how it is to be found, and yet, in one way or another, all seek happiness. Most superficial is the hedonist who seeks it in outer events and thus makes himself the slave of circumstances. More wise is the person who seeks happiness in worship, in the service of others and in harmonious living, for although he may not understand the nature of happiness in the fullest sense, he has nevertheless turned towards it by turning away from the egoism that over-clouds it. And most excellently guided is he who turns inwards, as taught by Bhagavan, in quest of the Self which is perfect imperishable happiness. What is implied in Bhagavan's saying that all men seek happiness is that all men are impelled towards a search for the Self although few may realise this or seek intelligently and with deliberate intent. In seeking happiness they are in fact seeking their true nature, although they do not know where to look.

This explains also another puzzling saying of Bhagavan's in the same sentence that every one has the greatest love for himself. Superficially, this looks like the saying of a cynic, not a sage. Men who have given their lives for others, surely they have not had the greatest love for themselves? The person who mistakes pleasure for happiness mistakes the body for the Self and has the greatest concern for his physical and material welfare, his pleasures and prosperity. He loves what he mistakes for his Self just as he seeks what he mistakes for happiness. But in a deeper sense love for the Self which is God, the Self manifested in all beings, the indescribable, unutterable Self, draws a man back from darkness to Light, from pleasure and pain to Happiness, from wandering to abidance. The love of God or Self for a man is the magnet that makes him seek. And whoever seeks shall find, because it is his own nature, his own true Self, his own eternal happiness that he seeks, although he may not know it.

# HINDUISM

HINDUISM CONTAINS A number of *darsanas* or doctrinal viewpoints. These are not rival sects, as in Christianity or Buddhism, but viewpoints all of which are recognized as legitimate, each providing the theoretical groundwork for a different type of path. According to a man's understanding and temperament he may be drawn to a more or less direct path, and each path has its own theoretical basis. A Guru usually expounds one such viewpoint and guides his disciples along the path that is based on it and he may even, for their sake, proclaim it the best or the only perfect path, but if questioned he will admit the legitimacy of others also. For instance, Sri Ramana Maharshi in modern times taught the doctrine of Advaita and the path of Self-enquiry based on it, but if some devotee found this too arduous and preferred a less direct path he would confirm that that also was good.

The ultimate and most direct viewpoint, the very quintessence of Hinduism, is the doctrine of Advaita or non-duality. This is, roughly speaking, the doctrine that Being is One. I say 'roughly speaking' because even this is too limiting a definition from a strictly philosophical point of view. The word 'Being' is objected to as too definite, suggesting a comparison with or exclusion of non-being, while the word 'non-dual' is preferred to 'one', since the conception of 'One' may suggest limitation by the existence of some 'other' outside the 'One'. "It is the beginningless, supreme Brahman which is said to be neither Being nor Non-being." (*Bhagavad Gita*, xiii, 12). That-which-is is finite; and there can be nothing outside Infinity or it would not be infinite, being limited by the exclusion of what was outside it. To put it mathematically: infinity minus  $x$  is a contradiction in terms, since the exclusion of  $x$  makes the first term finite. Similarly, to speak of an Infinite God and of other beings outside God is a contradiction in terms, a mathematical absurdity. God is either finite or Non-dual.

How then, it may be asked, according to this doctrine, can one account for the universe and all its beings? They are simply manifestations of the Being, having no separate individual reality, subtracting nothing from its Infinity when coming into being and adding nothing to it when reabsorbed, mere reflections of one aspect or possibility of the Being that is their Essence, like one man reflected in many mirrors. "That Being which is the subtle Essence is the Self of the whole world. That is the Truth. That is Atma. That Thou Art." (*Chhandogya Upanishad, 6-8-7*).

The truth of this is to be felt in the heart.



## Bhakti Marga and Jnana Marga

*Temperament guides a seeker in the choice of a path. But the final realisation of Oneness with the Self is equally complete from whichever state or path it may come.*

EVERY DOCTRINE PROVIDES different spiritual paths for men of different temperaments, but nowhere are these so clearly or scientifically formulated as in Hinduism. The three basic types of path are the *jnana-marga* or way of intellect, the *bhakti-marga* or way of love and the *karma-marga* or way of action. A natural hierarchy is recognized in the *margas*, as *jnana-marga* being the highest and *bhakti-marga* the next. However, in embarking upon a path, there is no question of a man choosing what he considers best; he must recognize the possibilities of all the *margas* and only two questions arise for him; which is most in accord with his temperament and in which he can find guidance from a Guru. Furthermore the *margas* are by no means exclusive of one another; in fact it is usual for a path based upon one to contain some elements of the others or at least of one of the others.

To say that *jnana-marga* is the way of intellect does not mean that it is the most mental or theoretical. By 'intellect' is meant the direct intuitional understanding of the heart. It is a modern aberration to confuse learning and theory with intellect. Sound theoretical understanding is a useful, if not essential, preparation for any path, as it can safeguard against various misconceptions; but it needs to be less extensive and elaborate for the path of *jnana* than for other paths. Once a man has embarked on this path in its pure form, he does not need cosmology or symbolism and therefore theory in general falls away except for the basic, simple theory of Oneness.

Various spiritual paths aim at so purifying and harmonising the individual as to enable him to realise first the integral and natural human state, the state of primordial man before 'the fall' and then successively higher states. Such a path is elaborate and it is advantageous for the *sadhaka* to have the fullest possible theoretical understanding which will safeguard and purify the aspiration. Although it does not make a man's practice of the discipline more intense, it purifies it by keeping him aware that the discipline is not for its own sake and the immediate results it produces are not the Goal.

From a practical point of view, such a path brings a man progressively nearer to Realisation of the Absolute since it removes more and more of the attachments and illusions which conceal that ever-existent identity; however, from a purely intellectual point of view, it brings him no nearer at all, since with regard to the Absolute there is no near or far and no comparison; and in fact the final realisation of Oneness with the Self is equally complete from whatever state of being or stage of advancement it may come.

*Bhakti-marga* is the way of love and devotion leading to Union and therefore the most ecstatic path. In its final perfection *bhakti* is the same as *jnana*, for love and knowledge are the same. "The eternal, unbroken, natural state of abiding in the

Self is *jnana*. To abide in the Self you must love the Self. Since God is verily the Self, love of the Self is love of God; and that is *bhakti*. *Jnana* and *bhakti* are thus one and the same.”<sup>1</sup>

However, the path to the final perfection is different. Being the way of love, *bhakti-marga* is a way of duality, the duality of lover and Beloved finally merged in the ecstatic bliss of Union.

Love of God kindles a burning desire to surrender to the Will of God. Indeed the degree of sincerity of the love can be gauged by the desire to surrender.

For some aspirants the surrendering of the weak and faulty self-will to God’s Will will be truly easier than the assertion of Divinity within the heart, ‘... for the Unmanifest is hard for the embodied to realise’.<sup>2</sup> By eliminating thereby the ego-sense the individual will may be transformed into the Divine Will.

This does not mean, of course, that *bhakti-marga* restricts itself to the conception of a personal God outside the worshipper, only that it uses this conception (which, indeed is true so long as individuality persists) to strengthen and inspire the devotee and carry him on with more energy beyond it. Then God is recognised as the Self within and as manifested in the entire universe.

It is obvious how *bhakti* can inspire and energize other paths since it is love of God that tears men from egoism and draws them to harmony.

There could be no better proof that the path of devotion is compatible with Knowledge than Bhagavan’s *Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala*. Take for instance, verse 45 of the poem: “Weak though my effort was, by Thy Grace I gained the Self, Oh Arunachala!” It is said that tears of ecstatic ardour streamed down his face as he composed it. Certainly it is one of the supreme symbolical love poems of all ages and all religions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, XII-5.



It has always remained the emotional treasure of his devotees, as the *Forty Verses on Reality* is their doctrinal foundation.

Verse 20 of *Forty Verses on Reality* says:

“Seeing God without seeing the Self who sees is only a  
mental image.

Only he who has seen himself has seen God,  
since he has lost his individuality and  
nothing remains but God.”



## The Threefold Scripture

THERE ARE VARIOUS ways of categorising the Hindu scriptures. In the first place, they are divided into sruti, that is ‘heard’ or ‘revealed’ scripture, and smriti, that is ‘recollected’ scripture; the sruti being of absolute and the smriti only of contingent validity. This does not necessarily mean that the smriti are less true; it may mean that they are less widely applicable owing to their larger admixture of the contingent. The sruti comprise the *Vedas* including the *Upanishads*. Their pre-eminence is not due to a high or higher degree of philosophical exposition. In fact, except for the *Upanishads*, they contain little of this. It is due to the power in them, a power that goes beyond theories and philosophies to the basic source of Power in the monosyllable OM, which the Vedic Rishis grasped and canalized.

A second category arises from the fact that the words of a Jivan Mukta, one Liberated while living, are beyond scripture, beyond everything. They do not abide our question. They are simply to be accepted. The Maharshi himself indicated this on one occasion when he said: “The shastras are the outcome of the sayings and doings of Jnanis and have come down through the ages through many channels. If there is any divergence between what a Jnani says or does and what is laid down in the shastras, then the latter have to be revised or corrected.” Such are the enunciations of a *Yoga Vasishtha* or a Ramana Maharshi.

The third category is the ‘Prastana Trayi’ or ‘Threefold Scripture’ of Hinduism. It has sometimes been said that any doctrine can find a place in Hinduism. That is, of course, absurd. Many varied modes of perceiving truth are possible, but so also are many types of error. The three scriptures are accepted as fundamental to Hindu orthodoxy; what accords with them is valid; if anything does not accord with them it is not valid. Only one of the ‘Three Scriptures’ is technically sruti: that is the *Upanishads*. The second is the *Bhagavad Gita* and is intrinsically compelling, being the scripture of Sri Krishna himself.

The third is the *Brahma Sutras*. These are traditionally regarded as the work of Veda Vyasa, the compiler of the *Vedas* and author of the *Mahabharata*. What is more important than authorship is that from ancient times they have been universally accepted as the touchstone of Hindu orthodoxy, the enunciation of the Sanatana Dharma. They are, as the title indicates, of the sutra form of literature, that is a collection of terse, cryptic statements, leaving all but the essential to be understood or filled in by commentators. All three of the great Hindu Acharyas—Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa—have in fact written commentaries on them, each in terms of his own school. They themselves, moreover, contain a good deal of matter which can be considered controversial, particularly in refutation of unorthodox schools. Other names that have been

given to them are ‘Vedanta Sutras’, ‘Vyasa Sutras’, ‘Uttara Mimamsa Sutras’ and ‘Sariraka Mimamsa Sutras’.

All three of the ‘Three Scriptures’—*Upanishads*, *Gita* and *Brahma Sutras*—are regarded as authoritative. They are found to be in agreement, and the true orthodox teaching of Sanatana Dharma is contained in them all. The difference is rather in tone and manner of exposition; while the *Gita* is vibrant with love and *Upanishads* maintain sublime wisdom, the *Sutras* are more like categorical guide-lines. No one who aspires to say what the Sanatana Dharma teaches and what it does not can afford to neglect them.

One cannot speak of an outline of what is itself an outline, but the following sets forth some of the essential points contained in the *Brahma Sutras* and accepted traditionally as authoritative. In cases where there may seem to be contradiction it means that both aspects of a paradox have to be accepted.

Brahman is one without a second, can be described only as ‘Not this, Not that’, is the cause of all, is Bliss and is the Inner Ruler.

Brahman is the material cause and the efficient cause and is an intelligent principle.

Individual self (jiva) and Universal Self (Paramatma) are in the heart.

Brahman is not the object of perception.

The Self consisting of Knowledge is not the individual self but Brahman.

Brahman, though different from the world, can be its cause, and yet the effect is not different from the cause.

Brahman is uncreated, indivisible and omnipotent.

No motive can be attributed to Brahman’s creation and no evil ascribed to Him. The only thing that could be represented as ‘motive’ is ‘leela’ or ‘play’, which is spontaneous.

Mind, intellect and the sense organs are created, not original.<sup>1</sup>

The development of names and forms is the work of the Lord, not of the jiva, but the jiva is eternal (except insofar as transcended through Knowledge in Moksha).

The jiva is the agent so long as he is connected with the *upadhis* (physical and subtle bodies) and is dependent on the Lord for his activity. He is a reflection of Brahman.

The jiva or individual being experiences other lives after death. (Its possible developments are described. Possible modes of death and rebirth are described.)

Liberation is of one kind only.

But a Jivan Mukta may take birth again for the fulfilment of some mission.<sup>2</sup>

Meditation on the Atma is to be continued until Realization is attained.

While meditating on Brahman one should regard It as identical with oneself.

Knowledge of Brahman frees one from the effects of all past karmas, from (apparent) good and evil alike. Nevertheless prarabdha-karma (that part of one's karma which is due to be worked out in this lifetime) continues (from the point of view of the observer) until exhausted, when the knower of Brahman becomes (consciously) One with It.

The Liberated Being does not thereby acquire anything new but only realizes his already existent nature.

The Knower of Brahman has all powers except that of creation; he does not return to manifestation.



<sup>1</sup> cf. *The Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. IX, where Sri Krishna speaks of them as the creation of his Prakriti.

<sup>2</sup> Bhāgavan Ramana Maharshi has also been heard to declare this.

# The Name

*In most religions (though not in Christianity)<sup>1</sup> invocation of the Divine Name is one of the most important techniques of bhakti marga, that is of the path of devotion and submission. The following passage in praise of it is taken from Namdev, one of the great Maratha poet-saints of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. In his youth he was a bandit and murderer. One day he came upon a young mother comforting her fatherless child and with sudden horror it flashed on him that it was he who had slain the father. In violent remorse he rushed to the nearby temple and tried to commit suicide, but he was prevented. He then vowed the rest of his life to penance and worship. He became an ecstatic bhakta and a saint.*

## ALL-PERVADING

THE NAME PERMEATES everywhere from the heavens to the lowest regions of the entire universe. Who can tell to what depths in the nether regions and to what height in the heavens it extends? The ignorant undergo endless types of rebirth without knowing the Essence. The Name is immortal, says Namdev. Forms are innumerable but the Name is all.

The Name itself is form, and form is the Name. There is no distinction between Name and form. Becoming manifest, God assumed Name and form. Thus the Name and the *Vedas* were established. Remember that there is no mantra beyond the Name. Those who say otherwise are ignorant. The Name is God Himself says Namdev. This is known only to loving devotees of the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup> Where invocation is not direct but mediate—as for instance in the prayer of the heart.

The all-pervading nature of the Name can be understood only when one realizes his Self. As long as one's own name is unrecognized it is impossible to grasp the all-pervading Name. When one knows one's Self one finds the Name everywhere. To consider the Name different from the Named creates illusion. Ask the Saints, says Namdev.

None can realize the Name by the practice of Knowledge (*Jnana*), meditation or austerity (*tapas*). Surrender yourself first at the feet of the Guru and learn to know that the 'I' itself is the Name. After finding the source of that 'I', merge your individuality in that Oneness which is Self-existent and devoid of all duality, that which pervades beyond all duality. The Name has come into the three worlds. It is Parabrahman Itself, where there is no action arising out of duality.

#### NAMDEV'S ENLIGHTENMENT

*This was read out before Bhagavan in the hall and he said: "Namdev must have written this after he had obtained full Realization on touching the feet of Vishobakesar." The point of this remark is that for a long time Namdev, although a saint and an ecstatic, was not fully realized. He worshipped God under the name of Vithoba (as is common in Maharashtra), and so intense was his devotion that the image of God in the temple used to come to life for him and speak to him as a friend. This sort of manifestation is apt to occur for the ecstatic bhakta. A modern example is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, for whom the image of the Mother Kali came alive.*

*Bhagavan continued with the following story of Namdev's final Enlightenment:*

Gora, another saint, who was a potter by trade, held a feast to which he invited the saints, including Namdev and Jnanadev. In the hope of enlightening Namdev, Jnanadev said to Gora: "Your job is making pots. You daily test them to see which are properly baked and which are not. There sitting in

front of you are the pots of God, so test them to see which are sound.” Gora who had been told privately of the purpose of the test, agreed and, taking up the stick with which he used to test his pots, went round among his guests, tapping each one on the head. They all submitted meekly till he came to Namdev, who cried out indignantly: “What do you mean, potter, by coming to tap me with your stick?” Gora whereupon replied, to Jnanadev: “All the other pots are properly baked; only this one is not yet baked!”

At this every one burst out laughing. Namdev was so humiliated that he got up and rushed out of the house straight to the temple of Vithoba where he complained bitterly, crying out: “Am I not your child and your closest friend? How could you let such a humiliation befall me?”

Vithoba appeared before him as usual and seemed to sympathize, but then said: “Why could you not sit quiet and submit to the tapping, like all the others? Then there would have been no trouble.”

At this Namdev became still more upset and cried: “You too want to humiliate me! Why should I submit? Am I not your child?”

Vithoba then said: “You have not yet understood and even if I tell you, you won’t. But go to such and such a ruined temple in the forest and there you will find a saint who will be able to give you Enlightenment.”

Namdev went to the forest, as he was told, and when he reached the ruined temple he found a simple old man lying asleep there with his feet resting on a Siva-lingam. He could hardly believe that this was the man from whom he, the chosen friend of Vithoba, was to obtain Enlightenment. However, as there was no one else there, he went up to him and clapped his hands to wake him, whereupon the old man opened his eyes and said: “Oh, so you are the Namdev whom Vithoba has sent here.”

At this Namdev was taken aback and began to think that this must be a man of power to know his name and why he had come. Still, man of power or not, he had no right to rest his feet on a lingam, he thought; and he told the old man so.

“Oh, are my feet on a lingam?” the old man said. “All right, put them somewhere else.”

So Namdev, out of reverence for the lingam, moved them to another spot. There too a Siva-lingam sprang up, and so in one place after another, whatever place he put them. Finally he sat down and took them in his lap, and he himself became a Siva-lingam. And at that moment Enlightenment dawned on him.

After this Namdev returned home. For some days he did not go to the temple at all, although it had been his habit to go there daily and spend most of the day there with Vithoba. After a few days Vithoba appeared before him in his house and asked, apparently guileless, why he had forgotten to visit him.

“No more fooling me now,” Namdev replied, “I know now. Is there any place where You are not? Do I need to go to the temple to be with You? Do I exist apart from You?”

“Yes, now you understand,” Vithoba said.

[Commenting on this story, Bhagavan said: “It is to be noted that it was only when he surrendered and touched the feet of the Guru that he obtained Enlightenment.”]

## VERILY, THE NAME IS GOD HIMSELF

*In modern times Swami Ramdas also, like most bhaktas, prescribed the invocation of the Name. The following is an article about it that he distributed privately among his disciples. It is printed here with the kind permission of Mataji Sri Krishnabai of Anandashram.*

God and His Name are not distinct from one another. Name is God Himself. The moment we think of the Name



our mind is filled with the presence of God. There is no easier way of focussing thought upon God than taking constantly His Name. When we repeat the Name aloud, we feel our heart is flooded with the ecstasy of love, because the sound of the Divine Name awakens the heart to the bliss and love of God.

Although mental repetition of the Name is held to be far more efficacious than the verbal repetition, still the rare experience of sweetness and joy derived by uttering the Name aloud is incomparable. When the entire being of the devotee thrills with rapture to the music of the Name, he realizes that the Name is Brahman.

God is both manifest and unmanifest. The Name stands for such a God. Here the unmanifest is the all-pervading, infinite, immutable, tranquil and static spirit of God. The manifest is the entire universe of name, form and movement with all its beings, creatures and things. The Nature stands for this all-inclusive and all-transcendent Godhead, who is both personal and impersonal.

The Divine Name is thus the beginningless source of all creation and the creation itself. God, the absolute, is the nameless Name.

The Name can free the soul from bondage. The Name can take it to the highest consummation of spiritual life. The Name can grant a blind soul Divine sight. The Name can bless an individual with a universal vision full of sublimity. The Name can lift the soul to inconceivable heights of God-realization.

The power of the Name is invincible. A mind which is considered to be unconquerable, by the soothing influence of the Name becomes docile, yielding and submissive. The mind itself is transformed into God by the power of the Name. He

who takes refuge in the Name can work wonders. Death itself will stand in awe of him. He can command all the forces of nature and direct them to bring about a spiritual awakening in the hearts of men. The Name can make a human being an embodiment of eternal love and joy. The Name can convert an individual into a Cosmic Reality—an ignorant soul into a very God.

Where the Name of God is sung, the atmosphere is permeated with purity, peace and bliss; for the symphony of the Name spreads everywhere the splendour of love.

The Name is all-sufficient. The utterance of it is itself meditation. The ecstasy born of it is itself *samadhi*. The Name is love, light, power and joy.

The writer can vouch for it from his own experience that the Name by itself without any other *sadhana* can grant one the fullest vision of God everywhere and may merge him in an ocean of never-ending love and joy. There is no *sadhana* which can be so universally adopted by all people and is at the same time so simple for realizing God as the Divine Name. It is perfectly true, in the words of a saint, that he who has God's Name always on his tongue is a *Jivanmukta*, or a liberated soul.

So, dear friends, to whatever race, caste, creed or colour you may belong, take up the Name of God and feel the sweet communion with it, and you may depend upon it, your souls through constant bathing in the nectar of the Name will not only be purified but will also be illumined with the omnipresent and omniscient light and love of God. This practice of taking the Name will lead the unyielding spirit of man to complete surrender to the omnipotent power and will of God. In the earlier stages when the Name is repeated with earnestness, faith and concentration, the face

and the body of the devotee will shine with a peculiar lustre, his mind will be filled with wisdom and heart with love. This is due to predominance of *sattva guna* in the devotee. Later when the repetition is continued with the same zeal, he will behold the universe before him as the very expression of God. Becoming one with God, he will have the vision of God everywhere.

## CURE FOR DESIRES

*In Islam, as one would expect from a religion whose very name denotes 'submission', no technique is more prized than invocation of the Divine Name.*

“The food and drink of the saint is remembrance of the Name of the Lord,” said Abu'l Hasan.

Al-Ghazali, the great theologian, said: “What the slave of God derives from His Name is deification, by which I mean that his heart and purpose are drowned in God and he sees none other.”

“Recital of the Name is a certain cure for all desires,” said Dhu'n Nun Misri; “Whoever hears it faithfully finds the way to God.”

## BESTOWS DIVINE WISDOM

*For the Sikhs there is no more patent technique than invocation of the Divine Name, as the following hymn from the Granth Sahib shows:*

Hearkening to the Name bestows  
Truth, divine wisdom, contentment.  
To bathe in the joy of the Name  
Is to bathe in the holy places.  
By hearing the Name and reading it

A man attains to honour;  
By hearkening the mind may reach  
The highest blissful poise  
Of meditation on God.  
Saith Nanak, the saints are always happy;  
By hearkening to the Name  
Sorrow and sin are destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

### LEADS TO SALVATION

*Buddhism is the most impersonal of religions. Its essential and original teaching seems to have no place for a Path of devotion or for personal worship. In the Pure Land School, however, in China and Japan, Mahayana Buddhism has developed such a Path for those who need it. A passage in Zendo's Commentary on the Pure Land Sutras runs as follows:*

“Only repeat the name of Amitabha with all your heart, whether walking or standing, sitting or lying; never cease the practice of it for a moment. This is the work which unfailingly issues in salvation, for it is in accordance with the original vow of Amida Buddha.” It was on the basis of this instruction Honen founded the Japanese School of Jodo.<sup>3</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> *The Sacred Writings of the Sikhs*, p. 34, Allen & Unwin.

<sup>3</sup> *Buddhism*, p. 162, by Christmas Humphreys, Cassell.

# Krishna, Teacher of Dharma

In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna taught Arjuna the rules of Dharma, that is of right conduct. However, it has been said that on other occasions he himself did not observe them. The *Gita*, it will be remembered, is a dialogue enshrined in the vast epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, an epic dealing mainly with the feud between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas, which culminated in the great eighteen-day battle of Kurukshetra. It has been asserted that Krishna repeatedly used dishonourable tactics during this battle and was anything but an exemplar of dharma. This accusation has also been taken up by certain representatives of another religion who have tried to make out that Krishna was an incarnation not of God but the devil, which is perhaps not in very good taste.

The two lines of defence usually put forward are not convincing. One is that the Krishna of the *Gita* is not the same person as the Krishna of the epic. This is quite untenable, for the divine status and power of Krishna is referred to continually throughout the epic by friend and foe alike. The other is even worse. It is that Krishna, being divine, was not bound by human laws of honour—as though Divinity meant merely power and not purity or goodness.

Let us first see where this accusation originated and then examine the evidence for it. It was voiced in the *Mahabharata* itself by Duryodhana, the arch-villain of the epic, the great exemplar of adharma or dishonour, as he lay dying. That alone should make it suspect; for a valid accusation would hardly flow from such a tainted source.

Since the accusation and Krishna's reply to it are bound up with the particular issues at stake, it will be better to sketch these in a general outline first.

Pandu and Dhritarashtra were brothers. Dhritarashtra, being the elder, was crowned king, but he was blind and therefore had to delegate most of the work of government. Pandu died while the five sons born by his two wives were still growing boys. These five, as the Pandavas, were therefore brought up together with their cousins, Dhritarashtra's many sons, known as the Kauravas. Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, being elder than any of the Kauravas, was proclaimed Yuvaraja or heir apparent. However, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas, was jealous and resentful and would not let the kingdom slip out of his grasp. The Pandavas were in all ways superior, and this only increased his jealousy. While still a boy he had already tried to murder Bhima, the second of the Pandavas, who was like a young giant. The blind king, perhaps not unnaturally, favoured his own son, and after some years Duryodhana succeeded in persuading him to exile the Pandavas to a country house away from the capital. He then set fire to the house hoping to kill them.

This plot failed, however. The Pandavas escaped and became the sons-in-law of King Drupada and had to be received back. Then, in a division of property, they were given a waste, undeveloped part of the kingdom; but in a few years they built it up into a finer kingdom than the part retained by Duryodhana. Once more the latter was tormented by jealousy. This time he challenged Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, to a dicing match. It was a point of honour for a Kshatriya never to refuse a challenge either to combat or dicing, so Yudhishtira had to accept, even though he knew well that he was going to be cheated out of his rights. And indeed, the other side did cheat and fleeced him of all his property, then of his own freedom and that of his brothers and finally of their wife Draupadi. Draupadi was dragged into the Court and insulted and would have been worse humiliated but for her own spirited defiance and the invisible help of Krishna. The Pandavas looked on helplessly, feeling bound by the code of honour not to intervene. At this point

the elders, realizing too late how serious the matter had become, arranged a compromise. The Pandavas and Draupadi were restored to freedom but were to live in exile in the forest for twelve years and then unrecognized among people for another year. All this they did and then both sides began canvassing allies for war. Even then Yudhishtira offered to maintain peace if Duryodhana would give them just five villages to rule over, but he refused even that. War had become inevitable.

Now the position of Krishna. Humanly, he was the ruler of a neighbouring state and a noncombatant ally of the Pandavas, going into battle as Arjuna's unarmed charioteer; so he had nothing personally to gain by the victory of the Pandavas or to lose by their defeat. Spiritually he was the Divine Avatara who declared to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Whenever dharma decays and adharma prevails I manifest Myself."<sup>1</sup> The verse which follows this is particularly important for our purpose: "For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil and for the establishment of dharma I take birth from age to age."<sup>2</sup> That is to say that his function was not only to proclaim a gospel. He did that in the *Bhagavad Gita*; but he also had to protect the righteous, establish dharma and destroy evil and the evil-doers. This he did in and through the battle of Kurukshetra.

With this background we can come to a general review of the actions of Krishna, which we will examine in more detail later. The battle of Kurukshetra was the transition from the Dwapara Yuga or the third age to the Kali Yuga or spiritually dark age in which we now live. Krishna was the Avatara presiding over the transition and it was essential to him that it should take place through the victory of dharma, not of adharma, that is to say of the Pandavas and not the Kauravas. According to the doctrine of the yugas, there are four ages of successively lower spiritual levels within the complete manvantara or cycle. The course of each age

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. IV, v. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ch. IV, v. 8.

shows a spiritual decline but the inauguration of the next age is marked by a new stabilisation, although on a lower level. The Dwapara Yuga was characterised by a rigorous code of honour and chivalry, but this had become inwardly corrupt, so that it could be used by scoundrels to ruin honest men. It was, in fact, adherence to the letter that kills instead of the Spirit which vivifies. A characteristic example was the infamous dicing match. Yudhishtira and his brothers knew that they were being wronged, but bound by the letter of the law, did not feel free to resist even when the noble and beloved Draupadi was threatened with humiliation. But Krishna did. In the *Bhagavad Gita* he constantly stresses the need for inner, not outer, renunciation. “He it is who is a sannyasi, he it is who is a yogi, who performs his duty without regard to profit, not he who renounces the sacred fire and activity (of a householder).”<sup>3</sup> Similarly in fighting evil in the world he taught that an upright man, a champion of dharma, cannot let his hands be tied by adherence to formal rules of honour twisted to evil purposes by unscrupulous adversaries. The state at the beginning of the Dwapara Yuga where rules of honour were honourably observed was doubtless higher, but that which Krishna was abolishing where formal rules of honour were twisted into instruments of villainy was far worse. This means that Krishna, by his example as well as his teaching, was establishing dharma for the new age that was dawning and that his actions are not merely excusable but models to followed.

With this in mind, let us examine in detail the accusations and Krishna’s rejoinder. Duryodhana is lying mortally wounded on the ground. “Duryodhana had been listening to the words of all of them. He rose to his waist like a wounded cobra that is not yet dead. He was suffering intense pain from his body, but he did not worry about that. He said: ‘Stop these words, Krishna! . . . You have no shame. I have been killed most unfairly and you are gloating over my fall. You were responsible for this act of Bhima’s.

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<sup>3</sup> Ch. VI, v.1.



I don't blame him at all. In fairness to Bhima I must say that he had forgotten his oath and was fighting a fair fight. It was you who brought the talk round to unfair fighting when you were talking to Arjuna. You spoke loud deliberately so that Bhima would hear you. Arjuna then slapped his thigh (to make Bhima remember). You have caused many kings to be killed by unfair means and you dare to call me sinful! I know all your evil deeds, Krishna. You were the cause of this great war and of the slaughter of so many men. You stationed Shikandi in front of the chariot of our grandfather and thus enabled Arjuna to kill him. Do you think I did not mark it? You caused the elephant called Aswatthama to be killed, and it was you who made Drishtadyumna kill Drona. Do you think I did not mark it? It was you who made Ghatotkacha face Radheya, so that Radheya's Shakti was wasted on that beast. Do you think I did not mark it? It was you who made Arjuna kill Radheya when his chariot wheel was sunk in the mire. Do you think I did not mark it? If the Pandavas had fought with Bhishma and Drona and Radheya by fair means they would never have won the war. It is you, Krishna, who are the greatest sinner here, and not I who have been killed by unfair means.'

“Krishna turned on him with angry eyes. He said: ‘Listen to me Duryodhana. You have been killed because of your adharma. You have killed all your friends and all your dependents by your unrighteousness. Bhishma and Drona and Radheya were killed because they took up your cause against that of Pandavas. Bhishma should not have sided with you. Drona could have left Hastinapura and gone away to the forest.’<sup>4</sup> Radheya was bent on pleasing you. He knew that you were in the wrong and yet he fought for you. It is because of you and your evil deeds that they have been killed. You say that I am the cause of this war. Have you so soon forgotten my coming to Hastinapura (to plead for peace)? Have you forgotten the trouble I took to convince you that the war should

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<sup>4</sup> The point of this is that Drona was a Brahmin, not a Kshatriya; the significance is explained later.

not be fought? You would not let the world out of your grasp. Your avarice was the cause of this war and of the death of all these heroes. Your wickedness goes back to the time when you were just a young boy. The young plant of jealousy was encouraged to grow by your father and your uncle Sakuni. It is the fruit of that tree that you are tasting now. Even for the death of Abhimanyu alone you will have to be killed again and again. You do not deserve any one's sympathy and I have no regret for you.”<sup>5</sup>

I will elucidate these various allusions later, but it can be seen here already that while Duryodhana speaks of technicalities Krishna is concerned with wrong motives and evil policy. The lesson has to be pressed home on the Pandavas also, who had suffered so much by letting themselves be enslaved by the letter of the law when true righteousness or dharma pointed the other way; and therefore Krishna now rounds on them with his counter-charge.

“Krishna turned on all of them his angry eyes. He thundered at them in his beautiful resonant voice: ‘Of course they were all slain by unfair means! They were all the very flowers of Kshatriya prowess. If you had fought by fair means they could never have been defeated, let alone killed. Not all your skill with the bow and arrow and your divine astras<sup>6</sup> could have given you victory over those heroes. This Duryodhana could never have been killed in fair fight. Look at me and listen to me carefully. Long ago in the Mamyaka forest I wiped the tears from the eyes of my dear Draupadi and promised her to bring about the death of all who had made her weep.<sup>7</sup> Yudhishtira, you did not care about the insult to her in the Court at Hastinapura; you were concerned only with the right or wrong of it. You allowed your wife to be insulted by these beasts and stood silent because you thought it was not dharma to interfere. You stopped Bhima from doing what he should have done. But I could not let Draupadi

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<sup>5</sup> *Mahabharata*, page 674. All the quotations from the *Mahabharata* in this article are taken, with slight verbal changes, from the abridged translation by Kamala Subramaniam, published by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai.

<sup>6</sup> Occult weapons.

<sup>7</sup> Draupadi was dear to Krishna as his devotee; there was no personal link between them.

weep. When she was in the Court no one came to her help. The great Bhishma and Drona and all the others never helped her. I swore to kill every one of them; yes, every one of them. I killed the great Bhishma because he had not the courage to interfere when the beasts of the Court were harassing Draupadi. I killed Drona for the same reason. He also was indifferent on the day when the game of dice was played. He had no right to take part in the war or to fight on the side of Duryodhana when he knew that the Pandavas were in the right. He loved this evil-doer and so, with Bhishma, Drona too had to die. I am bent on one thing only; the righting of a wrong done to good people. I have achieved it and I have no regrets. As for the sin of all this unfair fighting, let it fall on my head; I am prepared to bear that too for the sake of the Pandavas.”<sup>8</sup>

That is to say that Krishna admitted to using unfair means in order to bring about the triumph of right over wrong, of dharma over adharma.

Having reviewed the picture as whole, let us now examine each separate item of it to see how this key fits in.

First is the slaying of Bhishma. Partisans of Duryodhana say simply that Krishna got a woman to stand between Bhishma and Arjuna with the result that Bhishma, out of chivalry, laid down his bow, but Arjuna, under Krishna’s urging, used his and was able to kill Bhishma. The only excuse for such a travesty (if it is an excuse) would be ignorance. The truth is far more complex and requires an outline of Bhishma’s story.

He was a lonely and desolate old man waiting for death to claim him but a terrible fighter and, according to Kshatriya dharma, he fought to the utmost when he did fight. He had joined the side which had a technical claim on his loyalty, although he knew that it was in the wrong, and it was for this that Krishna condemned him, just as a modern war crimes court condemned Hitler’s generals for obeying immoral orders. Bhishma was revered

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 675.

by both sides as their 'grandfather', but in fact he was step-brother of their grandfather; he himself was a celibate and had no children. When he was a young man his father remarried. The new step-mother and her father feared that Bhishma's descendants would disinherit hers, so he took a vow never to marry. Enormous weight was attached to a vow and later, when circumstances became such that Bhishma's step-mother herself wished him to have offspring, he refused to break his vow. On one occasion Bhishma abducted a princess named Amba, with her two sisters, for his step-mother. Amba, to cut a long story short, was brought to the point where she declared that, since Bhishma had abducted her, it was his duty to marry her according to the Kshatriya code of honour. Bound by his vow, Bhishma rejected her. Amba's love turned to hatred. She immolated herself, vowing to be reborn a man with the sole purpose of bringing about Bhishma's death. She was reborn as Shikandi, a girl who changed sex and was already a man at the time of the Battle of Kurukshetra. Owing to the force of concentration behind the vow, he remembered his previous life and his enmity to Bhishma. Bhishma also recognised Amba in him and therefore laid down his arms on his approach.

Bhishma was the commander of the Kaurava army. Yudhishtira, the saintly eldest brother of the Pandavas, was caught in the dilemma, that, by the law of dharma, his side ought to win but that it seemed impossible so long as the terrible old man was opposing them. Therefore he went with his four brothers and Krishna to Bhishma's tent in the enemy camp at night, barefoot and unarmed, and put the problem to him himself. Bhishma approved, expressed his weariness with life, but declared that, while fighting, he had to do his utmost. He added that there were only two who could kill him, Krishna and Arjuna. Since Krishna had taken a vow not to fight in the battle, that left only Arjuna. Even Arjuna could only kill him if he co-operated by laying down his arms, since he had received a divine boon that he could only die or be killed when he

consented to. This he would do, he said, whenever Shikandi, whom he recognized as Amba, was stationed before him. That was the time when Arjuna was to kill him. There is no doubt that it was a clever scheme and Krishna was the brains behind it, but was there anything dishonourable in it? From a long range viewpoint, Bhishma had to be punished for giving his allegiance for merely technical reasons, to a cause that he knew to be wrong but even from a short range viewpoint there seems to have been nothing in it contrary to dharma.

The next episode is the killing of Drona. Once again a whole story is involved. Drona succeeded Bhishma as commander of the Kaurava army. He also was revered by both parties, having been the archery instructor of both Pandava and Kaurava princes. He was guilty of a twofold adharma. Like Bhishma, he was fighting for 'the establishment', the side to which he owed technical loyalty, against the side which he knew to be in the right. Also he was a Brahmin and had no right to be fighting at all. This is what Krishna was alluding to in the passage quoted above when he said that Drona could have left the Court at Hastinapura and gone to the forest: it was his dharma to be a sage or hermit, not a warrior.<sup>9</sup> Apart from being a superb archer, Drona was also a great master of occult powers through which he wrought terrible destruction on the common troops who had no defence against them. This was felt to be a great adharma. And, in parenthesis, it is natural to suppose that people of those days should have been as far beyond us in their mastery of occult powers as we are beyond them in our mastery of physical powers. The situation was equivalent to that in modern warfare of an enemy using poison gas. Krishna decided that in such a case it is legitimate to tell a lie. Would any modern moralist decide otherwise?

<sup>9</sup> See the *Bhagavad Gita*, III.35: "Better one's own dharma, however imperfect, than that of another, though well performed. Better even to die following one's own dharma, for that of another is perilous."

Drona's insensate ambition was mainly for the sake of his son Aswatthama and if he believed that Aswatthama had been killed he would give it up. Krishna ordered the Pandavas to tell him so. Even the forthright Bhima quailed from telling a direct lie. He prevaricated. He killed an elephant with that name (which is what Duryodhana refers to in his accusation) and then called out: "Aswatthama is dead!" Drona turned to Yudhishtira for confirmation, believing him to be too saintly to tell a lie, but he also repeated it. Drona was heart-broken and lost interest in the battle. Further urged by Bhima to return to his true dharma as a Brahmin, he laid down his arms and sat in meditation; and in that state he was killed.

That the lie was wrong in itself is clearly admitted in the *Mahabharata*. In fact it is stated that Yudhishtira was so saintly that he, together with the chariot in which he drove, was normally in a state of levitation, some inches above the ground, but that after he had uttered this lie his chariot came down to earth. What Krishna was teaching was that there may be a situation where a lesser wrong, such as a lie, is justified and even necessitated to eliminate a greater one. Would any modern moralist deny this? The question was debated among the Pandavas themselves. Arjuna, who is the Hamlet of the *Mahabharata*, forever doubting, hesitating and regretting, condemns the lie in retrospect. The forthright Bhima staunchly defends it. The final verdict is given by the eldest brother, the saintly Yudhishtira.

"I was told by Krishna that it was for the good of the Army that I should tell that lie. I have always hated lying but I did tell a lie..... I consider Krishna my guru and I am proud to have obeyed him. I told a lie and I am proud to have told it. It has saved the lives of many people and thus I have been able to do much good. So I am proud of my lie. Do you hear that? I am proud of it! I don't care if I do go to hell for this lie, as you have predicted. I have lived an upright life to the best of my ability. I have never

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 608.

had a single evil thought. I have always tried to tread the path of Truth. This lie of mine seems to be without sin. If I feel that something is not sinful then it is really not sinful.”<sup>10</sup> Here Yudhishtira proclaims the inner law of dharma that Krishna was trying to establish in place of the brittle outer conventions.

The next item enumerated by Duryodhana is a clever stratagem but not unfair. Radheya, who took over the command of the Kaurava army after Drona had been killed, had an *astra* or occult weapon which was fatal but which he could use only once. He was reserving it for Arjuna, but Krishna manoeuvred him into a duel with another champion who pressed him so hard that he had to use it.

It is different, however, with the death of Radheya himself. He was fighting a duel with Arjuna when his chariot began tilting over, its left wheel sinking in the mud. He appealed to Arjuna to observe the laws of chivalry by refraining from attacking him while he righted it, but Krishna refused to allow this. “So you want fair treatment from Arjuna now! Tell me truly, Radheya, whether you yourself have always adhered to dharma. You have been a party to Duryodhana’s plots against the Pandavas. You were there when their queen Draupadi was dragged into the Court by Dussasana. You gloated over her helplessness more than the others. You never thought of dharma when the game of dice was being played. But why talk of what happened long ago? Let me remind you of what happened only four days back when you all killed Abhimanyu.’ Krishna’s eyes were red. His face was terrible to look at. It was twisted with anger and grief at the thought of Abhimanyu. He continued: ‘Yes, Abhimanyu. Six heroes murdered him. He wanted a fair chance. He did not have a single weapon. With the wheel of his chariot in his hand he called on you all to fight him one by one. Did you think of the rules of fair fighting then? Who was it who cut Abhimanyu’s bowstring from behind when he was unaware of it? Was there a hero

who knew the dharma of fair fighting? You disgust me with your demand for fair fighting. How dare you expect it when you paid no attention to it then?’ ”<sup>11</sup>

This is the point on which Krishna keeps insisting. Rules of honour cannot be allowed to become a weapon in the hands of the dishonourable who ignore them when it suits their convenience but claim their protection when convenient. The Abhimanyu whom he mentions was Arjuna’s son, a gallant youth of sixteen whom a group of experienced warriors did to death. While others were attacking him in front, Radheya had cut his bowstring from behind, leaving him defenceless.

The only remaining accusation is the killing of Duryodhana himself by unfair means. When his army was defeated and all its great warriors slain he fled and concealed himself in a lake. The Pandavas discovered him and called to him to come out. Yudhishtira then challenged him to mortal combat with any one of them he might choose and with any weapon he might choose, with the kingdom at stake. Krishna was furious. Once again there was the quixotic folly of binding oneself by rigid laws. After all the sacrifice and suffering of the battle and after at last obtaining victory, here was Yudhishtira putting it all in jeopardy again and risking a return of the forces of adharma by staking the outcome on a single combat!

Duryodhana chose to fight Bhima with a mace. He was soon seen to be getting the better of it. And it must be said here that this was so intrinsically improbable that it would seem to have been told with the deliberate purpose of bringing in another lesson in dharma. Bhima has throughout been the mighty warrior of almost superhuman strength, while Duryodhana has been an arrogant but clumsy and rather pathetic figure on the battlefield. Several combats of his with one or another of the brothers have been recorded during the battle, and in each case

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 641.



he has been worsted and saved himself by flight. And now he is made superior to the mighty Bhima! The point is that after the infamous dicing match, when Draupadi was declared forfeit, Duryodhana had bared one thigh and called her to come and sit on it. Bhima, in a rage, could hardly be restrained from rushing upon him then and there (and, it will be remembered, Krishna said that he should have done so). He vowed that when the inevitable war came he would break both Duryodhana's thighs with his face. To strike below the waist was a foul, but when he made his vow nobody remarked on this. Now, when the combat he had been waiting for all these years at last came, Bhima, we are told, forgot about his vow and Krishna had to prompt Arjuna to remind him of it. He thereupon swung his mace low and caught the unsuspecting Duryodhana on the thighs, thereby breaking them and winning the combat. To focus still more attention on this technically dishonourable way of avenging injustice, Krishna's brother Balaram had to come by at that moment, making it necessary for Krishna to justify the act. Balaram was rather like Bhima in his simplicity of mind and tremendous strength of body and was prepared to attack the Pandavas on account of this foul blow. Krishna, however, pacified him and justified the deed. In doing so he specifically referred to the opening of the Kali Yuga and the need from now on to use a small misdeed to destroy a greater one: "Remember that the fourth quarter of time, Kali, has now stepped in. We cannot find unsullied dharma from now on."<sup>12</sup>

This was a case of particular formal obligation (a vow) overriding a general one (a rule of fair fighting), and it is interesting to note that there is a similar case in the other great epic, the *Ramayana*, when Rama, who is considered the very personification of dharma, used what were considered dishonourable tactics in fulfilment of a vow, and without the personal justification that Bhima had. The two brothers Vali and Sugriva were fighting.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 672.

Rama had an alliance with Sugriva and had vowed to come to his aid if ever he was in danger. Vali was getting the better of it, and the gods had granted him the boon that he could never be killed by any one he could see, so Rama hid in the bushes and shot him from behind. Vali, while dying, bitterly accused Rama of adharmā but was convinced by him that his oath justified his deed.

However, Krishna's teaching went farther than this. It was that the spirit of dharma was to override the letter. A scoundrel was not to be allowed to tie the hands of the righteous by technical rules of dharma in order to establish adharmā. So hard do people find to understand this, to put the spirit above the letter, that even now, after all these centuries, there are still some who put themselves on the side of Duryodhana, accusing Krishna of violating dharma. Actually, in the *Gita* no less than in practical examples, he denounced fixation on the letter of the law.

“The ignorant, being attached to the letter of the *Vedas*, declare in flowery language that there is nothing beyond.”<sup>13</sup>

“No more use than a well in flooded land are the *Vedas* for an enlightened Brahmin.”<sup>14</sup>

It was always the Essence, the Spirit of Truth for which Krishna bade his disciple Arjuna strive.

The verdict of the *Mahabharata* itself is quite unequivocal. On one occasion, before the battle of Kurukshetra, Dharma personified, a god and the father of Yudhishtira, appeared to the Brothers and declared: “I am on your side. Where dharma is, there will victory be. Where Krishna is, there will dharma always be.”

One further consideration needs to be developed before leaving this subject. That is that Krishna's attitude looks superficially like the discredited theory that the end justifies the means and there are probably critics who would love to pin this

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<sup>13</sup> Ch. II, v. 42.

<sup>14</sup> Ch. II, v. 46.

theory on to him. Actually it is not the case. This theory means that if I believe something is for the general good—my own religious sect or Communism or Nazism or whatever else—I am justified in committing sinful and criminal actions in order to bring it about. Krishna's teaching was that the spirit of Dharma (that is, of right dealing or justice or uprightness) should override the letter. It is not a case of envisaging some consummation and then committing crimes to bring it about, but of preferring real to formal justice in any situation. If the real corresponds with the formal justice, so much the better; but in Kali Yuga there will be many cases where it does not, and in such cases real justice is to be preferred.

It is not a case of envisaging any end at all, because the only end to strive for is dharma outwardly and moksha inwardly, but of assessing the obstacles to dharma and moksha and taking action against the more powerful whenever the two are mutually opposed. To disobey orders is adharma, to slaughter innocent victims of concentration camps is a greater adharma; therefore Krishna would say, like a war crimes tribunal, that such an order should be disobeyed. But what about Krishna's convictions in the passage already quoted, that the Pandavas should win the war, and his admission to the use of unfair means to bring this about? Is that not a case of the end justifying the means? Here again, it appears so only superficially. If these so-called unfair means could be justified only by the need for winning the war, that would be a case of end justifying the means but, as I have shown, each one of these incidents is inherently justified as an act of dharma. Not for a single one of them is it necessary to appeal for justification to the general need to win a righteous war.

I do not say that in such a case the end never can justify the means, for instance that the Tibetans defending their religion and tradition, their country and way of life against a more powerful foe, who is trying to destroy it all, never would be justified in using inherently dishonourable means. What I say

is that that was not what Krishna was teaching. What He was teaching was that a man should estimate in what direction the true spirit of dharma points and have the courage to follow it, even if it is contrary to formal obligations. That might in some cases cover an example such as the Tibetan resistance. It may be a question of degree—and in fact it often is—how important is the end and how wrong the means. If it is, for instance, a question of destroying a rat's fleas to prevent an outbreak of bubonic plague few would declare it unjustified. It is not always easy to decide in what direction the path of true dharma lies. It requires both integrity and intelligence. Making the right decision is half the battle; carrying it out is the other half. Both are necessary. And I am reminded here that when a follower of the Maharshi was faced with a choice of actions and asked him which course to take, he would very seldom answer. More often he would sit silent, leaving the burden of decision with the questioner.

In this issue we are publishing a portion of the *Yaksha Prashna*, a sort of catechism of dharma which occurs in the *Mahabharata*. When asked in it what is the greatest corruption or dereliction of dharma for a Kshatriya, Yudhishtira answers that it is desertion of the helpless in their time of need. And yet it needed Krishna to point to him, in the passage already quoted, that he himself had been guilty of this when he left Draupadi exposed to insult and humiliation from Duryodhana and his friends, feeling himself bound by the letter of dharma to connive at the transgression of the spirit of dharma. This, in fact, can be taken as a test case; was Yudhishtira right in standing aside and leaving Draupadi defenceless against the insults and humiliations of Duryodhana and his cronies because he had been trapped into forfeiting her, or Krishna in saying that his duty of protecting the innocent and resisting evil override technicalities?

# The Swami Vivekananda Birth Centenary

IT IS HARD now to remember to what a low ebb Hinduism had fallen at the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. The Hindus, conquered by a Western country, recognizing its more potent civilization, adopting its education, began to feel dejected at home and despised abroad. Missionaries were not wanting to proclaim that the West's superiority was due to Christianity and India's backwardness to Hinduism. With the Brahma Samaj, a Christianised version of Hinduism was offered by Western-influenced Hindus. The rigidly orthodox were already outside the current of history and the moderates were inclined to compromise.

Then the presence of Sri Ramakrishna electrified Bengal. Almost uneducated, writing no books, proclaiming no philosophy, by the sheer power of his presence he changed the whole tone of things. Those who were being swept on the current of reformism and agnosticism (like the young Narendra Dutt himself) were arrested and shocked back into devotion. Nevertheless, it was still necessary to vocalise and spread this new influence, to create a respect for Hinduism in the West and a self-respect in India.

These were the two tasks into which Narendra, become now Swami Vivekananda, flung himself with his colossal energy, and by and large he succeeded. If some of his books for Westerners now seem elementary, if Hindus seem conscious enough of their great cultural heritage, that does not mean that his task was unnecessary; on the contrary it is a measure of his success, of the vast change that has come about since his work began.

There was no doubt about the Grace that flowed through him. At the famous Chicago ‘Parliament of Religions’—famous now only because Vivekananda took part in it—it was not his arguments that impressed people so much as his presence. He had got no farther than “Sisters and brothers of America!” when the entire hall burst into a torrent of applause. From that point on, in speech after speech, contact after contact, people felt the power and grace in him. A recently published book by some thirty odd disciples and admirers, Hindu and Western,<sup>1</sup> shows this overpowering impression he made on people and the support they derived from him. It shows too how he retained his simplicity and humour despite their adulation, never falling a victim to pride.

No wonder then that Vivekananda is honoured in India as a national no less than a religious hero. Indeed, India and Hinduism are traditionally so closely united that it is sometimes hard to separate the two.

In 1963 the Swami’s birth centenary was being celebrated throughout India. Books were published on the occasion, lectures given, meetings held. The enthusiasm was enormous. The celebrations overflowed into 1964, culminating this year in Calcutta and Madras. They showed what a powerful hold the Swami still has on the imagination and loyalty of his compatriots.



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<sup>1</sup>*Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.

# BUDDHISM

# Buddha and Ramana

IT IS REPORTED that Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was once asked why the Lord Buddha refused to answer questions about the after life, and that he replied: "Perhaps he was more concerned with the real work of guiding men to Self-realization than with satisfying useless curiosity." It has not been sufficiently remarked how close the teaching of this Vedic Sage born in modern times is to that of the Blessed One. And there could be no better proof that it was the pure essence of Hindu spirituality that the Buddha reaffirmed, leaving aside only the accidentals.

Sri Bhagavan also refused to satisfy men's curiosity and constantly insisted that it was not theoretical understanding that was needed but only enlightenment. When asked: "What shall I be when I die?" he answered: "Why do you want to know what you will be when you die before you know what you are now? First find out what you are now." By which he meant: "Seek the deathless, formless Truth of Nirvana, which alone is behind the appearance of this life or any other life." When asked about the nature of God he replied: "Why do you want to know what God is before you know what you are? First find out what you are." Nay more, he has even been heard to say: "There is no Ishwara." By which he meant: "There is no God apart from the Self which alone is, just as there is no you apart from the Self."

True, he often spoke of God, but that was a concession to ignorance, for so long as the conception of the individual self as a real and separate being continues, the conception of God as Creator, Master and Lover of that individual self must also continue; but for those who were willing to understand he always came back to the final truth that there is only the Self. Therefore he said: "There is no God apart from the Self, for if there were he would be a Self-less God, which would be absurd."



He also insisted that you have no being apart from the Self. The conclusion is obvious, however frightening.

There is, indeed, an apparent contradiction, for Sri Bhagavan proclaimed that there is only Atma whereas Lord Buddha declared that there is no atma; but such a contradiction between two Masters who both point the way to the Absolute Truth can never be more than verbal. In this case, Sri Bhagavan used the word Atma to mean the Universal Self which is Nirvana, whereas Lord Buddha used it to mean the individual soul. And Sri Bhagavan taught also that there is no individual being, not only in the sense that it will not endure but that it is not now: "Never mind what you will be when you die; find out what you are now."

The Buddha was very little concerned with theory. His purpose was not to erect either a theology or a social order but simply to show men the way from suffering to peace. And yet theorists have descended upon his teaching and argued it out into patterns which help neither themselves nor others to escape from the wheel of suffering. It is possible that they will fasten on the teaching of Sri Bhagavan also, but it will not be his real teaching that they expound, for his real teaching was to avoid the inessential and follow the way to Self-realization. "But people do not like even to hear of this Truth, whereas they are eager to know what lies beyond, about heaven and hell and reincarnation. Because people love mystery and not the Truth religions cater to them so as to eventually bring them round to the Self. Whatever be the means adopted, you must at last return to the Self, so why not abide in the Self here and now?" Even more explicitly he said: "Just as it is futile to examine the rubbish that has to be swept up only to be thrown away, it is futile for him who seeks to know the Self if, instead of casting away the *tattvas* that envelop the Self, he sets himself to enumerate them or to examine their qualities." He who says that this Master taught this and that taught the other has not understood their purpose. They are not here to argue but to show men the way from suffering to Blessedness. Even though they may expound the one Truth in

different modes and point different paths, the Truth and Goal is the same. But in these two cases there was striking similarity in the language spoken and the Path indicated.

The story of Sri Bhagavan is of the most simple. Born in a poor Brahmin family of South India, he went to a mission school and learnt a little English; and at the age of 17 he passed from darkness to Enlightenment as simply as any adolescent passes from boyhood to manhood. Lying upon his bed, he suddenly pondered: Who am I? I am not this changing body, nor am I these passing thoughts. What then am I? If this body dies shall I still be? And he tried to experience death, to imagine his body dead and carried to the burning ghat. He lay stiff and held his breath to intensify the experience. There was a momentary intense fear of death, and then death was dead. He was no more the ego, he had awakened into Enlightenment of the Deathless Self. Theory he learnt later, and said: "Yes, that is it", just as a woman to whom a child had been born might read afterwards about childbirth.

He left his family secretly and went to the sacred hill of Arunachala and there he remained for 54 years until, on April 14, 1950, he left the body he had worn. Arrived at Arunachala, he remained immersed in the effulgence of pure Bliss, not conscious of his body, not needing it, not speaking or moving and scarcely eating, so that to onlookers it appeared to be the most intense tapas.

It was neither mind nor body that dragged him back to an acceptance of worldly conditions, but pure compassion. Devotees gathered round him, sought to bask in his Grace, craved his guidance. Once again, as in the time of the Tathagata, he saw that men were bewildered and needed guidance, and out of compassion he lived out his long life among us, subject to all the conditions of human pain and sickness.

The path he prescribed was strikingly similar to that of the Buddha for he also taught that it is attachment that binds men to their suffering and that by detachment and dispassion they

can discard birth and death and suffering and realise their true state of unshadowed Bliss. The weapon that he gave for achieving this was the vichara, the question: Who am I? Has some one angered you? Who is angered or offended? Who am I? Does some success flatter you and tempt you to further ambition? Who is pleased or flattered? Who am I? By remembering that I am not the doer, it is possible to live and act in the world in perfect equanimity, without passion or anxiety and without suffering. The image he gave was the bank cashier who handles lakhs of rupees quite efficiently but without any agitation because he knows that it is not his money. So also it is not you, not the real Self, that is affected by changes of state and fortune.

And yet the vichara goes much farther than this for such dispassion would, in itself, be a cold and negative state. As the ego goes out, the Spirit must come in to take its place. And the vichara is a positive and terrifically potent weapon to awaken the awareness of Self, the Spirit in man. Bhagavan's instruction was to sit in meditation, concentrating the consciousness in the heart—not the physical heart on the left but the spiritual heart on the right side of the chest, the centre of I-ness in man, the spot to which every man spontaneously and unwittingly points when he says: "You mean me?" or "I did it". And, thus concentrating, ask yourself: "Who am I?" If thoughts arise during the meditation, do not follow them but observe them and ask of each thought: "What is it? Whence did it come? And why? And to whom?" And so each thought will lead back to the basic I-thought. And who am I?

There is no mental or verbal answer. There cannot be since the purpose of the meditation is to awaken awareness of the Self that is beyond thought and words. The answer is a vibration of Self-awareness that, after some practice, awakens in the heart. And by effort and practice this is to be made ever more constant and profound. Then it will sing itself awake every time the vichara is used in the way first mentioned, and the reply will be

blissful awareness of the Self that is untouched by anger or greed or desire, and the dispassion will be radiant, not cold. This awareness of the Self must be made constant, and then all that is needed is not to interfere, and the Self will devour the ego.

Like the way and teaching of the Buddha, that of Bhagavan is simple and direct, because it is central. And yet what has happened is that a new Path has been opened for mankind, a Path adapted to the peculiar conditions of our modern age. There are many today who find it difficult or impossible to withdraw from the world or even to observe the full and detailed obligations of their religion. And Bhagavan has absolved those who turn to him from the need to do so. Not only Hindus but Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Parsis, Jews, all came to him and he never advised any to change from one religion to another. He prescribed the vichara for all alike. Nor did he advise any to withdraw from the life of the world. Since the one object is to overcome the I-am-the-doer illusion, how does it help to exchange the thought: "I am a householder" for the thought "I am a monk"? It is necessary to discard both and remember only "I am". Through his tremendous Grace and Power, Bhagavan has opened to mankind again in this age the direct path of Self-enquiry. "The attempt to destroy the ego through ways other than Self-enquiry is like the thief turning policeman to catch the thief that is himself. Self-enquiry alone can reveal the truth that neither the ego nor the mind really exists and enable one to realize the pure, undifferentiated Being of the Self or the Absolute. Having realized the Self, nothing remains to be known because it is perfect Bliss, it is the All."

## APPENDIX

This article was written over fifteen years ago as a chapter in a book called *Ramana Arunachala* published by Sri Ramanasramam. After writing it I found that there were Buddhists as unenlightened and intolerant as the followers of any theistic religion who objected to a comparison between the Maharshi and the Buddha. Indeed,

one alluded scathingly in a book he wrote to people who could compare a 'mere *jivanmukta*' with the Buddha. I wish to elucidate this question, not in any spirit of emulation but as a matter of understanding; because understanding is so much of the essence of Buddhism that lack of it seems more shocking than in a personalized and devotional religion. And any one who can use the adjective 'mere' to qualify the term 'Jivan Mukta' betrays thereby a total lack of understanding.

There is a universe composed of physical and subtle worlds full of animate and inanimate beings of countless variety. Apart from men and physical animals, these comprise gods, spirits and demons. Among the men are Buddhas, Prophets, Avatars, Saints and Sages who bring guidance and teach wisdom. In the form they assume all of these, as the Buddha said, are compound beings and therefore subject to dissolution. Mukti means the waking into realization that all these worlds with all their gods, men and demons, Prophets, Avatars and Buddhas, are a manifestation having no more reality within Nirvana, Dharma Kaya, Essence of Mind, Self or whatever term one may use than a dream in the mind of the dreamer. A Jivan Mukta is one who has awakened from the dream while still alive on earth. Therefore to say that the Buddha or any one or anything else, divine or human, is greater than he, is to say that one part of his dream still exists after he has awakened from it and is more real than he is, which is nonsense.

One could deny that any one but a Buddhist or any one but a Buddha can attain Mukti. That would be mere religious bigotry such as one finds among the blinkered exoterists of every religion; but to speak of a Jivan Mukta and couple it with the adjective 'mere' or suggest that there can be anything beyond, simply shows that one does not know what one is talking about.

# The Four Noble Truths

*It is through not understanding, through not penetrating the Four Noble Truths, O Bhikkhus, that we have wandered round this long, long journey of rebirth, both you and I. What are these four? The Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Truth of the Ceasing of Suffering and the Truth of the Way to the Ceasing of Suffering.*

—*Digha Nikaya*

BUDDHISM STARTS FROM the postulate of suffering: that there is suffering, that there is a cause for suffering and that there is a cure for suffering. This is not pessimism. Pessimism and optimism are emotional attitudes, whereas this is more like a medical diagnosis: cool, clinical, unemotional, a statement not of opinion but fact — such is the condition, such is its cause, such is its cure; take it or leave it; it is up to you.

The diagnosis that there is suffering does not mean that life is all pain and no pleasure; that would be patently untrue. It means that man is vulnerable to events and conditions, that he is liable to bereavement and apt to be forced into association with people and things he dislikes and separation from those he likes, that as he grows old his health and powers fail and he is crushed by sickness and old age and finally extinguished by death. It means, in fine, that so far as a man considers himself an individual being he is foredoomed to frustration ending in extermination, however many pleasures or triumphs there may be on the way. If any one says that he likes it so and considers the pleasures of life worth the price, all right; it is up to him; a doctor only diagnoses, he does not try to force his treatment on a patient. If an alcoholic is killing himself but prefers to go on doing so when by abstention he could recover his health and prolong his life, the doctor can only warn him; it is up to him.

The second basic truth—that there is a cause for suffering—implies the third: that there is a cure for it, since it often happens, as in the case of the alcoholic, that removal of the cause produces the cure.

The cause of suffering is the false belief that one is a separate individual being; but this is a statement of deceptive simplicity. It sounds as though a mere change of mental outlook could eliminate suffering, which is absurd. A man could read and agree with an exposition of *anatta* and straight afterwards over-eat and suffer for it, and his change of outlook would not help him at all. The trouble goes far deeper. Belief in an ego cannot be merely theoretical since it obsesses also children and uneducated persons who know nothing of theory. If it is productive of *tanha*, that is of ‘thirst’ or ‘craving’, it is also a product of *tanha*; it is deep-rooted. Since it is not a mental creation, a mental change is not enough to eradicate it. One can understand that the ego is fictitious and yet continue to desire its appreciation by other fictitious egos or its triumph over them and to crave its sense-gratification. Thus, just as the second basic truth, that there is a cause for suffering, leads on to the third, that there is a cure for suffering, so the third calls for the fourth, that there is a path to this cure. And with the fourth the doctrine becomes dynamic.

The first basic truth is a diagnosis, a mere statement of observation; and life bears its truth in upon one. The second is a deduction which intelligent consideration shows to be true. The third results from the second, as in the case of an alcoholic: removal of the cause will remove the effect. But it is much more complicated than the case of the alcoholic because only will power is needed in abstaining from alcohol whereas it requires great skill to unmask and renounce the ego. Therefore with the fourth truth comes the prescription. Although still dispassionate, the doctor is now dynamic; he has finished his diagnosis and is telling you now what course of treatment you must take if you want to get better. Suffering is caused by the false belief in an ego; this produces and is produced

by *tanha*; therefore one can say that suffering is due to *tanha* and can be removed by the elimination of *tanha*. This is equivalent to the elimination of the ego, since there can be no craving without some one to crave and no ego without craving, for to crave is the ego's nature. So one is brought up against the question: what is the path of whose existence the fourth basic truth assures us? And the answer is: the Noble Eightfold Way.

This is not a series of successive steps of which one must be completed before the next is undertaken, and no school of Buddhism uses it as such. It is simply an amplification of the fourth basic truth, describing the path that is necessary.

It is to be noted that right understanding precedes right speech and action on the list. Discipline of life will not of itself dissolve the illusion of an ego and eliminate suffering. It may indeed increase the inner stress which is so large a cause of suffering, since if a man does not understand why he is curbing his *tanha* he is likely to develop inner resentment, secretly longing to indulge it. Whether deliberately chosen or inflicted by outside circumstances or by enemies, hardship does not of itself purify the ego or enlighten the mind. It is only likely to produce useful results if undertaken with intelligent purpose. Just as mental understanding of the doctrine of *anatta* is of little use without practical efforts to realize it, so on the other hand practical discipline of life is not likely to be very effective without understanding of the doctrine which demands it.

Before right understanding can produce right living (which includes thought, speech and action) it must be vitalised by right aspiration and thus cease to be merely theoretical; and therefore right aspiration comes second on the list. There is the well known tag of the Latin poet: "I know and admire the better way but I follow the worse." Whether as blatantly cynical as this or not, understanding may remain sterile. It is aspiration which vitalises it and puts it in control of one's way of living. Thus only it becomes



dynamic. And thus it changes the nature of man from one vulnerable to events and mortgaged to suffering to one liberated from suffering and untouched by the flow of events.

## Some Consequences of Anatta

HOWEVER MUCH SCHOLARS MAY DISPUTE WHAT IS the original form of Buddhism and what texts may go back to the time of Gautama, there is no doubt that at the very heart of it lies the doctrine of anatta, no-ego. This all the schools agree upon. And this is the essence. It is what gives its fundamental character to Buddhism. From it flow important consequences. For instance, prayer in the sense of petition becomes impossible. Prayer postulates two beings: a small one to request a boon and a great one to grant it; if there are no beings there is no point in prayer.

Anatta has both a static and a dynamic aspect. Statically it is an assertion that there is no ego, no separate individual being; dynamically it is a reminder to realize this by dissolving the illusion of any such being. One who is pledged to this goal cannot ask for boons for the ego whose existence he denies and to the destruction of whose apparent existence he is pledged. He cannot logically pray even for assistance in accomplishing this destruction, for who is to assist whom? He is not in fact trying to destroy an ego but merely to perceive (what he is already convinced of mentally) that there isn't one. It is true that devotional schools have arisen for those who flinch from the austere purity of the Dharma, that in Japan, for instance, there is a school of tariki or 'outside help' as well as jiriki or 'self-help', but this can be no more than a concession to weaklings. Anatta is a truth to be realized; it can never be a boon to be conferred.

Historically the search for outside help is negated by Buddha's famous last words to the beloved disciple Ananda: "Therefore, Ananda, be lamps unto yourselves. Be a refuge to yourself. Seek no outer refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp and a refuge. Look not to any one outside yourself for refuge."

This does not mean that man as an individual rejects help that appears to come to him from other individuals, simply that he perceives that the battle is being waged within him. As in other religions, he follows a guru, but the guru is only activating and inspiring his own inner effort. He takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, but that is not renouncing the need for self-help; it is only arming himself for it. He does not pray to any of them. As man is set on the world's stage, there are the forces of tanha or craving to bewilder him and the apparent realities of life to entice him; and over and against these are the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha to show him the way. Set between them, it is he who has to arm himself and to make the effort. And in doing so he has to remember that he is not really fighting to destroy anything that exists but only striving to perceive clearly what does not exist.

Just as there is no place for prayer in Buddhism, so there is no place for miraculous powers. It cannot, of course, be said that in the long history of Buddhism no saints have exercised such powers or that no miracles have occurred spontaneously in the ambience of a saint, but there is no tradition of miraculous powers. As a person becomes purified through mindfulness and strengthens his mind through the elimination of distraction and illusion, such powers are quite apt to come to him, but they do not carry him forward towards the ultimate goal of Nirvana; they do not, that is to say, help him to realize anatta, and therefore they are useless. Indeed they are dangerous insofar as they may distract him from the goal, just as physical wealth and power may; therefore they are not to be indulged. They can be used up to a point to help others, just as physical

wealth and power can, but not to conduct others towards the goal of realized anatta, and therefore this plea also fails to justify them. In fact, just like physical wealth and power, they are more likely to be an impediment than an asset, and therefore it is better to refrain from seeking them and to renounce them if they come unsought.

Buddha, indeed, forbade his followers to cultivate or display them. There is a story of how a visitor set his bowl on the top of a high pole and challenged any of the monks to fetch it down and one of them yielded to the temptation to do so by practising levitation; when Buddha was told of it he reprimanded him, asking what good purpose had been served by this display of powers. In the Vinaya, the set of monastic rules that are said to have been framed by Buddha and are certainly characteristic of the early Sangha, one of the offences for which a monk could be expelled from a monastery was claiming or displaying powers. It was not a question of whether the powers were genuine or not; it was not for fraud that he was expelled but for engaging in unfruitful and distracting activity.

Look at the story of the woman who brought the dead child to Buddha. To have restored it to life would have been making her an exceptional case freed in this one instance from the law of nature and would not in any way have conduced to the dissolution of her ego. On the other hand, by making her see that death and bereavement are the common lot of mankind he opened her eyes and set her on the path to freedom from suffering.

The Dharma is uncompromising in its logic, ruthless in its adherence to truth. If the ego is a fiction which creates a life of frustration ending finally in extermination, true compassion lies not in alleviating a few of the sufferings that it causes but in indicating its unreality so as to dispel suffering entirely.

# Ignorance and Sin

ONE FUNDAMENTAL POINT on which all religions agree is that egoism must be restrained and ultimately the ego itself surrendered. Furthermore, they all warn that indulging the ego, though productive of immediate satisfaction, will lead ultimately to frustration and misery, while rejecting it, although hard at first, will lead to a beatific state. Buddhism is the most simple and direct about it, since it states outright that there is no ego to renounce; all you have to give up is a fantasy, a daydream, an illusion of an ego. However, even that does not make it an easy task in practice. Even though the ego doesn't exist, its clamouring for the adulation of other egos and for the good things of life can be insistent enough.

This agreement on what has to be done is a very striking thing, to my mind the most striking thing in the whole realm of comparative religion; because it suggests a submerged unanimity beneath the contradictory forms. If they differed as to what has to be done that would make them really incompatible, but since they only disagree about why and how, it means that they are really sponsoring the same programme.

Am I suggesting, then, that there may be a certain validity in the theistic religions? Yes, I am. It just doesn't make sense to me that large sections of mankind should have been misled throughout the ages and that noble-minded teachers like Moses and Christ and Mohammed should have been deluded. Far more likely that they were Bodhisattvas adapting Dharma to the minds and characters of their followers and expounding it in a form that these could follow. After all, religion is primarily an enterprise, not a philosophy. It is primarily an enterprise for killing the ego or realizing that there isn't one. That, behind all the mountains of doctrine, is the one essential.

Basically there are two ways of conducting the attack on the ego or egoism. The Eastern religions characterise it as ignorance and the Semitic (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) as sin. The practical result is the same. The doctrine of sin teaches that God will punish vice and reward virtue, while the doctrine of ignorance teaches that wrong living will cause suffering, just as eating wrong food causes sickness, while right living will produce happiness, just as a right diet does physical health, and ultimately awakening from ignorance will remove suffering altogether as awakening from a bad dream removes the terror of it. What has to be done is the same; it is only the explanation why that differs.

The doctrine of sin is the more emotional. In its crude form it is hardly convincing, but neither, as I shall show later, is that of ignorance. In its crude form, the doctrine of sin looks as though God creates man with a headstrong ego and an attraction towards the things of the world and then punishes him for indulging it. But one has to look deeper. Man is capable of turning two ways: outwards to the reflected beauty of the material world, as reported by his senses, or inwards to the true Beauty that can be called Suchness or Nirvana or just what is, and that he calls God. If he chooses the former his love of things will put him in bondage to them and turn him away from the true Beauty of timeless Eternity. He may seem to be exiled from God, but really it is he who exiles himself. He may seem to be punished by God, but really it is he who punishes himself. It may be said that God has turned away from him, but really it is he who has turned away from God, from Truth, from real happiness. There is no caprice in it, nothing that could even remotely be called unjust. But until he discovers this from experience has to take it on faith, so the beginning is hard: it means sacrificing happiness that he knows to be real (or thinks he does) for happiness that may turn out to be real. Faith, rightly understood, does not mean believing

that such and such historical events are as reported or that such and such things will happen after death; it means faith in the inner truth, inner being, the Dharma-Kaya, as yet only dimly apprehended. Sacrificing the clearly apprehended outer pleasures for this inner truth is bound to bring peace and happiness, not really as an act of reward or judgment but naturally, because it means turning away from the apparently real shadow to the apparently shadowy substance.

Similarly, egoism in the sense of craving for power over others or popularity with them means turning away from God as the Ordainer and Background Reality to a belief in oneself, in one's individual phantom of a self; and this can only lead to disaster. That is why all religions lay such stress on humility. Rightly understood, humility is not comparative. It does not mean comparing oneself unfavourably with others (in which there can be a good dose of hypocrisy) but seeking to submit the illusory ego-self to universal Truth and Being.

Seen in this way, the gulf between the doctrine of sin and that of ignorance is not really so wide as might appear. According to the doctrine of ignorance, one grows up under the illusion that one is a real person in a real world of good things to enjoy and bad things to shun when in reality one is only a *per-sona* (*per* meaning 'through' and *sona* 'sound', the mask through which a Greek actor spoke) through which life is experienced. So long as one lives in the ignorance of this illusion, one is subject to frustration as pleasant experiences prove ephemeral or disappointing and painful ones unavoidable. Here also true humility is needed to recognize the ego that seems to inhabit or be the person to be a fraud, and to perceive that the person really is a *per-sona*, a mere mask.

This doctrine also can appear crude when presented in a crude form. It can be made to appear that merely mental ignorance is implied and that learning theory from a book is

supposed to be a passport to beatitude. Actually, of course, one has to look deeper. Right understanding is only the first step of the Buddhist Noble Eightfold way, the preliminary. By ignorance is meant the wrong identification of oneself with the body-mind complex; Enlightenment or Awakening or Liberation means the real, effective awakening from this ignorance into experienced Truth, like a man waking up from a dream.

This doctrine also foretells beatitude for him who strives and torment for him who yields to the ego, though not through the judgement of any God but simply through karma, which means the law of cause and effect. He who strives skilfully and persistently awakens from the illusion of individual being, that is from the state of ignorance, into the realization of being-as-it-is, whose characteristic, so far as one can speak of such a thing, is pure felicity, pure rightness. He who clings to the ego-illusion, on the other hand, makes himself subject to desires and fears, anger and resentment, jealousy and regret, which build a hell in his subconscious, posthumously to be manifested in the bodiless state.

Of course, it is not to be supposed that only these two extremes are possible. There are also those who purify the ego without waking from the illusion of its existence. They are equivalent to those in the Semitic religions who lead an upright life without attaining of the Mystic Union. For both a heavenly future is foretold, as the inner beauty of the soul or subconscious takes objective form for them in the subtle world. There is also the vast army of mediocrities who neither degrade themselves to a despicable state nor develop their better possibilities. Their own craving for a renewed formal life draws them back to rebirth with no need for any divine intervention. However this is leading us beyond the confines of the present article.

Just as true humility is needed on this path also, so is true faith. It is often said that Buddha did not demand faith, since

he exhorted his followers to examine everything for themselves and not accept anything just because some one had said it; but that is using the word 'faith' in its lower sense of simply believing something to be true. In its true sense, as defined above in speaking of the doctrine of sin, it is the vitally necessary quality of *shraddha*: clinging to the dimly perceived truth of Nirvana and aspiring to awaken fully to it when the mind and senses report the apparent reality of the world of sense perceptions.

The truth is that whichever of the two kinds of doctrine one may follow, one does in fact grow up finding the things of the senses attractive and wanting one's ego to dominate over other egos or to be liked and admired by them. And in either case there is likely to be a more or less lengthy period when this outward pull seems more real and desirable than the inward pull to what one may call Truth or Reality or God or Self. Therefore there has to be a wrench. By not making it one becomes more and more weak and distracted and subject to outer influences; by making it one becomes more and more happy, strong and radiant and, as a by-product, better able to help others. But with most people it is not merely one sharp wrench but a fairly long period of being pulled both ways; and throughout this period it will seem like sacrificing real for presumptive happiness. The purpose of religion is to encourage one to make this wrench, this transition; and whether it tells us that it is sinful not to, or stupid not to, is perhaps not so important. Whether it tells us that God will reward us for making the right choice or that we shall awake to the beatitude that is our real nature, the goal is the same. The important thing is to attain it, to barter the substantial-seeming shadow for the shadowy-seeming substance of felicity.



# The Tibetan Doctrine of Incarnate Buddhas

THE TIBETAN DOCTRINE of what are commonly called 'Incarnate Buddhas' is a development of the general Mahayana doctrine of Bodhisattvas. A Bodhisattva is one who has overcome the ego but still refrains from waking up into realization of Nirvana in order to help other beings on their journey thereto. Indeed, the full Bodhisattva vow is not to withdraw from samsara till all animate beings have first been saved. Now it is not to be supposed that this can be accomplished in one lifetime; therefore the vow must imply either survival in a disembodied state or continual physical reincarnation.

The former of these two possibilities is widely envisaged in Far Eastern Mahayana. For instance, the practice of invoking the name of Amitabha (Chinese O-Mi-To-Fu) is said to be based on his vow to save all who call upon him and bring them to the 'Western Paradise'. It will be apparent how close this doctrinal development brings Mahayana, both in theory and practice, to theistic religions, whether monotheistic or, since there are a plurality of Bodhisattvas, polytheistic.

In Tibet the possibility of perpetual return is also developed. A Bodhisattva who has exerted a beneficent influence within a certain limited sphere, for instance in the control of a certain monastery, may return again and again in human form to continue the same work. Despite technical differences, this is fundamentally equivalent to the Hindu doctrine of Avatars and the Christian doctrine of a Son of God.

When Hindus declare that a certain Master is not a saint but an Avatar, what they imply doctrinally is that he is not a man struggling upwards on the path of return who has at last,

in this lifetime, made the final breakthrough to Deliverance but a Being who has voluntarily descended into human form to help others on their upward path. Therefore he should have no sadhana, no struggle towards Enlightenment, in this lifetime but should simply awaken in childhood or at adolescence into the Enlightenment which he deliberately discarded for his venture into the stormy seas of samsara to rescue those struggling therein. This also explains why Christians attach so much importance to the tenet that Christ was born “without original sin”, which means without the obscuration of Enlightenment which normally necessitates spiritual effort. Similarly, those of the Maharshi’s followers who regard him as an Avatar (and they are many) maintain that his brief Awakening into Enlightenment at the age of sixteen<sup>1</sup> was effortless. In parenthesis it may be added that the followers of Ramakrishna have a more difficult case to make in representing him as an Avatar, since they have to explain away the long and violent sadhana he made.

It will be seen then, that there is nothing unique in the Tibetan doctrine of what are known as ‘Incarnate Buddhas’. When I referred to technical differences between that and the Hindu doctrine of Avatars, what I had in mind was that as soon as the ‘Incarnate Buddha’ quits one mortal tenement at death, he immediately takes birth in another which, as it begins to exercise discrimination, recognizes people and objects from its previous life and recollects occurrences, whereas the Hindu Avatar is not limited either in time or space to the immediate environment of his predecessor or expected to inherit physical memories.

The Hebrew doctrine of return recorded in the Gospel of St. Matthew as being confirmed by Christ is in this respect

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of which see *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* by Arthur Osborne, Ch. 11, published by Rider & Co., London, & Sri Ramanasramam, 1997.

similar to the Hindu. It will be recalled that when Christ revealed himself to his disciples they protested, somewhat puzzled, that the guardians of the law taught that before the Messiah could appear the Prophet Elias must first return. Jesus confirmed this teaching but added that Elias had indeed come but had not been recognized. "Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist."<sup>2</sup>

This doctrine of return, in whichever form one may find it, adds complexity to the general doctrine of reincarnation. What is it that continues from one birth to another and what is provided anew each time? Obviously the bodily form is new. But this implies that the temperament and mental aptitudes are also new, in fact the entire psychosomatic instrument, since both medical science and astrology show that physical, mental and temperamental traits go together. A man cannot have the physical make-up indicated by one horoscope and the temperament indicated by another, the body of Aries and the disposition of Taurus. And in actual fact, the records show that the successive incarnations of the Dalai Lama (the most conspicuous and therefore the best documented case of such chains of incarnation) have differed widely from one another in build and character, physique and temperament.

At the other extreme, it is not sufficient to maintain that what reincarnates is pure Being or the Self, because that applies to all beings and would leave no difference between a reincarnation of one Bodhisattva and another or of Krishna or Rama, or of Moses or Elias—or indeed between them and any other form assumed by the One Self.

This implies the existence of beings that are not individualised by the ignorance born of desire, as are mortal men, but at the same time are not universalized in Oneness with the Self, that is in Nirvana. There is indeed evidence of such on earth in a

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<sup>2</sup> *St. Matthew*, XVII, 10-13.

human state. Those who knew the Maharshi in his lifetime were quite convinced that he was in a state of constant conscious Identity with the Self; and yet they did differentiate between him and other such conscious manifestations of Identity—Shankara, say, or Christ or Buddha. If this separateness in Identity can exist with a body, why not without? The Maharshi was quite categorical that there is nothing beyond the state of Jivan-Mukta, Realized while embodied, nothing more to attain, no difference between the Jivan-Mukta and the Videha-Mukta, Realized after death. What more could he possibly attain by death, when Identity is realized already? And what could he lose? Only physical modes of apprehension; and these are already felt to be a restriction. So if we can conceive of such a being embodied, why not disembodied? Then why not re-embodied?



# ISLAM

# Islam and Advaita

ISLAM EXPRESSES THE point of view that God alone is to be worshipped and that the whole was evoked by Him out of nothingness and all men are as nothing before Him. Hinduism expresses the point of view that the universe with all its beings is a form assumed by Him, a manifestation of Him, without however, changing or detracting from His unmanifested Reality. To say that God created the universe out of nothing or that the universe is nothing but an illusion veiling the Reality of God comes to the same. The two points of view are therefore two aspects of the same truth, two ways of saying the same thing. Since a man has no reality other than that given by God, the essence of his being, the reality of him must be that reality other than which there is nothing, that is to say God. By realising the nothingness of his individuality, by what was called in Mediaeval Christendom 'self-naughting' a man realises the universality of his Divine Essence. Therefore a man who has realized his true Self (which has nothing to do with psychology but goes beyond the mind to the very essence of Being and is without doubt the true meaning of the Delphic 'Know Thyself') has realized his essential Oneness with God ('I and my Father are One') beyond the accident of form.

Appreciating this, Hindus worship such a One as God. Adhering to the letter of the law, most Muslims condemn such worship as idolatry. Actually it is not; it is not worshipping other than God but, on the contrary, recognising that the worshipped has destroyed the illusion of otherness from God which still veils the worshipper.

All this is understood by the Sufis, who are the spiritual elect of Islam and of whom are the great Islamic saints. They teach in secret what the Hindus teach openly. But the exoteric Muslims

do not understand. For them there is an absolute gulf between the two viewpoints, and for them the Hindus are pantheists or idolaters. The Sufi poet, Al Hallaj used to proclaim when in a state of ecstasy: *An'al Haq*, 'I am the Truth'. 'The Truth' is a Divine Name and he was executed for blasphemy in accordance with Islamic law, although the Sufis understood and have continued to revere him. Another Sufi, Abu Said, skirted the law, declaring negatively: 'There is nothing beneath this robe other than Allah.' A Sufi incantation used commonly to this day runs: 'I seek pardon of God for all (in me) that is not God.'



## Is Sufism Islamic?

WHEN A YOUNG Muslim seeks initiation into A Sufi order he will be shown the *silsilah*, that is the 'chain' or genealogical tree of the order, going back from sheikh to sheikh in unbroken line to the Prophet himself. True, many of these orders bear the names of the great Sufi saints of the 11th and 12th centuries of the Christian era—Abdul Qadir Jilani, Mu'inuddin Chishti, Ibn Arabi and others; but although these great builders impressed their own character on them, they had themselves been initiated into them and were re-adapting them, not creating new ones.

If, however, he then takes a book on Islamic history and culture from the library he will probably read that Sufism is an adaptation of neo-Platonism and came into Islam several centuries after the Prophet. These two apparently contradictory statements may come as a great shock to him. Which is he to believe? The armchair

historian, who probably has an anti-spiritual bias in any case, will see no problem; he will simply brush aside the testimony of the *silsilah* as forgery. But one who has felt the intense fervour of the Sufi quest for truth will not believe that it is based on falsehood; nor could he follow it if he did.

Actually the problem melts away as soon as one remembers that Sufism is not a philosophy but a path, which is something very different. A philosopher who studies neo-Platonic and Sufi philosophy does not thereby become a Sufi, is not even training to be a Sufi, does not think of himself as a Sufi, while on the other hand a Sufi *murid* or disciple is not called upon to study neo-Platonic or any other philosophy. He can if he has a bent that way, but there is no obligation. It is important for him to understand the basic doctrine of *tawhid*, Oneness, which, as interpreted by the Sufis, is the same as Identity or Advaita, but that is all. After that it is practice, not theory, that is needed.

Even if philosophers had never formulated their theories at all, if there were no texts, no books, no theories, the basic meaning is contained in the *shahada* itself: 'There is no god but God', none worshipful but the One, no being but the Being, no self but the Self. It is the same as that tremendous sentence in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "There is no existence of the unreal and no non-existence of the Real,"<sup>1</sup> and according to Islamic tradition it has been used with full understanding as a weapon for fighting the 'greater holy war' from the beginning. Its implications were developed more specifically later—the burgeoning into voluptuous form of what was latent is a stage in the growth of every religion—philosophers were delighted to find its essential truths elaborated by the Greeks, poets began to write rapturously about it, it became widely known where at first it had eschewed publicity, but all this concerns the *salik* or spiritual wayfarer very little. His task is not to theorise about it but to use it.

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<sup>1</sup> Ch. II, v. 16.



From another angle also this question may be asked, whether Sufism is Islamic; for there are groups in the West today which propagate, under the name of Sufism, a sort of vague inter-religious mysticism. To call this Sufism is a simple misuse of language. The term 'Sufism' has always been used, and is therefore correctly used, to indicate *tasawwuf*, the traditional esoteric aspect of Islam transmitted down the centuries in regular schools by direct descent from teacher to disciple. Some of the Sufi saints may have spoken or behaved in a way to shock the orthodox, but a saint often does feel that society is too smug and needs shock treatment. Some of the orthodox, from their side, may have been blind to the esoteric teachings of Islam and denied their orthodoxy, but that too is a phenomenon common to all religions. Plenty of Christians are blind to Christian mysticism, and there have been Hindu dualists who have rejected Advaita and attacked Shankaracharya; but that does not mean that the *via purgativa* is not Christian or Vedanta not Hindu or Sufism not Islamic. They may all lead to the same goal, but they are separate paths till they get there.

A new path independent of the religions has indeed been laid down in our age, but it required Bhagavan, that is God Incarnate, to establish it. That does not mean that groups of men can produce a composite path; nor does it justify them in calling what they produce by an Islamic name and then denying that it is Islamic.

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# Shirk and Tawhid

IT SAYS IN the *Koran* that the one unforgivable sin is *shirk*. This means literally 'association'; it implies the association of any other with Allah in one's worship: and one who thus associates is termed a *mushrik*. Literally interpreted, a Christian is considered a *mushrik* because he associates Christ and Christ's mother with God in his worship. For most Christians, of course, the Trinity is the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and in any case one who understands the doctrine of three Persons in One God is not a *mushrik*. The term might, however, fit educationally backward Catholics who pray to saints and the Virgin as well as to God.

Understood more profoundly, *shirk* is not necessarily the worship of any other god or person but of whatever one is devoted to—wealth or pleasure, political or financial power, social prestige, popularity or any other such intangible idol. Even love between man and woman can be *shirk* if the horizontal pull is strong enough to impede the vertical. The condemnation of *shirk* is equivalent to the Judaic statement that the Lord is a jealous God and to Christ's saying that one cannot worship God and Mammon; but it is a point of doctrine which is more central to Islam than to the other two Semitic religions.

The Sufi goes still deeper. For him the 'other' that is associated with Allah is the ego, which is the basis of all sin. "A person grows up in a state of spiritual ignorance, turned towards the transient and incomplete satisfactions of this life and away from the radiance of Divine Bliss. Since this means turning away from God, Christianity calls it sin. 'Sin is nought else, but that the creature turneth away from the unchangeable God and betaketh itself to the changeable; that is to say, that it turneth away from the Perfect to 'that which is in part' and imperfect, and most often to itself.'"<sup>1</sup> In this fullest and deepest meaning, so long as there is ego there is *shirk*, and therefore 'forgiveness'

in its fullest meaning of Realization is not possible. The *shahada*, that there is no god but God, has not been fully realized.

Hinduism teaches that a necessary precondition for Realization is *vairagya*, which means non-attachment, equal-mindedness. My article on the ‘Spiritual Traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church’<sup>2</sup> speaks of the similar insistence by this Church on *apatheia*, which, he explains, is far from meaning ‘apathy’. Islam approaches the same point from the opposite end, saying that there cannot be Realization so long as there is *shirk*. One says that there must be non-attachment, the other that there must not be attachment. Because attachment to anything, and primarily to oneself, means giving it a share in the devotion that is due to God alone. Indeed, to combine the terminology of two traditions, one can say that *vairagya* means no *shirk*; *shirk* means no *vairagya*.

As Sufis sometimes express it, the great sin and obstacle to *fana* or Realization is ‘otherness’, the belief in a separate individual being apart from the One. And this is *shirk*. I remember attending a Sufi session at which a chant or incantation was used that would run in translation: “I ask pardon of God for what (in me) is not God; and all things say ‘God’.” The first half is a rejection of ‘otherness’ as sin and error; the second half an epiphany, representing the entire universe as a hymn of praise to God.

*Tawhid* is Oneness. It is understood by the exoteric Muslim as the Oneness of God, a doctrine more rigorously insisted on in Islam than in any other religion, except perhaps Judaism. But for the Sufi *tawhid* is the state of Oneness, or more correctly ‘no-other-ness’ that remains when the *shirk* of ego ends; and that is Advaita or Identity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*, p. 155, (quoting from the *Theologia Germanica*), by Arthur Osborne, Sri Ramanasramam, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> *The Mountain Path*, January 1964, p. 132-37.

I say 'no-other-ness' rather than Oneness. It is not really correct to say 'I am He' in the sense of A=B, since that supposes a duality to be dissolved. The right formula is: 'There is no I; He alone is.' Nor is this mere verbal hair-splitting; it has grave practical implications, for the incantation 'I am He', used alike in Sufism and Hinduism, carries within it the danger of secretly, even unwittingly, implying 'the ego is God', which is the uttermost error and supreme blasphemy. Therefore a Sufi will not say 'I am Allah', but he may say: 'I am not other-than-Allah', for otherness is the *shirk* of ego which he has sacrificed; and when all otherness disappears what remains is *tawhid*.

For the Muslim the *shahada*, 'there is no god but God' is the great weapon: the first part of it rejects *shirk*, the second part affirms *tawhid*.



## The Lesser and Greater Jihad

“Believers! Make war on the infidels who dwell around you and be severe with them. Know that Allah is with the vigilant.”<sup>1</sup> War is under no stigma in Islam. Indeed, it is enjoined in the *Koran* in a number of places. Nor is it necessarily defensive. The small Muslim community of Medina was naturally defensive at first, but after overcoming the Meccan idolators the Muslims, still in the lifetime of Mohammad and in obedience to him, proceeded to subjugate the rest of Arabia and to equip an expedition for the invasion of Syria. Indeed, fighting was an obligation and those who shrank from it were rebuked as sternly as Arjuna was by Krishna: “If you do not go to battle He will punish you severely and will replace you by others.”<sup>2</sup> Those

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<sup>1</sup> *Koran*, IX, 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Koran*, IX, 39.

who died in battle acquired the proud title of *shaheed*. This is translated as ‘martyr’, but it is from the same root as *shahada*, the ‘testimony’ or ‘witness’ that there is no God but God and that Mohammad is his Prophet. It implies that they died as witnesses to the truth of Islam and earned paradise by doing so.

This militancy can be explained in terms of the distinction that I pointed out in my *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*<sup>3</sup> between a world-renouncing and a world-sanctifying religion. Since Christians were enjoined to renounce the world and render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar’s, they could live as well in a pagan as a Christian country. Indeed, the persecution or at least discrimination that they were likely to suffer would serve to keep their faith screwed up to a pitch and weed out the smug, the worldly and the weaklings. Islam, on the other hand, was not only a faith but a way of life with its code of civil and criminal law and its injunctions governing trade, marriage, inheritance, etc. Muslims were not enjoined to renounce the world but to mould it to a harmonious and divinely sanctioned pattern of life. And this could only be done if they were the rulers.

This does not mean that no other religion was to be tolerated. There is a cryptic saying in the *Koran*: “No compulsion in religion”—cryptic because it can be taken as a statement to mean that compulsion is impossible in matters of faith or as an injunction to mean that no compulsion is to be used. The latter seems the more plausible reading. Other monotheists, such as Jews and Christians, termed ‘People of the Book’ since they also had a revealed scripture, were not to be exterminated or forcibly converted but, after conquest, to be taxed and protected. “Out of those who have been given a Book, make war on such as do not believe in Allah and the last day and forbid what Allah and His Prophet have forbidden and follow the religion of truth, (and do so) until they are subjugated and pay taxes and recognize your supremacy.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Published by Sri Ramanasramam, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *Koran*, IX, 29.

Muslims did not always keep to this. For instance, on the conquest of Persia Zoroastrianism was practically extirpated, although a monotheistic religion, surviving only among those few of its followers who escaped to the hospitable shores of India to found the Parsi community. But then, in what religion have men lived up to their scriptures? And what rulers of subject peoples have resisted the intoxicating presumption of superiority?

For idolatry toleration was not obligatory, since Mohammad himself set the example of smashing the idols at Mecca and banning their worship. Perhaps that accounts for the savage persecution that so many Muslim rulers indulged in India. Sufis may have perceived the beauty and profundity behind the idol-worship, a Kabir or a Nanak may have proclaimed that one could call alike on Ram or Rahim, even a Moghul prince like Dara Shikoh may have welcomed 'The Meeting of the Two Seas'—and been put to death for it by his fanatical brother Aurangzeb; but in general Muslim ruling classes lacked the will to understand.

Islam, then, does not condemn war; but does any religion? Christ declared that he was come to bring not peace but a sword and that even members of the same family would take up arms against each other for his sake. And so it has been. His prediction has been simply fulfilled. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Arjuna falls into a pacifist mood and is convinced by Krishna that he should do his duty as a Kshatriya by fighting.

What then of the ahimsa that Gandhi proclaimed and that is so widely honoured, at least in theory, to-day? In ancient India ahimsa, non-violence, was an obligation upon the sadhu, the world-renouncer. Having renounced worldly ends, he naturally had to renounce worldly means also. But it was never expected that a ruler should abjure warfare and none of the scriptures enjoin ahimsa as a general obligation; it would be a denial of the very conception of a Kshatriya caste to do so. Whether Gandhi himself meant ahimsa to imply renunciation of war by sovereign states is hard to say, because the one statement he

held to quite consistently was the statement of his own inconsistency. Certain it is that he encouraged Indians to join the British army in the first world war and that at the very end of his life he did nothing to dissuade the government of independent India from sending troops to defend Kashmir.

War is a horrible thing and always has been, but the feeling of revulsion against it is quite recent. In fact it dates from the time when total nuclear destruction became a danger to be reckoned with. Fear of such destruction is sensible and well grounded and efforts should certainly be made to prevent at least major wars from breaking out; but these efforts should be recognized for what they are--the outcome of fear--and not dressed up in idealistic phraseology to make it appear that man has suddenly become better than he ever was before: because that is hypocrisy. One thing is definite in Gandhi's teaching; that is that he distinguished between ahimsa based on idealism and non-violence based fear and hated to see the latter parading as the former.

Although war is horrible in itself, it has an important symbolism. There is an inner as well as an outer war. It is recorded that when Mohammad returned to Medina with his followers after one of their battles he said: "Now we have come back from the lesser jihad to the greater"--from the war against outer enemies to each man's war against the enemies within himself. Islam is by no means alone in stressing this symbolism: the *Bhagavad Gita* is interpreted by many commentators as implying the need for inner strife, while the Christian Church on earth is entitled the 'Church Militant.'

Outer pacifism is as admirable as war is horrible unless it means putting up with what the Hindus call *adharma*--disharmony, wrong, injustice--out of fear, for then it is craven. But in modern times there is an inner pacifism also, and this is wholly to be condemned. Among the ever growing groups and circles of people who understand that there is a higher reality are many who hold that it is sufficient to understand mentally or to believe in the

divine verities without making effort, without taking up arms against the forces of obstruction in oneself. Such people shirk what Mohammad called 'the greater holy war.' They are like the 'hypocrites' of whom the *Koran* speaks, who professed verbal sympathy with the striving Muslims but were not prepared to face danger or make any sacrifice in the cause. "The day will surely come when you will see the true believers, men and women, with their light shining before them and on their right hand and a voice singing to them: 'Rejoice this day. You shall enter gardens watered by running streams in which you shall abide forever.' That is the supreme achievement. On that day the hypocrites, both men and women, will say to the true believers: 'Wait for us so that we can borrow some of your light.' They will be answered: 'Go back and yourselves seek a light.' Then a wall with a gate in it shall be established between them, on the inside of which shall be mercy but on the outside punishment. They will call out: 'Were we not on your side?' But the answer will be: 'Yes, but you fell into temptation and wavered, you doubted and were deluded by your own desires till the Divine pronouncement came and the Dissembler deceived you about Allah. Today no ransom shall be accepted from you or from the unbelievers; the fire is your abode and protector: an evil end!' " <sup>5</sup>

The term for Realization in Islam is *Fana*, a word remarkably similar to 'Nirvana' since its literal meaning is 'extinction'. It has a certain similarity to the Hindu '*nirvikalpa samadhi*', meaning 'Realization in a state of trance'. To be perfected it must be followed by *Baqa* or 'stabilization', in which there is a full return to outer awareness simultaneously with inner Realization. This is the Hindu *sahaja samadhi*. It is the state which Western Zen writers love to refer to when, as they put it, "a tree is again a tree and a mountain a mountain."

The question which agitates seekers throughout the world today, in fact the only question of importance, is what should be

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<sup>5</sup> *Koran*, LVII, 12-15.



done to attain Realization and what path or methods to follow. The ‘inner pacifists’, the ‘hypocrites’ as the *Koran* calls them, are those who hold that nothing need be done, no effort made, no enemy fought: “just carry on quietly and it will all come to you.”

The error of this attitude can be exposed by putting the question from the opposite end: not ‘what must be done to attain Realization?’ but ‘what prevents Realization?’ The word *‘sahaja’* means ‘natural’; *sahaja samadhi*, therefore, is ‘natural samadhi’. And the Maharshi never tired of reminding us that Realization is natural to us, that it is our natural state. Then what withholds us from it? The answer is fairly obvious: the ego with all its tangled roots. Can one imagine a state of permanent, natural Realization dawning on a person who is jealous lest some one else attain it before him, distracted by the thought of a beautiful woman, irritable when people disagree with him, hungry for adulation, concerned about the impression he makes? Obviously not. That means that before the ground can be cleared for Realization a whole jungle of tangled impulses and desires has to be cleared out. And how do the ‘inner pacifists’ propose to do that? Do they hold that it is a simple thing to do and requires no effort or technique? Spiritual Masters in all ages have warned that it is not; and today psychiatrists confirm the warning. The patient won’t get back to human normalcy without admitting the existence of complexities and need for effort; and the inner peace, the stillness, the calm expanse of mind that the spiritual aspirant must achieve in order to make the dawning of Realization possible goes far beyond anything the psychiatrist conceives of. How then can it be attained without effort?

It may be objected that the types of effort prescribed on a spiritual path are not in fact techniques for eliminating the egoistic impulses which obstruct Realization, that calling on the Name of God or being mindful of one’s breathing or looking inwards to experience the reality of oneself cannot remove rancour or pride or other manifestations of egoism. But who is qualified to say that? The psychiatrist’s technique also is not a

direct head-on attack on complexes, and yet experts with learning and experience say that it works. And the spiritual techniques enjoined by the Masters are based on deeper learning and more profound experience going back for centuries; and many have found that they worked. Today also those who use them energetically under proper guidance as weapons in the greater holy war find them efficacious. It is the 'hypocrites', those who prefer not to fight, who complain that they would be ineffective anyway.

Soon after a person sets forth on the great enterprise it sometimes happens that an experience of overwhelming beauty comes to him, a perception of a truer, higher Reality that he will never be able to forget till the end of his life. This is an encouragement to persevere, a foretaste of what is to be achieved. It carries its own credentials and is beyond the possibility of doubt. It can be explained as the Grace of God or Guru on the young aspirant. Or it can be explained as the newly awakened aspiration momentarily tearing aside the veil of the ego which it is not yet powerful enough to destroy forever. It will not last, and the aspirant may be dejected, feeling that he has slipped back instead of making progress; however, its memory will hold him to the quest and draw him onwards until, perhaps after long striving, it begins to be accessible to him again. But suppose he should sit down and say: "It came to me spontaneously so I will wait for it to come again spontaneously. Why should I make any effort to retrieve it?" He will be remaining inactive with all the twisted complexities and hidden or open impurities inside him which render its stabilization impossible. He will be like the 'hypocrites' of the *Koran* who sympathised verbally but would not fight. His fate will be the same.



## The Sufi Path of Love

YEARS AGO, WHEN I still occasionally went to a cinema, I saw a Hollywood version of a mediaeval Islamic town. Suitably repulsive looking beggars were crouching outside a palace wall, crying: "Alms for the love of Allah!" This was a characteristic inaccuracy. In the first place the Name was mispronounced, the first syllable being accentuated instead of the second, and in the second place 'for the love of Allah' is not an Islamic phrase. 'In the name of Allah' yes, but not 'for the love of Allah.'

Also the phrase so common to Christian writers that 'God is love' is not Islamic. The quality that is equated with God in Islam is rather Truth. Indeed, in the well known story of the Sufi Al Hallaj who was crucified for proclaiming the Supreme Identity while in a state of ecstasy, his actual words were 'Ana'l Haqq,' meaning "I am the Truth."

This perhaps reflects the fact that, despite the rigid dualism of exoteric Islam, Advaita is far more widely recognized by the Sufis than by any but the very greatest Christian mystics. Both religions are essentially bhakti-marga. Indeed, Indian Sufis, with their methods of ecstatic devotion and invocation of the Divine Name, are practically indistinguishable from Hindu bhaktas pining for Krishna, the Divine Lover. The very word 'Islam' means 'submission.' Many Sufi saints, however, comparable in that to Hindu bhaktas such as Tukaram or the recent Swami Ramdas, have perceived the truth of Advaita and used its language, although not developing the technique of jnana-marga.

Despite theoretical recognition of Advaita, it is the path of love that runs through Sufism, as through Christianity, and the symbolism of lover and Beloved is constantly in use. This does not imply that the quest is a sort of less real reflection of the physical reality of love. In fact, that would be an inversion of truth. There are, indeed, correspondences between different levels

of reality, but it is the higher that is more real and is reflected and symbolised by the lower, not the other way round. If the Divine Ray pierces into the dark and secret place of the soul, creating there the germ of new life which grows unseen amid pain and discomfort until the 'new man' springs to life, that is a reality symbolised by, not symbolising, the physical laws of sex.

According to the symbolism used, the human lover seeking the Divine Beloved can appear either as man or woman. Indeed, the two forms of symbolism may be used indiscriminately, since both are true. In Christianity the human soul is traditionally represented, as is the Church itself, as the bride of Christ. There is also, however, the symbolism of the seeker aspiring to be guided and blessed by the Divine Grace symbolised as his Beloved--Dante by Beatrice or the troubadour by his lady who traditionally had to be unattained and unattainable. Parallel to this in Islam is the story of Majnun who goes mad with longing for the dark beauty of Laila, whose name in fact means 'night' and who symbolises the dark mystery, the Cloud of Unknowing. More frequently, however, the human soul is represented as female and as pining for the Divine Lover, just as Hindu bhaktas are gopis seeking the love of Krishna, the Divine cowherd, the flute-player. Also it will be seen that in the Maharshi's *Marital Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala* symbolism which might be considered male or female is used indiscriminately. It must be remembered that this was written for the guidance and inspiration of the bhaktas among his followers.

The theme of quest for the Divine Lover is far more widely used in Islamic esoterism than in Christian and is much better attested in literature. Is this partly because few Christian saints and seekers seem to have been poets? In the great ages of Islam the poets were saints and the saints poets. Among the Persians, Hafiz is the greatest lyric poet, perhaps what Shelley or Swinburne is in English, but with the difference that where in them only an occasional intuition makes some poem of lasting

value among much verbal banality, his poems are often of substance which the West, lacking the fire of Divine Love, would consider appropriate rather to the philosopher than the poet.

In Eternity without beginning the radiancy of Thy  
beauty glorified in its own splendour;  
Love was revealed and its fire set the world aflame.  
Reason desired to kindle its lamp from that flame of  
Thy love,  
The lightning of jealousy flashed, and the world was  
thrown into confusion.  
Others staked their fortune on ease and would not  
take up the burden of Love;  
We, Thy lovers, were the ones whose hearts,  
experienced in grief, staked all on grief and took up  
the burden of Love.

Renunciation of the ego is the whole secret, by whatever path it may be accomplished; and who should know this better than the lover? Ansari of Herat writes:

Know that when thou learnest to lose thy self  
Thou wilt reach the Beloved.  
There is no other secret to be revealed,  
And more than this is not known to me.

For the Sufi, love is all-sufficient, as Umar Khayyam writes:

Although the creeds number some seventy-three,  
I hold with none but that of love of Thee;  
What matter faith, unfaith, obedience, sin?  
Thou'rt all in all, the rest is vanity.

From love to Union, from Union to Identity. The following poem by Shabistari, prosy though it may sound in translation, is removed only by the thinnest of verbal veils from the true and ultimate doctrine of Advaita or Identity.

Union with 'The Truth' is separation for the creature state,  
 Friendship with Him is estrangement from self,  
 When the contingent wipes off the dust of contingency,  
 Nothing remains save Necessary Being.  
 The existence of the two worlds is as a dream,  
 In the moment of eternity they become naught,  
 Absolute Being by its own perfection is pervading all,  
 Phenomenal objects are mere imaginary things;  
 Imaginary things are not really existent,  
 Though the numbers are many, only One is counted.  
 In a moment this world passes away,  
 None remains in the world save 'The Truth',  
 At that moment you attain proximity,  
 You, stripped of self, are 'united' to the Beloved.<sup>1</sup>

The Judaic injunction to love, which Christ reiterated, had two aspects, not only to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, but also to love your neighbour as yourself. On the whole, the God-intoxicated wayfarer has tended to neglect the second of these. Naturally, one who loves God will be filled with goodwill towards all His creatures, but this does not necessarily transform itself into action or constitute an active and prominent part of his *suluk* or path. The ecstatic is not normally a philanthropist, even though he is not an egoist. In Christianity he has often been a monk secluded from society. There is no monasticism in Islam, but the Muslim ecstatic also has seldom been actively preoccupied with human welfare.

Today there is a general tendency to stress the love of one's fellows. In Hinduism it would be called combining the path of bhakti with that of karma. A striking modern exemplar of this was the recent Hindu saint, Swami Ramdas. During the years of his training, before he became a saint, he wandered about the

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<sup>1</sup> The above quotations are taken from *The Sufi Path of Love, an Anthology of Sufism* compiled by Margaret Smith, Luzac.

country with the Name of God always on his lips, but also seeing God manifested in everybody he met, not only those who helped him and were friendly but also in the ticket-collector who ejected him from a train and the bullying policeman who warned him on the icy platform. When a sadhu gave him a drinking vessel and another stole it, he cheerfully remarked that Ram in one form had given it and in another had taken it a way again.<sup>2</sup>

I instance this case because of the common objection that the Muslim could not see things this way on account of the strict Islamic doctrine of the impassable gulf between the Creator and His creatures. May be, but the Sufi, without worrying his head over philosophy or theology, can recall the Koranic saying: "Whichever way you turn, there is the Face of God!" With this saying in his heart he can see Divine Being manifested before him in the cloud-capped mountain, the tall trees and brilliant flowers, but also in the dingy streets, the jostling crowd, the mongrel slinking by. He can see Allah looking at him through the eyes of his beloved, and also try to see him through those of the colleague he was jealous of, the boss he resented, the friend he felt rancour towards. He experiences an outflow of love in which there is no sentiment, no distinction between the worthy and the unworthy. He accepts his environment, pleasant or unpleasant, as God-given, as that which is needful for him, and his fellows, helpful or irksome, as objects for love and commiseration. With this remembrance in his mind and love of God in his heart, what more does he need?



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<sup>2</sup> See the two volumes of his early autobiography, *In Quest of God* and *In the Vision of God*, both published by Bhavan's Book University, Mumbai.

# A World-Sanctifying Religion

In *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism* I pointed out a very important alternative in the attitude of religion to the world: it can either regard the world as hostile or renounce it, or it can regard it as a book of symbols flung abroad by God, manifesting His power and beauty, and seek to harmonize and sanctify it. The former is the attitude of Buddhism and Christianity as enunciated by their founders; the latter is that of Judaism and Islam.

Christ told the rich young man to give his property away to the poor and become a wandering mendicant. His followers were to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s”, to pay taxes to an alien, irreligious government and obey its laws. He disappointed the Jews by refusing to lead a revolt against this alien government. His kingdom, he declared, was not of this world. As in every world-renouncing religion, celibacy was prized above marriage. St. Paul sanctioned marriage only as a concession to human weakness. It was much the same in Buddhism. Buddha did not endorse the caste system, but neither did he denounce it. Whole-hearted seekers would in any case renounce the world, of which caste was a part, to become monks and celibates, so what did it matter?

The *Koran*, on the other hand, is full of references to the earth and the marvels of it, to mountains and seas, the sun and rain, day and night, beasts and birds, as God’s creation and as signs for those who can understand. Nothing of His mercies is to be rejected. Neither monasticism nor celibacy is acceptable. The whole of God’s creation is to be accepted, understood, enjoyed, but with purity, without egoism; and thus it will also be sanctified.



Therefore Islam had, from the start, far more need for social, legal and political organisation than Christianity or Buddhism. If the world is to be renounced in any case, why trouble to organize it? Let Caesar do that and pay him his dues, but leave the men of God free to follow their path of renunciation and seek the kingdom which is not of this world. Such could not be the attitude of Islam. Since the world was to be accepted and sanctified, all its relationships must be regulated; and this necessitated a network of civil and criminal law governing domestic, economic, professional and other departments of life.

The word 'Muslim' can be used in two senses. In one sense it can signify any one in any religion who submits to God, as, for instance, Abraham, who lived long before Mohammed, is referred to in the *Koran* as a Muslim. In this sense it would correspond in Hindu terminology to 'bhakta', one who follows the path of devotion and submission. Normally, however, it is used in the more technical sense of one who accepts and follows the specific religion established by Mohammed with all its religious, moral, social and legal obligations. In this sense it is a complete fusion of bhakti marga and karma marga.

This explains why the early Islamic Empire was so largely due to conquest, why in fact the Prophet and his immediate successors felt the need to challenge and conquer their neighbours. It was not simply a question of intolerance—no one could outdo the early Christians in intolerance once they had the power to persecute—the persecution of the Monophysites and other heretics among them, Charlemagne's slaughter of the pagan Saxons, etc. But Christians, having at first no framework of karma marga to their religion, could quietly infiltrate a pagan world, paying their dues to Caesar and regarding their religion as something private between themselves and God. Muslims could not. In order to live an Islamic life as prescribed for them in their Holy Book, it was necessary to belong to an Islamic community governed by Islamic law; and for this they had to be the rulers.

They might tolerate non-Muslims within the community (and they did more often than the Christians, though a good deal less than their modern apologists are apt to imply) but the community had to be shaped by Islamic law and tradition administered by Muslim rulers and jurists.

This is important today because it accounts for the dilemma with which Muslims are faced in the modern world. It explains why almost every modern book on Islam devotes so much space to the question of adaptation to modernism, while books on Buddhism and Christianity pass lightly over the subject or find it unnecessary to raise it. The modern world is no more alien or hostile to religion than was the Roman government of Palestine in the time of Christ. Christians, renouncing the unsuccessful Mediaeval attempt to create a Christian social order and make Christianity a world-sanctifying religion, can therefore revert to the attitude of Christ's day, rendering unto Caesar the outer organization of life and making their religion a private and personal matter. So can Buddhists. But not Muslims.

A Muslim who honestly believes that the modern organization of social and economic life is superior to the Islamic and that an Islamic state could and should adopt some Western code of law in place of the Shari'at has in effect ceased to be a Muslim, just as a Communist who really prefers the capitalist organization of society has ceased to be a Communist. A Muslim marooned in a modern community, like a Communist in a capitalist society, may have to put up with a social order that he disapproves of, but only reluctantly and with the intention of overthrowing it if it ever becomes possible. Until and unless he does so, he cannot lead a fully Islamic life.

If that is the position of the individual Muslim, what of the Islamic state buffeted by the economic and cultural winds of modernism—an economic system based on the payment of interest, a non-religious educational system, a democratic

political system, basing law on the will of the people, not the word of God, a social system based on equality of the sexes? I do not claim to be able to provide a quick or easy answer to a question that is agitating all Islamic governments and writers today, but I do insist that it is not a question of detail, of how many concessions have to be made and what sort, but of principle: whether the Islamic order of life is still held by Muslims to be the best attainable, indeed whether it is still at all viable. If not then the position should be boldly faced and it should be admitted openly that that particular amalgam of bhakti marga and karma marga which was instituted by the Prophet Mohammed has served its purpose and no longer meets the needs of mankind. The answer cannot be a compromise because Islam is based on the *Koran* as firmly as Christianity is on Christ, and the *Koran* expressly denounces those who accept some parts of it and reject others. For those who accept it, it pronounces on questions of law and social behaviour as well as of faith and worship. It lays down, for instance, the procedure for divorce. It says at what age a child shall be weaned. It prescribes cutting off the hand as the punishment for theft. It forbids taking interest on loans. And it insists that it is to be accepted as a whole.

It is still possible to be a Muslim in the vaguer sense of pure bhakti marga, of one who submits to the Divine Will; it is still possible to follow a spiritual path, however uncongenial outer conditions may be; but is it still possible either for an individual or a state to follow the Islamic way of life, sincerely believing it to be the best possible and championing it as such? This is the question with which Muslims are today faced. It can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no', but it should not be evaded.



# The Sufi Science Of Lataif

BEING THE SPIRITUAL aspect of Islam, Sufism is the science of man's spiritual development. Like every science, whether spiritual or physical, it has a theoretical and a practical side, its theory being the basis for practical experiment and the success of its experiments being the proof of its theory. It offers various modes of spiritual training, one of which bears a striking resemblance to the Tantric path of Kundalini. This is not really surprising; indeed it is almost inevitable since the subtle centres that are activated by these methods are neither invented nor imagined but simply recognized, being realities. They are not physical organs and none of their exponents suppose that they are; they are centres of the subtle potentialities latent in man but undeveloped in most men.

In Tantrism they are called 'chakras' or wheels. The Sufi term for them, 'lataif' (singular *latifa*) is much harder to define. *Al-Latif* is one of the 99 Divine Names and bears the implication 'The Subtle' or 'The Discriminating'. It is also the Name most commonly invoked when praying for something, which indicates that it bears the implication 'The Discriminating Giver'. The *lataif*, therefore, might be termed 'subtle centres' or centres of subtle perception or of discriminate fruition.

According to Sufi teaching there are seven *lataif*. One of them is in the region of the solar plexus. One, known as *qalb* or heart, is in the place of the physical heart. Opposite it, at the right side of the chest, is the one known as *Ruh* or Spirit. A third is between these two. As with the *chakras*, there is one in the forehead and one (corresponding to the Hindu *sahasrara*) in the crown of the head. Activation of this last may seem to be the supreme achievement, but there are Sufis who hold that it is really dependent on the *Ruh* at the right side of the chest. It is noteworthy that the Maharshi taught the same from the Hindu context and that Lama Govinda also asserts it from the Buddhist

context in his *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism*. That in the crown of the head is more concerned with ecstatic experience, but the Ruh is the pure spiritual Being on which this is based.

The activation of a *latifa* is known as its *tajalli*, that is its illumination or irradiation. This is accomplished by a precise technique under the guidance of one who has himself achieved it and is qualified to guide others. The method will involve concentration on the *latifa* to be irradiated together with other exercises such as a specific type of breath-control and certain specified incantations. It is a precise science, unguided or misguided experimentation in which may achieve nothing or even have destructive results, just as in a physical science. In fact there is real danger of the mind being overbalanced or the character ruined. Not only is right guidance essential but right motives as well. If such experimentation is practised out of curiosity or the desire for powers it may injure the practiser despite sound guidance and will certainly not bring him to the goal—or at any rate not unless his motives change in the course of the quest.

Higher powers are in fact attained, for the activation of each *latifa* brings about a certain more or less specific heightening of understanding and perceptions. These may include ecstatic visions and experiences, telepathic powers, ability to foresee the future and so forth; all these, however, are regarded by the true Sufi as by-products. The *salik* or traveller who values them for themselves is likely to get stuck in them and proceed no further. Many occultists or magicians, people who have supernatural powers but no real spirituality, are experimenters who have failed in this way, clinging to the partial results attained and therefore unable to co-ordinate and transcend them. Nor is the danger to be ignored that such failures may fail still further by falling into the grip of dark forces and becoming black magicians. The true goal to be aimed at is the state of 'Perfect Man', *Insanul Kamil*, and for this purity, patience and persistence are necessary as well as right guidance.

## Paradise and Nirvana

“AND FOR HIM who fears the station of his Lord there are two gardens. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? In each of them green branches. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? In both of them are two fountains flowing. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? In both of them are two pairs of every fruit. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? Therein shall they recline upon couches lined with silk brocade and the fruits of the two gardens shall be within reach. Which then of the boons of your Lord will you reject? Therein shall be maidens shy of glance, never previously possessed by man or jinn. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? They shall be like rubies and pearls. Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject? What is the reward of excellence if not excellence? Which of your Lord’s boons will you reject?”<sup>1</sup>

“There is, monks, a condition where there is neither extension nor motion, nor the plane of infinite space nor that of infinite consciousness, nor of the void nor of neither-consciousness-nor-unconsciousness, neither this world nor another, neither sun nor moon. Here, monks, I say, there is neither a coming nor a going nor yet a remaining, neither a falling nor a rising. It is not fixed, yet it does not move. It is not based on anything. That indeed is the end of ill.

“There is, monks, an unborn, not become, not made, not compounded, and were it not, monks, for this unborn, not become, not made, not compounded, no escape could be shown here for what is born, has become, is made, is compounded.”<sup>2</sup>

The former of these two promised states is central to Islam, a theme running through the *Koran*; the latter is the very basis of Buddhism. It could never be maintained that they are the

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<sup>1</sup> *Koran*, VI, 46-51.

<sup>2</sup> *Uddana*, 80-81.

same. The former is the state of paradise enjoyed by the beatified individual; the latter is what remains on the transcendence and dissolution of the individuality.

Neither is a state simply to believe in as happening after death: nothing happens that is not earned. And what is earned can be earned as well before death as after. States of realization attained during this life are equivalent to paradises attained after it. Perfect Self-Realization is Nirvana.

Perhaps the first question to settle is whether the descriptions of paradise contained in the *Koran* and in other religions (including Buddhism) are symbolical. The crude exoteric Muslim would probably feel cheated if told so. Like the materialist in every religion, he believes physical forms to be more 'real' than subtle. And he feels entitled to a 'real' paradise, his *houris* real women. However, while dreaming he takes the dream forms for real, and in paradise he will doubtless take the paradisaical forms for real. The Sufis certainly regard the promises as symbolical. The following is a commentary on the above quotation by Ibn Arabi, one of the most famous of the Sufi philosophers:

“. . . *And for him who fears the station of his Lord* means for him who fears His session in judgement over him, inasmuch as He is ever vigilant and makes man depend upon Him . . . there are two gardens, one being the garden of the soul and the other of the heart, inasmuch as fear is one of the qualities of the soul when illuminated by the light of the heart. *In each of them are green branches* through the branching out of those boughs which are the forces and qualities which bring forth the leaves of actions and virtues which in turn bring forth the fruits of the sciences and the states of spiritual contemplation . . . *In both of them are two fountains* of particular and universal perceptions, *flowing* to them from the Garden of the Spirit and causing to grow in them the fruits of the things perceived and the manifestation of the Qualities. *Of every fruit*, of the delightful objects of perception, *two pairs*, one particular,

being known and familiar, and the other universal and strange; for every universal idea that the heart perceives has a particular image in the soul, nor is there anything perceived by the soul that has not its archetype in the heart. *Therein shall they recline upon couches lined with silk brocade*, for the side facing downward, that is towards the soul, is brocaded with the forms of pious deeds springing from the virtues of character and nobility of qualities and excellence of endowments; and the outer side, facing the Spirit, is of the finest silk, symbolising the manifestations of the holy lights and the fineness of the celestial boons and of the states of contemplation that may come to one through intuitions of sacred wisdom and knowledge. . . *And the fruits of the two gardens shall be within reach*: the objects of perception are as near as they wish . . . they perceive them and gather them, and immediately others of the same kind spring up in their place . . . *Therein shall be maidens shy of glance*, glancing away from such heavenly souls as approach them in their station and from such as are beneath them, whether heavenly or earthly. . . None of them looks higher than the station of her consort or demands a perfection beyond his, so that her excellence either matches his or is inferior to it. Otherwise she would pass beyond his garden and be exalted above his station and would not be shy of glance or satisfied with her marriage to him and the joys of intercourse with him and his guardianship over her. *Never previously possessed by man* by any human soul, being created especially for their consorts and essentially holy so that none who are attached to the physical self can attain to them; *or jinn* by any power of fancy or any spirit veiled in base form. *They shall be like rubies and pearls*: those of the *houri* who are in the Garden of the soul are compared to rubies because of the ruby's beauty and limpidity and glow and brilliance and also its red colour, which corresponds to the colour of the soul; and those who are in the Garden of the Heart are compared to small pearls because of their whiteness and luminosity . . . *What is the reward of excellence*, that is of worship and concentration, *if not excellence?* in reward, through the acquirement of perfection and attainment to the two gardens here spoken of."



In a later passage of his commentary on this same *sura* he also defines the *hourī* as symbolising “pure lights and unalloyed visions wherein is no trace of evil or any possibility of it, lovely with the manifestation of the divine Beauty and Majesty and the excellence of the Divine Qualities.”

However, there can only be symbolism so long as there is something to symbolise, that is so long as the individual being continues to exist. Crude forms can symbolise subtle, but nothing can symbolise Nirvana, nothing except the Void, nothing except nothing.

Paradise is the proximate goal, Nirvana the ultimate. This is universally recognized in Buddhism. For instance, it is stated by the Dalai Lama in his article on Tibetan Buddhism in *The Mountain Path* of April 1964. It is recognized in Islam only by the Sufis. Abu Saïd declared that: “The world is the road that leads to the abode of love, whilst paradise is a stage on the way. The enlightened lover discards the one and transcends the other.”

In Buddhism there is any amount of teaching about paradise, which, indeed, must be the goal for the many. However, for those who aspire, it keeps in mind that the ultimate goal is Nirvana, which is as far beyond paradise as it is beyond this world, being immeasurably beyond either. The most illuminating reference, as showing not only the Buddhist acceptance of paradise but attitude towards it is in a story that I will quote, with my comments on it, from my *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*.<sup>3</sup>

“The Buddhist attitude to the heavenly worlds is the same as the Hindu; that is, as the Maharshi has been heard to say: ‘They are as real as this world here.’ As long as one is obsessed with the reality of one’s ego and therefore of this world, so long will the law of cause and effect hold and shape one’s conditions in

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<sup>3</sup> Pp. 146-148, published by Sri Ramanasramam, 1996.

posthumous worlds. But it is better to abide in the Self and not to worry about this world or the next. There is a story that illustrates this. Several years after his Enlightenment messengers came to the Buddha from his father requesting him to honour his home town also with a visit. He did so and was not without honour in his own home. In fact, a large number of the nobles renounced the world and followed him. Among these was his half-brother Nanda (not to be confused with his cousin Ananda, the beloved disciple). Nanda, however, was half-hearted about it. He had made the renunciation on the eve of being married to a beautiful girl and proclaimed heir to the throne and he fell to brooding over all he had missed. Seeing that he had no zeal, the Lord asked him what was the matter and whether he was not already thinking of abandoning the path and returning to the life of the world.

“Nanda replied: ‘My Lord, when I left home a Sakya girl, the loveliest in the land, looked back at me with her hair half combed and said, “May you soon be back, young sir.” It is because I am continually thinking of her that I have no zest for the Brahma path but have come to dislike it and wish to give up the training and return to a worldly life.’

“The Buddha then took him by the arm and immediately the grove in which they were standing disappeared and they found themselves in the celestial world of the *devas*. As many as five hundred dove-footed celestial nymphs were attending on Sakra, the Lord of the Devas. The Buddha asked Nanda which he found more charming and attractive, the Sakya girl who was the loveliest in the land or these five hundred dove-footed nymphs.

“He replied: ‘My Lord, compared with them the Sakya girl, although the loveliest in the land, would look like a monkey with its nose and ears cut off. She is not worth a particle of them. She can’t be compared with them. The five hundred dove-footed nymphs are incomparably more charming and attractive.’

“Thereupon the Lord took Nanda by the arm again and they found themselves back in the grove as before.

“Such a story might come from almost any religion; it is the sequel to it that illustrates the spirit of Buddhism. The rumour spread among the monks that Nanda was treading the path for the sake of heavenly nymphs and that the Buddha had promised him five hundred dove-footed maids. Thereupon they began to despise and mock him, calling him a mercenary. This so shamed him that he shut himself up alone and devoted himself with all his energy to the path, not allowing his thoughts to stray either to the Sakya girl or the nymphs or to his companions or anything else, with the result that he soon attained Enlightenment.

“Were the nymphs real? As real as the Sakya maid, but what is reality? That is the whole object of the quest.”

This makes the difference clear. Buddhism as originally propounded directs a man straight to Nirvana, ignoring or deprecating the wayside stations called ‘paradise’. It is based on the doctrine of anatta, ‘no-ego’; and if there is no ego there can be no conditions of the ego, neither paradise nor hell; only conditionlessness, suchness, that which is. Islam, on the other hand, as taught in the *Koran*, turns men’s minds to the possibility of higher states of the individuality and the danger of lower ones. Its doctrinal basis is ‘Islam’, which means ‘submission’ and thereby recognizes the existence of some one to submit. Buddhism proclaims the direct path to the ultimate Goal; Islam the striving to the wayside station of a beatified individuality.

During its later development each religion has to some extent developed the aspect that was originally lacking. There are many Buddhists who have neither the understanding nor the will to seek Nirvana, and for them indirect paths and techniques have been fabricated—the Pure Land School, the devotional invocation of Amitabha, the elaborate ritual and symbolism of Tantrism, with its heavens and hells.

However, such developments are not altogether in tone with the native genius of the religion. However absorbing they may be, and however productive of the results they aim at, they diverge from the pure spirit of Buddhism in that they implicitly overlook the basic doctrine of anatta, 'no-ego', which all the early schools of Buddhism made their sheet-anchor. Similarly, pure Tawhid, the Oneness of Being, and Ittihad or Identity is outside the Islamic tradition of submission, implying some one to submit and a God to whom to submit. It can sustain itself only among the very few who understand and on the basis of its inherent truth and of subtle interpretations of a dualistic scripture. Muslims in general are bound to reject it.

Islam officially cannot recognize it. Indeed, there is the historical case of Mansur Al Hallaj who, in a state of ecstasy, proclaimed "Ana'l Haqq", 'I am the Truth' (which, to a Muslim, carries the connotation 'I am God') and was crucified for it.

For those who seek paradise there is guidance in Islam and Buddhism alike. For those who aspire to the ultimate Goal the guidance in Islam is less clear. Sufis find concealed references to Nirvana in certain cryptic verses of the *Koran*, but there is no outspoken recognition of it. A Sufi might speak of paradise as a stage on the way, but the *Koran* speaks of it (for example, in the passage from *sura* LVII which I quoted in 'The Lesser and Greater Jihad' in our issue of July 1964) as "the supreme achievement". It is noteworthy in this connection that some of the Sufi saints claimed to have gone beyond the Prophet; but that is a subject for another article.



THERE IS AN Arabian Nights-like story in the *Koran* of an obviously symbolical journey that Moses made under the guidance of “one of Our servitors to whom We had granted mercy and knowledge”,<sup>1</sup> that is to say a realized man. Three times the guide tested Moses by performing an apparently outrageous action, and three times Moses failed to restrain his indignation. The name of the guide is not given, but he is traditionally held to be the prophet Khizr, who is nowhere mentioned by name in the *Koran*.

What is remarkable about this is that Moses is recognized in the *Koran* as a great prophet, whereas on this occasion he appears as an obtuse pupil. The explanation seems to be that Moses is the prophet most associated with the law, and this story is meant to show the law or exoteric religion or outer orthodoxy to be an inferior, a pupil and unintelligent over against esoteric or initiatic guidance.

Guenon, whose knowledge of symbolism was extensive, equated Khizr with the equally enigmatic Biblical figure of Melchisedec. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is referred to as “Called of God, a high priest after the order of Melchisedec.”<sup>2</sup> Just as Khizr is represented in the *Koran* as superior to Moses, so does the author of this Epistle represent Melchisedec as superior to Abraham, stating that Abraham paid tithes to him and he conferred his blessing on Abraham. Further, he is called “King of righteousness and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace.”<sup>3</sup> He is ranked higher than the Levitical priesthood, the descendants of Aaron. “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God; he abideth a priest continually.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Koran*, XVII, 65-82.

<sup>2</sup> *Hebrews*, V, 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 3.

It is quite evident that what we have to do with here is not an individual but an esoteric order with direct spiritual realization which raises its members above human lineage and gives it higher authority than the exoteric orthodoxy of the regular priesthood. The writer of this epistle is obviously a Hebrew writing for Hebrews, and the implication for him of Christ's being "a priest after the order of Melchisedec" is Christ's authority to override Jewish law and orthodoxy.

After Biblical times no more is heard of Melchisedec. In Islam, however, Khizr remained an important legendary figure. Sufism, though less rigid than the shariat of exoteric Islam, developed a law and orthodoxy of its own. Every Sufi aspirant had to be duly initiated to a *tariqat* or Sufi path by the validly appointed head of the order, successor to its whole chain of sheikhs. It was always recognized, however, that outside these orders there was the path of *afrad* or solitary ones (singular *fard*) whose guide was Al-Khizr.

In our own day the spirit of guidance has almost dried up in Islam, as in the other religions, and it is wellnigh impossible to find a realized guide at the head of any *tariqat*. But the Compassionate always responds to men's aspiration, and we find today, in compensation, a less formal outpouring of Grace to those who seek. This is, therefore, the age of Al-Khizr. It is better to implore his guidance than to adhere to the formalities of a *tariqat* which has everything except the essential—the realization of its sheikh.

There is a Hindu story which illustrates this. Before the Battle of Kurukshetra, at which the *Bhagavad Gita* was enunciated, both sides, in canvassing allies, believed that they had a right to call on Krishna, the Lord of Mathura, for support. He declared that one side could have his army while he himself, unarmed, would support the other. The Kauravas chose his army and Arjuna chose Krishna. It was Arjuna who won. Let those who cling to formal orthodoxy without a realised guide consider which they are choosing, Krishna or his army.

# Jnani, Prophet and Avatar

Jnana marga is the 'path of knowledge', by which is meant not theoretical knowledge but pure spiritual understanding. A Jnani<sup>1</sup> is a Man of Knowledge or a Sage in the highest meaning of the term, that is to say one who abides in constant conscious Identity with Universal Being. In Sufi terminology, he is one who is in a state of unbroken realization of *tawhid* or Oneness and *ittihad* or Identity, one who has passed through *fana* or 'extinction' to *fana'l fana*, 'the extinction of extinction' and is established in *baqa* or 'stabilisation'. This is a very rare phenomenon.

An Avatar<sup>2</sup>, as proclaimed in the Hindu tradition, is also a rare phenomenon. The classical enunciation of the doctrine is by Krishna when he says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Whenever dharma is obscured and adharma prevails I manifest myself."<sup>3</sup> This implies a threefold distinction between an Avatar and Jnani, although of course it is to be remembered that an Avatar may be a Jnani and a Jnani an Avatar.

In the first place, an Avatar is regarded not as a human being struggling up towards Enlightenment and finally breaking through the veil of illusion but as a Divine Being assuming the veil temporarily for the welfare of mankind: that is to say not an ascent but a descent. In this respect the doctrine has an affinity with the Christian doctrine of Christ the Saviour, the Tibetan doctrine of Incarnate Buddhas and to some extent, the Mahayana doctrine of Bodhisattvas.

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<sup>1</sup>Pronounced more like 'Gnyani'.

<sup>2</sup> Many writers use the form 'Avatara', but since the final 'a' is not normally pronounced and this is a practical, not an academic journal, we prefer the shorter form.

<sup>3</sup> IV, 7.

In the second place, the Avatar is, in the highest sense of the word, a functionary. He is a Divine Descent or Incarnation for the specific purpose of sustaining or restoring dharma. A Jnani may or may not perform any visible function. He may or may not be recognized for what he is. Chuang Tsu often refers to unrecognized sages. Buddha said of his followers: "There are bhikkhus in this company who are Arahants: having extinguished the corruptions, completed the ascetic life, done what was to be done, laid down their burden, attained their goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, and who are delivered by right insight."<sup>4</sup> Al Hallaj was crucified for claiming to be what he was, and other Sufis were more restrained, remaining, some of them, prudently inconspicuous. It is noteworthy that the followers of Ramakrishna regard him as an Avatar come to restore a decadent Hinduism. Many of the followers of the Maharshi regard him as an Avatar come to bring the direct path of Self-enquiry to mankind at large, Hindus and others. Nor is this to be dismissed as a posthumous development. In both cases there are ample records of those who held this view during their lifetime.

This second distinction may make an Avatar seem more important than a Jnani, especially to people who value action more than being and function more than state. The third distinction, however, restores the balance by showing that the Avatar need not necessarily have the total Realization of the Jnani. He may be an incarnation of the Cosmic Supreme Being not concerned with the metaphysical Absolute. For the Jnani, it is to be remembered, the entire universe with all its Avatars and the people they come to save is a dream from which he has awakened. The Avatar, being engrossed in his function, need not be in constant awareness of this ultimate truth. Indeed, it might make for greater concentration on his function and therefore greater efficiency if he were not. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Karandaka sutta et alia.*



Hindus have therefore a conception of ‘partial Avatars’, as one might call them. In fact, some of them hold, as the modern bhakta Dilip Kumar Roy has declared in his books, that all Avatars are in some way partial and limited except Sri Krishna who is the only complete Avatar. It is noteworthy that on one occasion when the Maharshi was asked whether he was an Avatar or not his answer was simply a rebuke to the questioner for attaching importance rather to function than state, rather to doing than being: “An Avatar is only a manifestation of one aspect of God, whereas a Jnani is God Himself.”

The prophet in the Semitic tradition is functionally parallel to the Avatar in the Hindu; but there is a difference. He also is primarily a functionary. He comes, like the Avatar, to purify, restore or re-enunciate religion, but he is known not as an Incarnation or Descent but a *rasool*, ‘one sent’, that is a messenger. In the dualistic monotheism of Semitic religion there is no room for an openly recognized doctrine of Identity or for an Incarnation. For the same reason, it is unnecessary for the prophet or messenger to be a Jnani, in a state of realized Identity. For him to be so would indeed be bad economy of material and therefore inartistic and inefficient. He would have to keep his high state and complete knowledge secret from his followers. It is obvious, therefore, that he can do his job better without it.

Christ claimed to be an Incarnation and enunciated the doctrine of Identity—“I and my Father are One”. But the Jews rejected him because of it and condemned him as a blasphemer. The *Koran* speaks of him as a prophet, though it does cryptically allow for a distinction in referring to him alone among the prophets as *Ruhu’llah*, the ‘Spirit of God’. It may be that this describes his state while ‘prophet’ describes his function. In any case, this claim to Identity took

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<sup>5</sup> *Koran*, 11, 151.

Christianity out of the pure Semitic tradition and gave it a certain affinity with Hinduism.

In speaking of Mohammed the *Koran* retains the traditional Semitic version of the prophet as messenger: "We have sent you a messenger who is one of yourselves to recite Our communications to you."<sup>5</sup> And to Mohammed himself it says: "And the messengers whom We sent before you were only men to whom We granted revelation."<sup>6</sup>

This means that either Mohammed had not Self-realization in its true and ultimate sense of realized Identity with Supreme Being or that he kept it carefully concealed from his followers. The former seems the more likely. The chief reason for saying this is that there are numerous references to Mohammed in the *Koran* and none of them imply realized Identity, while a number of them do imply its absence. Even apart from that, there are a number of incidents in his life which leave little room for doubt. To take only one of them: when the first of the revelations which were to grow into the *Holy Koran* came to him he received it as a message through an intermediary, the Angel Gabriel, and was cast into great distress, about which he confided only to his wife, wondering whether in fact it meant that he had been chosen a prophet or whether it did not come from an evil source. This is a story which carries conviction, even apart from the fact that it comes from Al Amin, 'the Trustworthy', as Mohammed was called even before he became a prophet. It is obviously not play-acting. But it is equally obviously not the reaction of a Realized Man.

And indeed, we have Mohammed's own word for it that he was not a Jnani in the sense that the Maharshi or Buddha or Christ were, that is to say in a constant state of conscious Identity. In a well known hadith he says: "I have a time with Allah during which no angel or inspired prophet is equal to

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<sup>6</sup> *Koran*, XXI, 7.

me.” This may indicate a state of ‘mystic union’ in which not even the highest forms of created life can intervene; but in any case, however it may be interpreted, he himself went on to say, with characteristic integrity, that it was not permanent but that at other times he had to make do with the felicity derived from one of his wives.

Through his instrumentality, however, a religion was established and paths were laid down, and there is no reason for doubting that they go the whole way. Some may be inclined to doubt this statement. Indeed, the Editor of *The Mountain Path* declared in a recent editorial that “no one can guide others farther than he has gone himself.”<sup>7</sup> My reply would be that there is a difference between the function of a guru and that of a prophet. The Islamic creed is that there is no god but God and that Mohammed is his messenger. To assert that the message cannot be complete would be a criticism not of the messenger but of God who sent him. It is well known even among non-Muslims that Mohammed did not write or compose the *Koran* but recited it as revealed to him in a state of trance. It contains no explicit statement of the Supreme Identity; nevertheless there is ample evidence that some of the Sufi saints have attained a state of *baqa* or ‘stabilization’ in realized Identity. The very doctrine of *baqa* as the completion of *fana* or ‘extinction’ indicates that this was understood as their goal. This explains how it is that some of the Sufi saints have alleged that they have gone beyond the Prophet and that the state of saint is higher than that of prophet. As the statement of the Maharshi quoted earlier in this article indicates, it may even (if one uses the more correct term ‘Sage’ or Jnani instead of ‘saint’) be higher or more complete than that of Avatar.

A recent writer quotes the great Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi as refuting this claim. “If a Prophet maketh an utterance which

<sup>7</sup> “Realisation and Guidance”, July, 1965, p. 145.

transcendeth the scope of his function as Law-Giver, then he doth so inasmuch as he is a Saint and a Gnostic, for his station as one processing Gnosis is more universal and perfect than his station as a Messenger or Law-Giver. Thus if thou hearest any man of God say—or if he is reported as saying—that sainthood is higher than prophethood, his meaning is as we have just explained. Or if he say that the Saint is above the Prophet and the Messenger, he is referring to one person, and meaneth that the Messenger is more universal in virtue of his sainthood than in virtue of his apostle-prophethood. He does not mean that those Saints who are followers of the Messenger are higher than him.”<sup>8</sup>

If read carefully it will be seen that this is no refutation. Indeed it admits that the station of the Gnostic (Jnani) is more perfect and universal than that of the prophet. This implies that the state of the prophet is not universal or perfect, because if it were nothing could be more so. There is no more perfect than perfect. All that it claims is that a prophet may also be a Jnani and if so is more perfect as such than as prophet. Whether he may be or not, there is certainly, as explained earlier in this article, no need to be, and there is ample evidence, as instanced above, that Mohammed was not.



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<sup>8</sup> *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century*, p. 161, by Martin Lings, Allen & Unwin.

## Petitionary Prayer

The English word 'prayer' has so much the meaning of 'petition' that it is not really apt for the ritualistic Islamic prayers that are said five times daily. Indeed, these could better be described as acts of worship or religious services. Not only do they contain no petition, except for guidance, but each one, even though performed only by a single person, is so complete and harmonious as to be comparable to a Christian Church service.

Nevertheless, petitionary prayer is practised in Islam, as it is in Christianity. It is bound to be in every theistic or dualistic religion. It was approved of by the prophet. It is much under fire today by people who, on the basis of some theoretical understanding of Advaita, like to imagine themselves above it. Before trying to explain or defend it, let us first set out the arguments brought against it. In their extreme form they can make it appear very crude indeed. As though one were to say: "I recognize that God is wise and omnipotent, but in the immediate context of my own life I think I know best, so please God be guided by me." Even in praying for others the cynic can argue that there is a spiritual ignorance amounting to arrogance: "If I had the power to cure Aunt Anne's arthritis and give George a better job I would, so You please do."

Actually, however, it is the cynic or critic who is being crude, since he is presuming belief in an anthropomorphic God, like a bigger and more powerful man. The matter takes on a completely different tone if one thinks of spiritual power which can be directed to certain ends just as physical power can. In fact it is only a crude idea of God that makes prayer to God sound crude.

Let us first consider prayers for guidance, among which must be included prayers for greater strength, more fervent love, stauncher perseverance on the path. What of them? The prayer for guidance

is the one petition which comes into the five ritualistic daily prayers of Islam; and it comes into every one of them. They all include a recitation of the Fatiha, the opening chapter of the *Koran*, which contains the words: "Guide us on the straight path, not the path of those with whom Thou art angered or those who are astray."

The critic who has a crude anthropomorphic idea of God may cavil at this too, saying: "You mean that you want to progress spiritually but it is God who has to be reminded to do his job of guiding and supporting you." Actually I may know very well that it is my own open and hidden weaknesses that are holding me back, urging me to rebellion and trying to lead me astray, and by my prayer for guidance I am ranging my conscious mind and will against them. I am praying for Grace not to associate myself with those tendencies in me which, by their ego-assertion, draw down the Divine Anger or those which wander about undisciplined and unguided. I may know, for instance, that day-dreaming weakens my will and undermines my spiritual effort, but knowing this is no help unless I take action or seek protection from it. Whether I think of the Divine Power to which I pray as the Transcendent Being who said to the world "Be! and it was" or as the Immanent who is "nearer to man than his jugular vein" (both Koranic phrases) may be largely a matter of theory to me in my present state. What is terrifically real and urgent is that the Source of guidance to which I pray is infinitely more potent than the individual self who prays. This explains the Sufi saying to the aspirant who called on the Divine Name and felt discouraged at receiving no reply: "Your calling on Me is itself My reply." The prayer for guidance is not theory or logic; it is a harnessing of the mind and will to the quest, a reaching out from the human to the divine. Whether it has logic or not, it has potency.

From this let us turn to other forms of petitionary prayer. Does one or does one not use one's intelligence and will power to bring about what one considers desirable? If one is sick does

one make the mental effort of deciding on treatment and the physical effort of taking the treatment prescribed? If circumstances are difficult does one try to improve them or just accept what comes? If one's professional work is unsatisfactory does one take initiative in seeking promotion or a better job or appealing to influential friends? If so why should one suddenly renounce effort when it comes to spiritual means such as prayer?

What then is the position of the Advaitin who considers himself above petitionary prayer? He should renounce not only prayer but also worldly means of improving his position, whether with regard to health or wealth or anything else. Then he will not pray for health but will also not take medical treatment. Let him be logical. The Prophet's grandson, Hasan, was granted a pension by the ruling caliph. There is a story that for awhile the caliph neglected to pay it and Hasan was urged to send in a petition and remind him. He replied that he scorned to petition a fellow-creature who was as dependent on the Creator as himself. the position of the self-styled Advaitin who would seek worldly means of achieving his desires but not heavenly is the exact opposite of this. Let him be logical.

Even with regard to guidance, the Advaitin's way is to remember that the obstructions are in himself and must be removed by himself. That shows that his path is not one of passivity, as the acceptance of whatever comes might suggest; it is one of intense activity, not revolting against the Divine Will or Universal Harmony, which cannot be changed in any case, but striving to bring himself in accord with it by inner purification which will be reflected indirectly but inevitably in a harmonisation of outer circumstances. It is said in the *Koran* that God does not change a people's state until they first change what is in themselves. That is a sentence worth pondering over in this connection.

Although the attitude of the Advaitin is pure submission (and therefore perfect Islam) when rightly understood and practised, there is the danger that it may dessicate into a purely mental

stance, especially if misfortunes do not arise to test him. It is easy to accept acceptable conditions of life; but suppose poverty comes, or misfortune, or ill-health: will he still accept it, remembering that he is not the body to which it comes? If so all right, but it is well to remember the Koranic saying that when you have come safe to the shore you forget the peril you were in and forget too that if you are smug Allah can cast you out on stormy seas again.

This shows that petitionary prayer cannot be dismissed so summarily. If the true Advaitin does not pray for the fulfilment of his wishes it is because he either has none or regards them as reprehensible symptoms of the ego and prefers to exorcise them. All honour to him. It is the desireless state that is to be aimed at; but one should examine oneself very carefully before deciding that one has reached it. If not, if one still has wishes and does seek their fulfilment, it is crude materialism to do so only by worldly means and ignore the spiritual.

Spiritual means of obtaining what one desires need not necessarily take the form of simple petitionary prayer; they may be more technical; indeed, it would not be out of place to say more scientific. The person who presses an electric light switch is using a scientific means of lighting the room whether he understands why the switch works like that or not, and the same applies to spiritual techniques. A Muslim who wishes to use spiritual means for bringing something about may turn his mind briefly in that direction and then repeat an incantation during which his mind will be on the incantation, not on the petition. Similarly, a Christian spiritual healer may take cognizance of a case and then empty his mind and allow the healing Grace to flow through it unimpeded. A Catholic may ask for masses to be said for a certain intention. An English Buddhist, Lobzang Jivaka, tells in his book *Imji Getsul* how the monks of a Ladhaki monastery where he was staying as a novice went to a drought afflicted area and recited a certain sutra. On studying the sutra he found that it had ostensibly nothing to do with drought and contained no prayer



for rain. Nevertheless the rain came. I gather from an advertisement in *The Mountain Path* that Hindus who have something to pray for write to ask Sri Ramanasramam to perform a Sri Chakra Puja with that intention.

All these are indirect spiritual means of getting one's wishes fulfilled. The anthropologist might say that they are nearer to magic than to religion, but if so that only shows that magic was originally a branch of religion. The important thing is that to a large extent they work—probably a good deal more than direct petitionary prayer. Indeed, the strong accumulation of individual will or desire in direct petitionary prayer may disturb the atmosphere and impede the action of the spiritual currents which are canalised by a more aloof approach. This is particularly felt by spiritual healers, who find that wishing actually obstructs the process of cure. I quote from a Taoist work to this effect. "...if meditation is aimed at curing an illness, the practiser should forget all about the thought of curing it and if it is for improving health he should forget all about the idea of improvement, because when mind and objects are forgotten everything will be void and the object thus achieved will be the proper one. ... If the thoughts of curing an illness and of improving health are clung to the mind will be stirred and no result can be expected."<sup>1</sup>

This also explains why the prayers of a saint are so effective. Believers in all religions flock to a saint and ask him to pray for their desires—for health, a son, prosperity, whatever they may fancy their happiness to depend on. They have practical reasons for doing so, having seen many cases of his prayers being effective. The reason for this is surely obvious: the saint is the man who has succeeded in eliminating his ego, and he can therefore invoke the necessary spiritual force to achieve what is desired without any disturbing intrusion of self-will.



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<sup>1</sup> *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation*, p. 189, by Charles Luk, Rider & Co., quoting from the Taoist Master Yin Shin Tsu.

## The Meaning and Use of the Rosary in Islam (Sunni)

The name for the rosary in Arab lands is 'wird', though in India 'tasbeeh' is more commonly used. It consists of 99 sliding beads divided into three sections of 33 each by larger beads. At the end is a still larger elongated bead making up the hundred. It is said that the 99 movable beads represent the 99 names of Allah and the end bead the Hundredth Name. However, the *wird* is not used only for invoking the Names but for keeping count in any incantation. And there is no religion in the spiritual practices of which incantations play so large a part as in Islam. Some incantations are graded in three parts to fit the three sections of the *wird*; others continue right through one or more repetitions of the *wird*. In fact sometimes a *wird* is made with a tail-piece of ten small beads beyond or beside the final elongated one, on which to mark off the hundreds or complete *wirds* recited.

### “We Will Show Them Our Signs”

THE *KORAN*, LIKE the *Tao-Te-King*, often speaks of a people or community when, read with more understanding, it refers to the individual. For instance, the *Tao-Te-King* asserts that when the Emperor refrains from ruling there is peace and prosperity in the Empire; and the *Koran* repeatedly enjoins not to make mischief in the land. The meaning in both cases is the same: that a man's faculties (the 'people') should be allowed to function simply, spontaneously, naturally, and that his mind or ego (the 'ruler') introduces disharmony among them when it starts to interfere and 'make mischief', harnessing them to some ambition or twisting them to imitation of some pattern that is not natural to them.

Living 'naturally' does not imply licentiousness or animal self-indulgence. On the contrary, that is itself a perversion created by the mind. It implies a life of noble simplicity.

Again, it says in the *Koran* that Allah does not change the state of a people until they first change what is in themselves. The *Koran* is an intensely symbolical book. Again and again one is brought up against sayings like this that need to be pondered over. In this case also the 'people' represent the 'community' of faculties, impressions, urges that go to make up what we call an individual. So the implication is that God does not change a man's circumstances until he first changes 'what is in himself', that is his nature or his attitude towards his circumstances. This carries the profound message that a man's environment reflects his nature.

This is a very hard thing to say. He who says it lays himself open to the accusation of smugness. "It is all right for you to say that because you are in comfortable circumstances, but what about all those who are destitute or bereaved or suffering, those who have no work or financial security or have been thrown into concentration camps?" It certainly is a hard thing to say, and it does not mean crudely and simply that good people succeed in life and bad people suffer. One's own character and destiny are so complicated that it is much if one can understand them; how then can one hope to understand at all fully those of others, about whom one has only comparatively external information? One complication that rules out a crude application of the theory is that what appears to be success is by no means the same as contentment—as many successful people commit suicide as unsuccessful, as many wealthy as indigent. Another is that human happiness itself is not the purpose of life. Another that happiness may even grow out of suffering if the suffering has awakened a man's nobler qualities. Collections have been published of letters written by inmates of Nazi concentration camps and it is remarkable how many of them

speak of finding not only a meaning in life but a happiness and serenity which they had never experienced in the free but superficial life they knew formerly. Indeed, from a profounder viewpoint, it may have been the camp guards who were more to be pitied than the prisoners.

Also, of course, it is to be remembered that people in the same family or working in the same office may have very different environments. One of two brothers may be bullied by his elder brother, miserable at school, but consoled by the protective love of his mother, while the other may be happy and successful among his school friends but embittered at home by his mother's favouritism towards his younger brother. The environment of a person is not something that can be measured by statistics but is mental and emotional as well as physical.

Taking all this into consideration, it does remain true that a man's environment reflects his nature as a mirror does his face. From this it results naturally that Allah does not change it until he changes first what is in himself. This has a bearing on what I wrote in an earlier article on petitionary prayer.<sup>1</sup> It is no use scowling into a mirror and praying that it will reflect a smile; as long as you scowl it will continue to reflect a scowl. Still less helpful is it to be aggrieved that the mirror shows bitterness. The aggrieved look will make the reflection still less amiable. But as soon as you change what is in yourself—malice to sympathy, jealousy to friendliness, suspicion to appreciation—the change will be reflected back at you from the mirror. And in your life also. A man who is full of malice will be subject to the malice of circumstances; one who is open and trusting will meet with unexpected help; one who is at war with the world will find the world at war with him.

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Mountain Path* for April 1966, p. 140 [p. 205 of this volume].

<sup>2</sup> *Koran*, XLI, 53.

Again it must be repeated that this cannot be taken crudely and simply. It does not mean that a just man can never be cheated or an honest man exploited. Nevertheless it does remain true in a general way; and in specific cases it is often self-evident.

This carries the implication that a man's environment is not merely something passive, like a reflection in a mirror, but also an active influence which, by changing as he changes, can provide a means for his spiritual progress. The whole universe manifests the Attributes of God, while His Essence remains unchanged. So it is also with a man and his environment. "We will show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth."<sup>2</sup> This is the same promise or threat as that referred to earlier: God will not change your state until you change first what is in yourself; He will continue to manifest His signs outwardly and in yourself until you recognize their truth. Your whole life is a book of signs if you could read them aright. A mean and timid man will find himself insecure in a threatening environment; and inwardly too the sicknesses he suffers from will be those of deficiency; but let him muster up courage to fulfil his obligations generously and both health and circumstances will change accordingly. The correspondence may not always be as obvious as that, but it often is; and in more subtle ways the signs are always there on the horizons and in ourselves. But too often our self-will prevents us from seeing them. And then we pray for the mirror of life to change its expression and rail against blind fate when it does not. It is we who are blind.



## “Which, Then of Your Lord’s Bounties Will You Reject?”

Again I refer to the distinction between a world-renouncing and a world-sanctifying religion.<sup>1</sup> A religion is far more than a creed, it is also a whole way of life. This is why any syncretism between the religions is futile. Even though they are paths to the same goal, they are very different paths with different vehicles of travel. To try to apply the provisions of one to another would be like trying to put a canal barge on tram lines. Islam, for instance, has never been a religion of renunciation, celibacy, asceticism, like Christianity and Buddhism. If some faqirs have become ascetics and mendicants it has been largely under Hindu or Christian influence; in general even the Sufi is expected to be married and to earn his living. The Muslim says ‘yes’ to life; he opens his arms to embrace both worlds.

“And the earth He hath set out for His creatures, with fruit in it and palm-clusters and grain in its husk and fragrant herbs. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you reject?”<sup>2</sup>

“Do you not see that Allah has subjected to you what is in the heavens and what is on earth and completed his favours upon you both outwardly and inwardly?”<sup>3</sup>

“You who believe, do not deny yourselves the good things that Allah has made lawful to you, but do not exceed the limits.”<sup>4</sup>

There is always that postulate, not to exceed the limits. Acceptance of life does not mean self-indulgence; it means a

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<sup>1</sup> See *Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of Hinduism*, Ch.1, by Arthur Osborne, also my reference to this in my article *A World-Sanctifying Religion* in *The Mountain Path* of January 1965, p. 7 [p. 185 of this volume].

<sup>2</sup> *Koran*, LV, 10-13.

<sup>3</sup> *Koran*, XXXI, 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Koran*, V, 87.

sober, dignified lordship over life—sober too in a literal sense, for alcohol is one of the things that are forbidden.

A Christian takes it for granted that his enemies are ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’, but for the Muslim the first two of these are not enemies. They are the creations of Allah, given to him to utilise and enjoy within measure and to give thanks for. True, there are dangers in them, in exceeding the limits and becoming their slave instead of their master; but to the Muslim it seems ignoble to reject God’s bounties out of fear of misusing them. It seems nobler and stronger to control oneself while accepting them, so as not to exceed the limits. Thus a very different attitude towards life prevails.

This also results, when rightly held, in a different organization of life. A man is not exhorted to renounce his property and become a mendicant. That would be saying ‘no’ to life. He is told to use his property wisely, support his family, adopt orphans, give relief to the destitute, free slaves and pay the poor rate. One result of this is that social snobbery is foreign to Islam. For instance, there has never been any contempt for the merchant class, as there was in the feudal societies of Christendom. In the time of the Prophet many of the leading Muslims were merchants who became soldiers in time of war and were priests for their own families. In later ages the spread of Islam through large parts of Asia and Africa was the achievement mainly of merchant settlers. Professional missionaries were not employed.

Indeed, there are no professional priests. Each Muslim stands before God, a priest in his own right and for his own family. Later a class of ulema or doctors of the law and maulvis or religious teachers grew up and acquired great prestige, but they never had the functions or the privileges of a priesthood. Even in our own time, I have attended a crowded Muslim concourse where, for one of the daily prayers of one of the groups, the imam whose duty it was to lead the prayers did not come on time, so an ordinary Muslim from the crowd stepped forward and took his place.

Had the injunctions of Islam been rightly observed, another result of this organization of life might have been that there would have been no poverty in Islamic communities—and heaven knows there has been plenty. For the prescribed poor-rate should have been enough to relieve poverty. Being an annual payment of 2 ½ percent not on income but on unutilised capital, it is the most economically sound of all taxes, since it does not withdraw wealth from circulation, like an income tax, but puts it back into circulation. Its great weakness is the difficulty of assessment. It became necessarily largely dependent on the conscience of the individual—and the conscience of the individual failed. It fails eventually in all religions, because a religion necessarily maintains the fiction that the entire population of a country follow it. I say ‘necessarily’, and in a world-sanctifying religion it is indeed necessary to organize the whole community; in a world-renouncing religion it might in theory seem possible to exclude the mass of the community, all except the genuine aspirants who are willing to renounce the world for Christ’s sake, but it does not work out that way. The hypocrites cannot be abandoned to their suicidal folly, even though they desire it and even though, by being drawn in, they befoul the purity of the religion that embraces them.

A world-renouncing religion lays down rules only for the individual. We know, for instance, that in Christianity the meek, the pure-hearted, the mournful, the persecuted are considered blessed, but about the prescribed pattern of society practically nothing. Christ’s kingdom was not of this world, so he laid down no rules for the organization of this world. He gave injunctions for the life of Christians but not of a Christendom. That grew up later, piecemeal, out of various disparate elements. But at the fountain-head of the religion, when slaves ask for advice they are simply told to obey their masters—nothing about setting them free. When people ask about obeying an alien, irreligious government they are simply told to pay their taxes, to “render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s”.



The Islamic ideal is very different. No honour attaches to celibacy or poverty, to weeping or being persecuted. The ideal is the householder who stands foursquare, supporting himself and his family and upholding his religion. Therefore the scripture necessarily regulates social as well as private life, enjoins trading honestly, giving good measure, not taking interest on loans, freeing slaves, endowing a wife, restricting divorce, defending the community when attacked. For a Muslim does resist evil, whether directed against himself or others. Islam is not a quietist religion. The Muslim, being God's khalifa on earth, has the duty of upholding righteousness and taking action against malefactors; which implies incidentally, defending churches and synagogues as well as mosques, in case of attack.

Even the regulation of individual conduct is more detailed, so as to have a social effect also. For instance, the twofold ban on alcohol and gambling is enough in itself to give a different face to Islamic society. And again and again it is declared in the *Koran* that Allah loves not merely 'those who believe' but 'those who believe and do good'. Always the practical outer manifestation of faith is demanded. And the word used for 'good' is a plural; it does not mean a vague abstract goodness but actual good deeds.

Both religions have fallen woefully short of their ideal through the centuries, but the fact that there were these very different ideals in the background—in the one case the celibate and ascetic and in the other the householder and worker—entailed a difference in the attitude to life no less important than any difference in doctrine.



## The Will to Perversity

ONE OF THE hardest sayings in the *KORAN* is that Allah is He who leads aright and also He who leads astray. Another is that the unbelievers would not deny if Allah had not willed it so. Thus the scripture itself boldly settles the problem that so torments theologians—how people can go astray if an omnipotent God does not wish it, or how a good and compassionate God can wish it.

This shows how far from anthropomorphic the Islamic conception of God is, when rightly understood. For it is only man who is good or bad, morally speaking. Which is a thunderstorm? Which is the birth of a nebula or the collision of galaxies or the mating of a queen bee? Cosmic events, indeed non-human events generally, follow a pattern or harmony that is neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong in any moral sense. It is only man who has been plunged or, to speak more correctly, has sunk into the realm of good and evil.

The conception of good and evil implies responsibility, obligation, the obligation to choose the good and shun the evil, and it is man alone in the universe who has this. Responsibility in its turn implies free will. Man has free will to work out his salvation and is held responsible in the *Koran* for not doing so. He alone in the universe has free will because he alone has responsibility. This is declared in one of the most cryptic sayings of the *Koran*: “Behold, we offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid. But man assumed it. Only he has proved a tyrant and a fool.”<sup>1</sup> He has used his power of decision and his responsibility to develop his self-will, becoming the tyrant over the earth and its creatures and a fool towards himself, encompassing his own downfall instead of his salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Koran*, Ch. XXXIII, v. 72.

This drives us farther back to the teaching of religion: that the true and primordial state of man is above the dichotomy of good and evil, that is to say, above free will in the sense of the will to perversity and denial. This is expressed in the Judaeo-Christian scriptures and in the *Koran* by the creation myth of Adam and Eve in a state of paradise before they ate the forbidden fruit of the tree of good and evil. The *Koran* further amplifies this by declaring that man was created higher than the angels, who bowed down in homage before him. The angels manifest specific aspects of Allah and have knowledge and power each in his own domain, but man is His vicegerent, central and broad-based. This is indicated by saying that Adam was taught the names of things. He had knowledge and dominion, which the angels had not.

Thus the 'fall' of man assumes the appearance of responsibility accepted but misused. Indeed, the *Koran* avoids the terms 'fall' and 'original sin': they are no part of Islamic doctrine. The sin of mankind, symbolised by Adam, is recorded, but in entering the domain of good and evil he assumed responsibility and undertook the obligation to work out his return, that is his salvation; and therefore Adam is also referred to as a prophet.

How does this affirmation of the choice of good and evil resulting in the assumption of responsibility conform with the statement of predestination with which this article opened? To make it still more explicit: the unbelievers are condemned in the *Koran* for saying that they would not have denied Allah had it not been His will; and yet in another verse, as remarked above, this is stated about them. How can these two statements be reconciled? They must be viewed as applying on different planes of reality, as is often the case when there is an apparent contradiction in religious teaching. Christ's saying that "evil must needs come but woe to him through whom it cometh" contains the same apparent contradiction or injustice; for if it is predestined that evil should come, how can he be held

responsible through whom the Divine ordinance is fulfilled? The two halves of the statement have to be understood on different planes. On the cosmic plane there is an inevitable pattern of creation and dissolution, some parts of which appear 'evil' when viewed from the human plane, on which alone, as I remarked earlier, the conception of 'evil' exists. But he who abides on the human plane has the responsibility which the terms 'good' and 'evil' imply and cannot shelter behind cosmic laws of an impersonal level. So also with these Koranic sayings. When it is said that it is Allah who leads astray or that men could not deny had He not willed it so, the reference is to the cosmic pattern of out-going and return, creation and dissolution which are neither good nor evil in themselves but may seem so from the human level; when the deniers are blamed for putting forth this plea in their defence it is from the human level, that is to say, the level of responsibility: and they are responsible.

Moreover, whether their course of action is predestined or not, they cannot know what is predestined and therefore cannot take shelter behind it. It is human ignorance that reconciles predestination with responsibility and therefore with free will. A crude example will make this very clear. No one would say: "I won't eat because if I am predestined to die of starvation it is no use my trying to eat." It would be madness because of the gratuitous 'if'. He does not know that he is predestined to die of starvation. There is no less folly and no less presumption in the man who says: "I will not strive in the way of Allah because it is no use if I am predestined to fail." Or who says: "I would not deny the truth or reject the commandments unless Allah willed it." How does he know what is predestined or, which comes to the same, what Allah was willed? A man's free will is conditioned by his ignorance; indeed it is bestowed on him by his ignorance. Not only has he not the right but he has not the power to abdicate from it, since his ignorance of coming events

forces decisions on him whether he wants them or not. It is the 'trust' which all other declined and man accepted.

That man has the freedom to fall from his high estate he has proved abundantly and men go on proving without cease; the important question is whether he has the freedom to return to it. And the *Koran* constantly reassures us that he has. Allah, it asserts, does not burden any man beyond his capacity. He is referred to again and again throughout the *Koran* as "the Merciful, the Compassionate". This may appear anthropomorphic but in reality it is not. It does not mean ascribing the human qualities of mercy and compassion to God but, on the contrary, implies that these human qualities are faint reflections of the Divine Attributes. The Mercy and Compassion of Allah manifests in the guidance of mankind and of each individual man back to the paradise of his true primordial state, but with its virtual perfections actualised and the possibility of a fall from it back into perversity and denial thereby removed. It is for this that the prophets and saints have come down upon earth and that the scriptures have been proclaimed and the paths established. Hard though the way of return may be, we have the assurance of the *Koran* that Allah does not burden any man beyond his capacity.

But what of those who reject the truth and deny and will not listen? They indeed have their free will. No compulsion can be exercised upon them. They choose perversity and denial; and this does not mean merely accepting wrong philosophical opinions or false religious doctrine, it means choosing not to recognize the higher possibilities hidden within themselves or to undertake the self-discipline needed to reveal and stabilize them. It means refusing to subject individual self-will to universal principles or mental theories to divine intuition. Thereby they bring themselves into a state of darkness and torment called 'hell'. So that even hell is a manifestation of the Divine Mercy, since it is the only way by which those who choose the freedom

to reject and deny can return to their true state of Bliss unspeakable. But it is a terrible road and the *Koran*, as a voice of Compassion, cries out again and again to warn men against it and to remind them what they are laying up for themselves.

But men have also the freedom to return gladly and voluntarily to conformity with the universal harmony which is the Will of Allah; and doing so brings supreme happiness. It means rising above free will by willing to be will-less. To such a one the question whether he has free will or not does not arise. Only then do they see how evanescent was this whole episode of strife and turmoil. "He will say: 'How many years did you abide on earth?' And they: 'A day or a part of a day. But ask those who keep account.' He will say: 'You abode there but a short time, if only you had known. Did you then think that we had created you to no purpose and that you should not be brought back to Us?' "<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>2</sup> *Koran*, Ch. XXIII, v. 112-115

# Shari'at and Tariqat

IN epochs when men attached too great an importance to formal orthodoxy (as today they attach too little) cases were known of Sufis deliberately flouting the shari'at, the law of Islam, in order to shock people. There were even cases of their pretending to do so, as in the story of the Sufi who went for a picnic on the river bank carrying a wine-jar and accompanied by a woman; but when some orthodox busybodies solemnly went to investigate they found the woman to be his mother and the wine-jar full of water. Real or pretended, such violations of the law served the useful purpose of shocking the literalists out of their idolatrous worship of formalities. As a general rule, however, and apart from some exceptions, Sufis have been fully orthodox and have expected their disciples to follow the shari'at or outer law as the basis for their tariqat or spiritual path. Antinomianism is not recognized in Islam. The higher obligation does not exempt from the more elementary but rather insists on it. The law and traditions establish a way of life that is mandatory for all Muslims.

The law is flexible enough to distinguish between obligatory duties and additional, voluntary ones. For instance, the five ritualistic daily prayers are obligatory, whether said in congregation or privately; but a sixth to be said between midnight and dawn is voluntary. The Sufi aspirant is far more likely to say the voluntary also than to neglect the obligatory.

In prohibitions also there is a similar distinction between what is absolutely forbidden and what is disapproved of but allowed. There is a hadith that of all things permitted divorce is the most displeasing in the sight of God. If one were to ask why then it is permitted at all the answer might be that the evil of enforced lifelong partnership of unwilling partners is even

greater. On the other hand, it is said in the *Koran* that the evil of drinking alcohol is greater than the advantages, and therefore that is absolutely forbidden.

Despite this prohibition, wine and intoxication feature largely in Sufi poetry, an example widely known to readers of English being the *Rubaiyat* of Umar Khayyam. There is no doubt that wine was sometime drunk; nevertheless these poems are universally understood by Sufi readers to be symbolical, as when Jalaluddin Rumi writes in his *Diwan*:

*Drunk is the Man of God, drunk without wine.*

Wine is the Divine Grace, intoxication is a state of ecstasy, the tavern is the world, and the inn-keeper is the *murshid* or guru. And when a Sufi master declares that sobriety is better than inebriety his meaning is that it is better to contain the Divine Grace without disturbing one's normal conduct of life than to fall into trances and states of ecstasy.

The Islamic pattern of life, for the Sufi as for the ordinary believer, covers not only law and ritual but what might be called social conventions. Indeed, *adab* is a code of courtesy or right behaviour. A Muslim will say "It's not *adab*" in the same way that an Englishman says: "It's not done"; and the expression is just as conclusive. Only there is no element of snobbism in *adab*, as there can be in Western social codes: being based on the traditions and observances of the Prophet, it is accessible to the humble as well as the mighty and helps to fashion the peculiar social democracy of Islamic communities. It may in some cases differ remarkably from Western rules of courtesy and give rise to amusing misunderstandings, but that is to be expected between two different civilizations. For instance, to refrain from belching after a meal shows little appreciation of the host's food. Also, it is *adab* for a guest to get up and go as soon as he finishes a meal. Therefore a courteous host will prolong his guest's visit by delaying the meal, whereas one gets rid of boring guests by serving food to them.



The actual shari'at is the foundation of life. It is the part of the *salik* or spiritual wayfarer to go beyond it. Never could he arrogate to himself the right to fall short of it. There is no faith without works in Islam. Again and again it is repeated in the *Koran* that Allah loves those who believe and do good. The word for 'good' in this phrase is a plural implying 'good works', not any vague general goodness; and the *Koran* is specific enough about the good works that are required.



## The Miracle of the *Koran*

MOHAMMAD DID NOT work miracles. Instead, the Divine Grace flowing through him created the *Koran*. It is, indeed, stated therein, in reply to demands for miracles, that its verses were the signs that he brought, which is the more pointed as their name, 'ayat' means 'sign' and therefore 'miracle'. Towards the beginning of his testimony, before he had yet been expelled from Mecca for bearing it, he hung up ten verses from the *Koran* in the Kaaba, where it was the custom of poets to exhibit their works, with a challenge to any who doubted their divine inspiration to produce others the like of them; and that in a language and a race famed for its poetry.

The impact of this book composed through the instrumentality of a man who was already forty years of age when it began, was illiterate and had never composed a thing, was stupendous. It was a new literary form, a kind of rhythmical rhymed prose. Already in Mohammed's lifetime there were people who could recite the whole of it by heart and could have replaced it if all the texts had been destroyed: and there have been ever since. Hafiz

or 'guardian' such a one is called. Therefore the claim of some hostile Western critics that the original texts were in a scattered and fragmentary condition means little.

Through the influence of this book the Arabic of the time of King Alfred and Charlemagne, before any of the languages of present-day Europe had evolved, is still the classical language of Arabic lands today. Local dialects have, of course, diverged from it, but not enough to prevent it being spoken, read and understood. And throughout the whole Islamic world portions of the *Koran* are recited five times a day by those who fulfil their obligations.

It is emphatically stated in the *Koran* that it is not poetry, and those who speak of it as such are denounced. In order to understand this it is necessary to see what the term 'poetry' conveyed to the Arabs of Mohammed's time. It did not imply, on the one hand, divine revelation, nor, on the other, the tepid imagination and banal observation of life and nature that so often goes by the name today. Lyric and narrative poetry were flourishing and its creators were apt to be ecstasies. As among various other ancient peoples, they were something like present-day mediums, possessed by familiar spirits, similar to the 'controls' of the mediums. These might even overpower them and speak through them. When, therefore, it was known that Mohammed fell into a trance in which portions of the *Koran* were revealed to him, which he recited on coming round, it was natural that some should declare that this was the same thing. It was in fact quite different because it was no familiar spirit that revealed the verses to Mohammed but the Angel Gabriel, that is the Spirit of Divine Revelation. And their form and content differed accordingly.

Incidentally, the malicious suggestion of some Western critics that Mohammed 'fraudulently' concocted the *Koran* or some parts of it, only pretending to have heard them in trance, is, from a purely literary point of view (apart from all other

considerations) rather like accusing Milton of 'fraudulently' concocting *Paradise Lost*. There is a difference, of course, because Milton was a poet, whereas Mohammed was not.

Translation of great work of literature is always difficult but perhaps more so with the *Koran* than any other. In the first place, it is not divided systematically according to subject, as a thesis or exposition in the Western sense of the word would be. A legal injunction such as to draw up a document testified to by two witnesses when taking a loan may be followed by an affirmation of Divine Omniscience, then by an encouragement to the faithful and a warning to unbelievers and evil-doers; this again by a reference to one of the prophets. In fact it has to be read and pondered passage by passage and often verse by verse. Then again, there are many topical allusions which would be lost on the modern reader without footnotes. And it is both cryptic and symbolical. For instance, an ejaculation such as "And the stars!" Is it to be translated: "And behold the stars!" or "Consider the stars!" or "What of the stars?" or "I swear by the stars!" ? But the greatest difficulty is purely linguistic. That, however, means more than semantic, since turns of phrase cover and mould turns of thought. For instance, the saying "To God do we belong and to Him do we return" does not strike one as particularly noteworthy; and yet the power and beauty of the original Arabic and its suggestion of utter surrender are such that it is often used as an incantation.

Muslims do not forbid or discourage translation, but for worship and ritual the original Arabic has to be used. In fact the only way of reading the *Koran* satisfactorily is to master at least enough Arabic to read the original text side by side with a fairly literal translation.

# The Place of Islam in History

ISLAM HOLDS A peculiar place in history, being the concluding enunciation of religion for this cycle. This is indicated in the *Koran* in the saying that Mohammed is the 'Seal of the Prophets'.<sup>1</sup>

The Semitic tradition begins with the pure monotheism of Abraham, from which both the Jewish and Arabic trends descend. "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but an upright man and a Muslim."<sup>2</sup> The word 'Muslim' here obviously has its simple meaning of 'one who is submitted to God' and its application to Abraham represents a viewpoint from which Islam is more primordial than either Judaism or Christianity. These were two moulds into which the original pure monotheism was later cast; and Abraham, being prior to them, was subject to neither. Nor was Islam which, coming after them, returned to the original pure monotheism. "Indeed, the closest to Abraham are those who follow him and this Prophet (Mohammed) and who believe."<sup>3</sup>

The pristine purity of a people and its religion declines in course of time.<sup>4</sup> Stringent regulations become necessary to hold people to that what was once followed freely. Thus the Law of Moses became necessary for the Jews. To say that it was a degeneration from the freer and less formal tradition of Abraham does not imply any criticism of Moses. It was what had become necessary. Similarly when the Jews adopted kingship and a later stage it was clearly stated in their scriptures that it was a concession made necessary by their spiritual and moral decline.

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<sup>1</sup> XXXIII, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Koran*, III, 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Bhagavad Gita*, IV, I and 2.

The next transformation brought about in the tradition was that of Christ, and to some extent it was a return to Abraham, since it replaced the rigidity of law by the flexibility of love. However it was never completed; it remained a world-renouncing path for the few, not a world-sanctifying religion for the whole community. Once again, it implies no criticism to say that it remained incomplete, because Christ himself said so. In his final message to his disciples he told them: "I have yet many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now."<sup>5</sup> Then when? Obviously not in this lifetime because his teaching for this lifetime was being brought to an end. In fact he specified that it was not he who was to complete his message by teaching them the 'many things' that still remained but the 'Comforter' who was to come after him. Who was this 'Comforter'? And how was he to teach? Christ gave the necessary clue when he elucidated that he would not speak of himself but only what he heard or what was revealed to him.<sup>6</sup> Christians declare that he was referring to the coming of the Holy Ghost, but that does not tally. The Holy Ghost is held to be one of the three aspects or Persons of God; and how can it be said that God does not speak of Himself but only what is revealed to Him? The only person whom the prophecy does fit is Mohammed. In fact the particular characteristic of Mohammed among the Prophets was that he did not compose the *Koran* ("speak of himself") but heard it revealed piecemeal in states of trance and, on awakening from the trance, recited what he had heard—exactly as Christ had prophesied. It is a remarkable confirmation of this (if any were needed) that the Greek word 'Paraklete', which is translated as 'Comforter' is equivalent except for one letter to the Arabic 'Ahmed', which is the more esoteric form of 'Mohammed'.

Thus we see that Islam was not only the consummation of the Semitic monotheistic tradition which arose with Abraham

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<sup>5</sup> *St. John*, XVI, 12.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

but also, more specifically, the first stage in the completion of the original Christianity, transforming it from a world-renouncing path for the few into a world-sanctifying religion for a whole community. I say 'the first stage' because a second and final stage of completion (which also Christ prophesied) is to be the Second Coming of Christ.

How does Islam stand with regard to this? The *Koran* says nothing about it, but there are hadiths or sayings of the Prophet referring to it. The common western idea that the 'Mehdi' expected by Muslims is the same as the Second Coming of Christ is incorrect. He is to come as the forerunner of Christ and is therefore more equivalent to John the Baptist. It is prophesied in the hadiths that Christ is to reappear in the Middle East and as a Muslim.

This points to a very urgent problem: The Jews did not recognize the first coming of their Messiah in Christ; the Christians did not recognize the first stage in the completion of Christianity in the institution of Islam; what likelihood is there that either Jews or Christians will recognize the final consummation of their religion in the Second Coming of Christ? Or that Muslims will either? If Abraham, through whom the Semitic monotheism had its origin, is referred to as a 'Muslim' in the sense of 'submitted to God' although he lived centuries before the religion known as 'Islam' was instituted, what more likely than that he through whom this monotheism is to attain its consummation should be a 'Muslim' in the same informal sense? In that case, is it not to be expected that once again only those few who, as Christ put it, "have ears to hear" should recognize the new Messenger and his Message and the orthodox in all three religions reject it?



# CHRISTIANITY

# An Aggressive Teacher

CHRIST WAS AN aggressive teacher. Verbally, he hit back hard when attacked. No “gentle Jesus meek and mild” about him. His method was always to counter-attack and put the attacker on the defensive.

When Buddha came to a rest-house with a few followers one night and heard a sadhu there holding forth against him and his teaching he neither intervened nor allowed his followers to. This magnanimity had such an effect that the attacker became a follower. When abused he answered mildly that since he refused to accept the abuse it must fall back on its utterer. When, on the other hand, to take one characteristic example among many, some Pharisees asked Jesus why his disciples ate without the prescribed ritualistic washing of hands, he rounded on them, calling them hypocrites, quoting Isaiah against them and adding: “You are so busy holding on to the traditions of men that you let go the Commandment of God.<sup>1</sup> True, of course, but certainly the way to make enemies.”<sup>2</sup>

Once when he was accusing some Pharisees of hypocrisy a doctor of law protested: “Master, when you say things like that you are insulting us as well.”

And he returned: “Yes and do I blame you experts in law! For you pile up back-breaking burdens for other men to bear but you yourselves will not raise a finger to lift them. Alas for you, for you build memorial tombs for the Prophets—the very men whom your fathers murdered. You show clearly enough

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<sup>1</sup> In these articles my quotations from the *Gospels* will normally be taken from the translation of J.B. Phillips, *The Gospel in Modern English*, Fontana paperback, Collins, as the Authorised Version is so over-familiar and its wording so obscure to the ordinary reader that the sharp edge of the sayings is blunted.

<sup>2</sup> *St. Mark*, ch. VII, v. 6-8.



how you approve of your father's actions. They did the actual killing and you put up a memorial to it."<sup>3</sup>

Many of the lawyers may have deserved rebuke for being formalists—many lawyers do in all ages; but they could hardly help being antagonized by such an onslaught. Many of the Pharisees may have been hypocrites, but we know from surviving Jewish accounts that some of them at least were men of integrity and devotion sincerely trying to perpetuate all that was best in the Jewish tradition.

Moreover, Christ's saying that all who were not for him were against him implied that they were deliberately being treated as enemies. To recognize the new teaching and Teacher must have required such integrity and understanding that there were bound to be quite a number who did not—priests, lawyers, ordinary people—and a wholesale denunciation of them seems unnecessarily aggressive to those steeped in any Eastern tradition. Buddha rejected the Brahmin monopoly of wisdom as firmly as Christ did that of the Pharisees, but he never denounced them; he simply accepted non-Brahmins into his Order on the same footing as Brahmins.

It was not only what Christ taught that was aggressive but the circumstances he chose for teaching it in. Buddha wandered quietly about the country, teaching those who would listen. The Maharshi did not even do that; he stayed at his Ashram at Tiruvannamalai and if any came and asked questions he answered them. But Jesus went and taught in the great Temple of Jerusalem during the most crowded festival of the Jewish year and while doing so mingled his own teaching with violent attacks on the guardians of the Jewish tradition, warning the people not to imitate their way of living<sup>4</sup> and telling them: "You are like white-washed tombs, which look fine on the outside but inside are full of dead men's

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<sup>3</sup> *St. Luke*, ch. XI, v. 46-48.

<sup>4</sup> *St. Matthew*, Ch. XXIII, v. 3.

bones and all kinds of rottenness. For you appear like good men on the outside—but inside you are a mass of pretence and wickedness.”<sup>5</sup> From the social point of view, the priests and lawyers (and they were the guardians of the social order—the more important since political power was in the hands of an alien conqueror) must have regarded much of this as rabble-rousing and the speaker as a dangerous revolutionary.

Another striking feature is that Jesus constantly demanded belief not only in his teaching but in himself and denounced those who did not believe in him. “The difference between us is that you come from below and I come from above. You belong to this world but I do not. That is why I told you, you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am Who I am you will die in your sins.”<sup>6</sup> There is a similar emphasis in Islam; the *Koran* is full of assertions that Muhammad is a true Prophet and denunciations of those who do not recognize him as such. In both cases the assertion may have been true, the denunciation justified, but apart from the truth of a teaching there is the manner in which it is delivered to be considered. The former might be called ‘vertical’, the descent from Formless Truth to the forms of a human world, the latter ‘horizontal’, the permeation of the human world. Between the two is the impact, the striking of the vertical on the horizontal, and the nature of this can vary. How much more gracious it seems when Buddha says: “Don’t believe because I tell you or any one else does. Try it out for yourselves and see whether it works, and only believe if you find it brings good results.”

But Christ’s was the aggressive way.



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<sup>5</sup> *St. Matthew*, Ch. XXIII, v. 27-28.

<sup>6</sup> *St. John*, Ch. VIII, v. 23-24.

# Spiritual Traditions of the Greek Orthodox Church

THE WORD ‘ORTHODOXY’<sup>1</sup> comes from two Greek words meaning ‘right glory’. So Orthodoxy means right worship, and that implies right belief and right thinking. We are reminded of what our Lord said to the Samaritan woman: “God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24).

People sometimes say, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you live a good life.” That is a very unthinking remark. In fact, it isn’t true. The truth is that it is of vital importance what we believe, because:

(i) “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” still less to be saved (*Heb.* 11:6);

(ii) “The devils also believe, and tremble,” i.e. they are terrified, having neither hope nor love, but believing that what we love and hope for will come true (*Jas.* 2:19);

(iii) If we do not believe in God we cannot receive His life and power to worship, love and glorify Him. Then, deprived of grace, we fall into idolatry and immorality (*Rom.* 1:20-32; *Wisdom*, chs. 13 & 14);

(iv) Our character and conduct depends on what we believe. Character is what we are. Conduct is what we do. What we are and what we do makes up the whole of our life. So our whole life depends on what we believe (*Gal.* 3:11).

An illustration: A mother tells her child that fire hurts, but the

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<sup>1</sup> The word ‘orthodoxy’ is used in this article in a technical sense, as applying to the Greek Orthodox Church, just as members of the Church of Rome use ‘catholic’ in a technical sense, as applying to their Church.

child does not believe it. The mother goes away. Left to itself, the child crawls to the fire and puts its hand in. It screams, cries and changes its faith, and consequently changes its conduct.

The Orthodox Church is very rich in dogma, doctrine, dogmatic belief. Where does this revealed truth come from? Orthodox dogma comes from Holy Tradition and Holy Scripture, and is to be found largely in the Church Service books. I suppose the Orthodox Service books are the richest in the world, and these services are based primarily on the twin sources I have just mentioned. In a sense there is only one source, for Holy Scripture is really part of Holy Tradition. It is a form of written tradition. In the life of the Church, and in the life of the individual, tradition comes first. From Adam for many centuries there were no books. Religion was dependent on the traditions handed down from father to son. Even in New Testament times, our Lord wrote nothing. How did the Apostles and early Christians get their faith and knowledge? By tradition handed on by word of mouth. It was not until 397 A.D. that the Canon of the New Testament was fixed as we have it today. And in the life of the individual, each of us gets his first knowledge of life and religion normally from his parents. Long before we can read we learn from their lives and lips. So the Apostle Paul says: "Hold the traditions which you have been taught by word or letter" (*2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Cor. 11:2*).

Public worship holds a very large place in Orthodox life. The centre of Orthodox worship is the Holy Liturgy or Holy Eucharist or Holy Sacrifice or Lord's Supper, the various names indicating different aspects of the service. Here we are reminded of the nature of the Gospel, of the heart of redemption. For in the Liturgy the whole of Christ's life and Passion is commemorated and re-enacted by word, symbol and action from His humble birth in the stable in Bethlehem to His glorious Resurrection and Ascension and the sitting at the right hand of the Father. In addition to all the other aspects of the service, the

Liturgy is a deep sermon in itself. That is why in the Orthodox Church it is not such a tragedy as it is with other Christians if the priest is a poor preacher or for some reason cannot preach, for the service in itself is a most profound and vivid sermon.

At a meeting of Presbyterian ministers, while discussing the Virgin Birth of Christ one minister said, "There are many in this Presbytery who do not believe in that particular fable. I myself am one who does not accept it."

One of them asked, "Then how did you become a Presbyterian minister?"

He replied, "I did accept it when I was much younger. But I have since become educated and no longer hold my previous belief."

One asked, "Do you mind telling us just why you do not believe in the Virgin Birth?"

He said, "I don't believe in that doctrine because it is only found on two pages of the *New Testament*. Matthew and Luke are the only ones who ever mention it. In all the writings of Paul he never introduced the question of the Virgin Birth. Peter never mentions it in his writings, and Jesus was utterly ignorant of any such suggestion. You never find it in a single sentence or statement uttered by Jesus Himself."

"Then tell us," one minister asked, "what do you teach and preach?"

"The Sermon on the Mount," was his instant reply. "That is enough Gospel for anyone."

"Not for me," answered the other minister, "because I don't believe in the Sermon on the Mount!"

If a bomb had been dropped, it could not have created more excitement. Somewhat bewildered, the first minister asked, "What do you mean when you say that you don't believe in the Sermon on the Mount?"

The other replied, "I don't believe that Jesus ever uttered the words that you call the Sermon on the Mount."

Greatly astonished, he said, "Why ever not?"

"Because it only occurs on two pages of the *New Testament*. Matthew and Luke are the only men who ever mention it. Paul never talked of the Sermon on the Mount. Peter says nothing about it. James, John and Jude are equally ignorant of it. Now, following your line of reason, if Matthew and Luke lied about the Virgin Birth, why should I believe them concerning the Sermon on the Mount?"

Of course, it is not true that St. Paul knew nothing of the Virgin Birth, for he never once calls Jesus "Son of Man" but constantly calls Him the Son of God. And where did Matthew and Luke get the information they give us in the Gospels if not from Jesus and Mary? That, however, is not my subject for the moment. The point I wish to make is this. There are many people in the world today who think that the Sermon on the Mount is the essence and heart of the Gospel. "Give us more of the Sermon on the Mount and less theology," they say. Even such a great man as Mahatma Gandhi said: "The message of Jesus is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, unadulterated and taken as a whole." It is one of the popular heresies and it needs to be answered.

The Sermon on the Mount is not the Gospel that the early Church taught. When St. Paul wanted to recall the Corinthians to the fundamentals of Christianity he did not say: "Blessed are the peacemakers. Do not resist an evil person. Love your enemies. Let tomorrow take care of itself. Do to others what you would like them to do to you. Be perfect." Those are magnificent principles. They could be called good advice. They could not possibly be called good news. No, St. Paul wrote something quite different. Here are his words: "I delivered to you among the fundamentals what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried,

that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve, then to more than 500 brothers at once, then to James, then to all the Apostles. Last of all He appeared to me” (*1 Cor.* 15:1-9).

And here is what St. Peter preached: “The God of our fathers raised Jesus Whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. It is this Jesus Whom God has exalted at His right hand to be our Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit Whom God has given to those who obey Him” (*Acts* 5: 30-32).

In any case the original Gospel was not a sermon, and not just the Beatitudes. It was thrilling news, glad tidings of great joy for all the peoples of the world. It was Jesus Himself, the divine Saviour, His life, His death, His Cross, His Empty Tomb, His Kingdom, His love and forgiveness, His power and His glory. It is this great truth that our salvation depends on, the act of God, on what God in His great love has done for us, that Orthodox Spirituality insists upon and emphasises in a remarkable way. In order to fix in the minds and hearts of the faithful what God has done for us, the Orthodox church, besides the Creed, has twelve great annual Feasts commemorating events in the drama of Redemption.

You may be surprised to learn that Easter is not one of the twelve. So great is the Resurrection in the mind of the Church that it is in a class by itself and is called “The Feast of Feasts and Triumph of Triumphs”. Easter is always celebrated at midnight and the service usually takes till about dawn. To attend an Orthodox Easter Service is an unforgettable experience. Many people, including Roman Catholic priests and monks, have told me that they have never seen any service to compare with it. The singing, especially as performed in the Russian Church, is uplifting in the extreme. One detail: at certain points in the service the priest greets the people in a loud voice with the words, “Christ is Risen,” and the congregation responds, “He is Risen

indeed!” This is also how people greet one another at Easter time. Instead of saying “Good Day” or “Namaskaram”, one says “Christ is Risen” and the response is “He is Risen Indeed”. On Sundays and at Easter there is a rule that prostrations to the ground are not to be made, as the joy of the Resurrection overwhelms even the sense of penitence. Also at Easter the psalms are not used for a whole week, and there is no fasting.

No days are blank in the Orthodox calendar. Every day some saints are remembered. Saints are of various classes. The Greek word *martyr* means a witness. The martyrs bore witness to Christ with their blood. It is possible to be a martyr in various ways. “Feel the tortures of conscience,” says St. Athanasius, “die to sin, amputate sinful desires, and you will be martyr in will. The martyrs struggled with the torturers, kings and princes. You have a torturer, the devil; he is the king of sin. There are also prince-persecutors, namely demons. If you refrain from these passions and from sinful desires, it will mean that you have trampled on the idols and become a martyr.” So much for St. Athanasius.

Typical of Orthodoxy is the group of saints called ‘Fools for Christ’s sake’. These were men and women who, for the love of God and in response to a special call, pretended to be mad or mentally abnormal. I think the earliest was a nun of Tabenna in the Egyptian desert, St. Isidora (380). She was never known to eat proper food. She lived on the scraps the nuns left. It was a large community and she was mostly treated with disdain and abhorrence. But such was her humility that she never refused to serve and obey everyone in the lowliest tasks.

Another Fool was St. Basil of Moscow who died in 1552, aged 88. One of the most magnificent churches in the world was built in his honour and can be seen in Moscow today. Once the Russian Emperor was building a new palace on Sparrow Mountains. One day he went to church, but instead of praying he was thinking about beautifying the new palace. St. Basil went to the same church and stood in a corner unnoticed. But he saw what the Emperor



was doing with his mind. After the Liturgy the Emperor went home and Basil followed him. The Emperor asked him, "Where have you been?" "There, where you were, at the Holy Liturgy." "How was that? I didn't see you." "But I saw you and I saw where you really were." "I was nowhere else, only in church," said the Emperor. "Your words are not true, O Emperor, for I saw you in spirit on Sparrow Mountains building your palace." Deeply moved, the Emperor said: "It is true, that is just what happened to me." That is typical of the spiritual insight to which the saints attained.

Here it may be good to mention that monasticism has always been highly regarded in the Orthodox Church. It is based on Christ's words: "He who is able to receive it, let him receive it" (*Mat.* 19: 10-12). And "sell what you have and give to the poor, and come and follow Me" (*Mat.* 19:21). And the promises to those who renounce everything (*Mat.* 19:29). Monks are pledged to battle with evil. Monasticism is not an escape from service.

A great virtue in Orthodox Spirituality is dispassion (Gk. *apatheia*), which is often misunderstood and mistranslated as "apathy", "indifference", or "insensibility" in a stoic sense. But true dispassion is freedom from passion through being filled with the spirit of God as a fruit of divine love. It is a state of soul in which a burning love for God and men leaves no room for selfish and human passions. How far it is from the cold stoic conception we can see from the fact that St. Diadochus can speak of "the fire of dispassion".<sup>2</sup>

The thought of deification may seem strange,<sup>3</sup> yet that is a word constantly met with in Orthodox works. It is based on Holy Scripture, of course. St. Peter tells us that God has given us His "great and precious promises that through them we may be partakers of the divine nature" (*2 Peter* 1: 4). And St. Athanasius explains

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<sup>2</sup> It corresponds to the Hindu *vairagya* and could perhaps best be rendered as 'non-attachment' or 'equal-mindedness'.

<sup>3</sup> It will not seem strange to Hindu readers.

that it is through the Incarnation that “the flesh has been deified”. This deification is worked out, according to St. Maximus the Confessor, by the identification of our human will with the divine will. That prevents all pantheism. It is union with the divine life and activity, not with the divine being and essence. Iron placed in a fire becomes red hot and fiery, but it remains iron.

Everyone is hungry for life and happiness. That is just what Jesus Christ came to give. “I have come,” He said, “that you may have life and may have it abundantly.” There is nothing wrong in being hungry for life and happiness, because that is the way we are made. Yet it is one of life’s paradoxes that the pursuit of happiness, like the pursuit of pleasure, defeats its own purpose. We find happiness only when we do not directly seek it. So God gave us the spiritual law: “Seek first the Kingdom of God” (*Lk.* 12:31). Then He promises that all our needs will be supplied. So Orthodox Christians have seasons of special seeking by penitence, prayer and abstinence that they may partake more fully of that life and happiness which constitutes the Kingdom of God. People think that wealth and honours mean happiness. But God tells us that a man’s life and happiness does not consist in the abundance of his possessions (*Lk.* 12:15). In the Orthodox view, so great is the human heart that nothing less than God can satisfy it. And the truth is that God is man’s happiness. So all men are really seeking God. But it is one thing to try to get happiness for yourself, and quite another to try to establish God’s Kingdom of divine power and happiness in the hearts of all men everywhere.

When Our Lord began His public life, the gist of His message was: “The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel” (*Mark* 1:15). To repent means, according to the Greek, to change our mind, our outlook, and consequently our life. Instead of thinking thoughts of fear, revenge, anxiety, depression, acquisitiveness and sickness, it means to live and think in terms of the heavenly kingdom which is all around us, and in which we live and move and have our being. Man is a spirit, housed in a

body. So he lives at once in Time and Eternity. Eternal life begins here and now. Our business or church is heaven on earth. The ikons or pictures remind us of things not of this world. "Our life, our home is in Heaven" (*Philip 3: 20*). We are surrounded by Saints and Angels and all the heavenly inhabitants. A prayer that occurs daily in Lent reads: "Standing in the temple of Thy glory, we think that we are standing in Heaven." "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you" (*Lk. 17:21*), so unless you take Heaven with you in your heart, you will never go there.

God made the world of Time as a school for Eternity. During this brief spell on earth, we are meant to be schooling ourselves to live with God our Father in perfect joy for ever. But many people find this world so beautiful, so attractive, that they get attached to it and even do not want to leave it. So St. John says: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For . . . the world passes away and the desire for it; but he who does the will of God lives for ever." (*1 John 2:15*).

We are meant to find God in His creation, to pass through the visible to the invisible, to "look at the rainbow and praise Him Who made it" (*Eccles. 43:12*). In order to be attached to our Creator we must be detached from creatures. Detachment is a virtue which holds a high place in Orthodox thought. "A small hair disturbs the eye, and a small care prevents detachment," says St. John of the Ladder. To love creatures instead of the Creator is idolatry.

A remarkable feature in the Orthodox Church is what may be called her sacramentalism. In order to train her children and teach them to pass through the visible to the Invisible, she uses pictures, crosses, various symbols and sacraments. The Orthodox Church calls sacraments mysteries. A mystery is not something of which you can understand nothing, something which is all darkness; it is more like a circle of light surrounded by darkness.

The Holy Mysteries or Sacraments are neither the end nor the essence of the spiritual life. They are means of grace, and only means. But these means have a great importance in the life of the Church. Because God has clothed our spirits in material bodies, He binds Himself to use material things in communicating with us. And so His law and practice in nature and grace is to give us His Gifts through the hands of His creatures. In other words God works through agents. So our life comes through a human father and mother, light through the sun, breath through the air, food through the earth. It is the same with spiritual things. The science of the Sacraments is through the material to the spiritual, through the visible to the Invisible. They teach us to find God through His creatures, to find Life through matter. The wonderful works of creation all tell us of the divine Presence, Power, Beauty, and Love.

As man is soul and body, so Orthodox worship requires the homage of both, an *Old Testament* ideal, of course: "That you may worship the Lord our God by everything that you do" (*Josh.* 4:24). Says St. Isaac the Syrian: "Every prayer in which the body does not participate and by which the heart is not affected is to be reckoned as an abortion without a soul." So in Orthodox worship we bow with our will and with our body as well, that is, we make prostrations to the ground. Another feature is the sign of the cross. Just as the Name of Jesus is made by a movement of the tongue, so the sign of the cross is made by a movement of hand and arm. The cross is the sign of faith, hope and love; it is the Christian sign, which God wants us never to forget so He puts it everywhere. Every tree, every telegraph pole is a cross. What a book is to a literate person, a picture is to an illiterate. It brings him understanding.

And we believe in the Communion of the Saints, because there is now no death and all are alive to God. We ask the Saints to pray for us, and we pray for those who are not yet saints.

## “Cast Not Your Pearls Before Swine”

WHAT ARE THE pearls and who are the swine? There can be no clearer statement in any religion that there are esoteric truths to be revealed only to genuine seekers and not to the public.

There is a modern tendency to demand that democracy should extend even to knowledge and secrets be thrown open to all; but do all want them? Einstein's relativity theory is open to all, but how many study it? It may be said that there is a difference, in that all could if they wanted, whereas Christ's injunction implies a deliberate restricting of knowledge; actually, however, the difference is not great, since ability to understand and earnest desire to follow are the sole qualifications for explanation. Truth is withheld only from those who do not value it and would therefore misunderstand and misuse it if offered. But they may be the majority.

What Christ said was that to offer it to them would be not merely a useless but a dangerous activity—“Lest they turn again and rend you”. Swine are not interested in things of beauty but only in roots and swill and what fills their belly. Materialists are not interested in things of the spirit. Moreover they are liable to be offended by the implied suggestion that your aspiration rises higher than theirs, that your understanding outstrips theirs, that any one can prefer a pearl to a root—and turn and rend you.

Then what has happened to the pearls? Have the churches still got them? It is known that there are modes of silent prayer and meditation and various spiritual exercises that are not publicly proclaimed. They may be open to the laity also, but only to such of them as show their fitness by going into retreat or seeking guidance for concentrated spiritual effort.

Indeed, to say that they are still guarded by the churches does not mean that every priest and clergyman is a guardian of them. Some of the swine may be wearing clerical costume also. It seems a rude thing to say, but nowhere near so rude as the things Christ said about the clergy of his day.

There was a powerful tradition of spiritual guidance during the Middle Ages. Towards the end of that period surprisingly frank records of it, or of the doctrine on which it was built, were left. Perhaps writers felt that the direct oral transmission was drying up and needed to be fortified by written accounts to tide over the dark age that was already threatening. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, an anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century English record, is almost entirely a manual for spiritual practice. Characteristically, it is prefaced by a short note warning off swine, insisting that it should be read only by those who are genuinely seeking, not by the merely curious. The *Theologia Germanica* speaks even more openly of the possibility of Divine Union. Meister Eckhart was so outspoken about the Supreme Identity as to be accused of heresy. He denied the charge, insisting that his teaching was the true Catholic doctrine rightly understood, but after his death excommunication was pronounced against him. Jacob Boehme, a Protestant cobbler, expounded the less direct mysteries of symbolism and sacred cosmology. Cervantes had the wit to conceal the pearls in a zany.

Moreover, something of spiritual practice also seems to have survived through the dark ages of rationalism. When pioneers such as Evelyn Underhill sought to bring the mystics back in the present century there was more than antiquarianism in their work; the spiritual lifeblood of Christian tradition still flowed, though pulsing now rather feebly and needing to be invigorated. For a spiritual current can be invigorated, sometimes even through an infusion of new life from outside. It is not a fixed quantum but a living, vibrating force, continually radiating with greater or less intensity, attaining an incandescent heat or cooling

down and growing inert, according to the fervour and understanding of those within its orbit. And since every thought, every action, every aspiration has its repercussions, those who draw sustenance from a spiritual body thereby also increase its potency, while the reverse is also true, that those who devote their lives to its service thereby draw sustenance.

The hidden pearls of esoteric wisdom need not be secret sayings such as the antiquarian or occultist loves to search for. They are far more likely to be profounder interpretations of sayings that everybody knows. The secret is not something that can be communicated but something that must be understood. A still truer description would be that they are wiser and more determined utilisations of interpretations than many people know.

The interpretations can be expounded in books and articles; their utilisation, which is what is of real value, can be taught only by a qualified guide to those who approach him directly.

But is it legitimate to expound even the interpretations openly, or would that come under Christ's ban on making hidden things known? I don't think it would, because this ban seems to be cancelled out by another cryptic saying of Christ's, that at the end all that was hidden shall be made known. This seems to be an age when, as at the end of the Middle Ages (though for different reasons) it is appropriate to disclose what can be disclosed. The real secret is ineffable. On all sides, from the viewpoints of all religions, one sees the hidden truths being expounded, so far as theoretical exposition is possible. Indeed, it may be that so little remains of the practical transmission that its theoretical wrappings no longer need concealment. Or it may be that their display is necessary to help some of those who aspire but do not know where to seek, so that even in our age Christ's word may still be fulfilled, that those who seek shall find. To take only one instance among many: D.T. Suzuki

quotes a Ch'an Master as saying, "Ask of your self, inquire into your self, pursue your self, investigate within your self, and never let others tell you what it is, nor let it be explained in words."<sup>1</sup> Not only don't seek for a theoretical explanation but don't accept one if offered, refuse to listen to one. And yet Dr. Suzuki himself, conforming to the needs of our age, has spent most of his life giving theoretical explanations in books, articles and lectures.

What is far more potent authorisation, however, is the action of Ramana Maharshi himself. The path of Self-enquiry, based on the doctrine of Advaita or Identity, was in ancient times taught only to the few, usually to the recluse who had renounced the world. Indeed, the *Chandogya Upanishad* shows the Sage Prajapati teaching first that the physical individual being is the Self and only going deeper for that pupil who refuses to accept the superficial teaching. But in our time the Maharshi has proclaimed it openly in speech and writing for all who can understand and follow. He wrote: "I have betrayed Thy secret workings. Be not offended! Show me Thy Grace now openly and save me, O Arunachala!"<sup>2</sup> Requiring no further authorisation, I shall try to display the hidden pearls.



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<sup>1</sup> *The Essentials of Zen Buddhism*, p. 320, Rider & Co., London.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Bridal Garland of Letters to Sri Arunachala', v. 98, from *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, Rider & Co., London, and Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.



# “Many Are Called But Few Are Chosen”

IS THERE any way of recognizing the pearls of esoteric truth about which I spoke in my previous article? No infallible way, but a good general rule is that they will be found to be those sayings of Christ's which modern Christians ignore. For instance, have you heard a sermon preached on the text that many are called but few are chosen? Or read an exposition of it by a theologian or apologist? Perhaps by the fire-eating predestinationists of the early Calvinist Church, but not since then. Today we pass it over in uneasy silence.

Called to what? Chosen for what?

For membership of the Christian Church? Or any of them? Can one imagine a board of missionaries screening applicants for conversion (or, in Christian countries, for baptism or confirmation) and accepting about one in ten?

Then to heaven? That would carry the rather grim corollary that most people go to hell. And indeed, Christ's teaching does sound grievously like that when he warns that “wide is the gate and broad the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thither: because strait is the gate and narrow the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it”.<sup>1</sup>

But isn't it possible just to be neutral? It would be generally agreed that few people are striving in a Christian way, making their life a pathway to salvation, finding the strait gate and following the narrow way, but that few also are actively vicious or destructive. Most people are just making what they can of their life, not exerting themselves to raise it to a godlike level but also not sinking to a bestial or diabolical level. Can't they avoid both Christ's ways and just make life a camping ground to be enjoyed while it lasts, with no thought of where it may lead to? That is not what Christ taught.

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<sup>1</sup> *St. Matthew*, VII, 13-14.

He mentioned no third possibility; only the two roads—up or down. And he said that most follow the latter. There is a saying ascribed to him in Islamic countries which, although not contained in the Gospels, fits in well with his teaching; that is: “The world is a bridge; pass over but do not build a house on it.” What is reported in the Gospels is that Christ specifically repudiated neutrality by saying that those who were not with him were against him. Christianity is not a comfortable religion—not for those who take it seriously, not for those who heed Christ’s warnings. It was not comfortable for his contemporaries. I said that in the first of this series of articles, and some readers took offence, thinking that I was attributing the blame for it to Christ. The blame was on those who needed aggressive handling; the blame is on those today who refuse to heed the warning, clear though it is.

Religious injunctions reflect spiritual laws which are as natural and universal on their level as physical laws are on theirs. Despite appearances, a tree cannot cease to grow or decay and just stand still, remaining as it is. Nor can a human body. Up to a certain age the process of growth takes place in it. From an even earlier age, perhaps from birth, processes of decay are also active in it. Why should we suppose that the human soul is exempt from this law, that it can stand aside from change and shirk its destiny, taking neither the narrow nor the broad way but just camping out and having a good time?

Note that I say ‘soul’ and not ‘spirit’. The Mediaeval schoolmen distinguished between ‘*animus*’ and ‘*spiritus*’. The Spirit is indeed changeless, birthless, deathless, One with the Father,<sup>2</sup> perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;<sup>3</sup> but the Spirit is above the laws of change, just IS; and to realize its identity with the Spirit is just the task which the soul has to take up.

Philosophical technicalities apart, it is clear to all that man as he is on earth is not changeless or perfect. Therefore he cannot

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<sup>2</sup> *St. John*, X, 30.

<sup>3</sup> *St. Matthew*, V, 48.

abjure the need for effort which his humanhood lays upon him. Even to human observation it is clear that he who does not improve deteriorates, that sitting out from the dance of nature, or trying to, means losing one's place in it and falling back. But it is not left to human observation, it is determined by Christ; and he leaves no camping ground between the two ways. By not taking the arduous one people are *ipso facto* following that which, he says, leads to destruction. That they are the vast majority is an appalling thought; but that does not make it any the less a fact.

The narrow path Christ spoke of is the path leading to salvation or realization. The two are the same. The exaggerated importance ascribed to death leads people to distinguish between after-death salvation and realization achieved in this life, but really there is no difference. Neither is attained without effort. The effort must be continuous. Even of those who find the 'strait gate', few follow the 'narrow path' to the end. This is stated even more explicitly in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which reminds us that even those who are called are few compared with the many not called, that even those who find the 'strait gate' are few, let alone those who follow the 'narrow path' to the end. "Among thousands perhaps one strives for Realization; among thousands who strive for Realization perhaps one knows Me as I am."<sup>4</sup>

One who takes the narrow path needs no scripture to tell him this. He sees all the company of his friends or former friends, all the society in which he used to move, occupied with their worldly aims and frustrations, satisfied or dissatisfied, but in neither case willing to turn away from it all and seek true happiness. How Christ's heart must have ached when he spoke of the broad path and the many who tread it! Even after setting forth, a man may look around at his companions or former companions in the quest and see this one fallen back into academic scholarship, that one following a false trail, another claiming to be what he is not,

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<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, VII, 3.

and be hard put to it to count two or three who are still striving in a good way. And even of those, how many will attain?

Read with understanding, Malory's 'Morte d'Arthur' is a very sad story. The whole noble company of knights were gathered together at King Arthur's court for the feast of Pentecost, and while they were seated at the Round Table the Sangraal passed through the hall on a beam of light, but veiled so that none actually saw it. They were asked who would undertake its quest and all alike pledged themselves and rode forth with courage and high hopes. Some, however, soon turned back, finding the tug of the world too strong; some perished by the way; some were daunted or overthrown by the dragons of the ego; some bewitched or cast into dungeons by enchanters, the false guides who beset the path; some turned aside to lesser quests or settled down in castles along the way; some attained a single vision of the Sangraal and recognized that, for them, that was sufficient achievement for this lifetime; and out of all that noble company only three pursued the quest to its end.

For the many who have been called but will not be chosen, who have found the 'strait gate' but do not tread the 'narrow path' to the end, the *Bhagavad Gita* does indeed offer a consolation, one that is at the same time compassionate and logical. Arjuna asks Krishna about those who strive but fail to achieve and is assured that no effort is wasted. Even those who fail to bring the quest to a good end, to the ultimate Goal, in this lifetime retain what progress they have made and will be so circumstanced in their next birth as to enable them to take up again from where they stopped and to press on further. Which also explains the phenomenon of those who, like the Maharshi, attain the Goal with the very little effort made in this lifetime.

But what is a clear message apparent to all seekers from the viewpoint of the quest is meaningless in any other context. When will Christians wake up to the heritage Christ left them and the warnings he gave?

# Jnana and Bhakti in Christianity

I HAVE BEEN asked to write about jnana and bhakti in Christianity. The enemy is the ego or self-will; about that all agree. The really sensible thing, therefore, would be to stop writing articles and comparing religions and get down to the practical work of killing it, no matter by what marga or through what religion.

Whatever method may be used, in whatever religion, it is fundamentally a method of conquering the ego. That is what should be borne in mind always.

Basically there are two ways of doing this: either to break the ego in so completely that it will run to harness and never again dare to kick its heels up or to take the bit between its teeth and bolt, or to destroy it altogether. The former way is called bhakti marga in Hinduism, the latter jnana marga. Christ taught both.

He taught bhakti marga when he told us to say: “Thy will be done.” There is still a ‘me’ and it still has a will, but its will is to be subordinate always and in all things to God’s will. This is the way most Christians follow—most Christians who are Christians. In Hinduism it is the way of Ramakrishna, who said: “I don’t want to be the honey but to taste the honey”—that is, to remain apart from Divine Being in order to enjoy It; of Tukaram, who said: “I shall ever desire dual consciousness. Thou shalt ever remain my Lord and I Thy worshipper.”

Christ taught jnana marga when he said: “The man who wants to save his life will lose it, but the man who loses his life for my sake will find it.” There is no question this time of keeping a ‘my will’ which has to be subordinated to ‘Thy will’. If the life

which has the will is to be given up, how can any will remain?

It doesn't really matter which path you follow. Both lead to the same goal. Only arguing which of them is better leads to no goal at all. The path of bhakti may lead to the 'mystic union', the uniting of two who still are two, like human lovers; but that doesn't matter, because from there the process will take its own course through its own continued momentum, with no further need for discipline and theory, until he can say with the Christian mystic Jacob Boehme: "God has become that which I am and has made me that which He is."

You can look at it from another angle too and say that bhakti marga is the Path of Love and jnana marga the Path of Knowledge. The lover remains separate from the Beloved for the joy of loving. That is the attitude of Ramakrishna, of all the great bhaktas. Knowledge means the realization that there is no one to remain separate. There just IS.

Christ taught bhakti marga when he said that the greatest of the laws of Moses is to love God with all your heart and all your mind and all your soul and all your strength.

He taught jnana marga when he said: "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall liberate you."<sup>1</sup> But the Jews he said it to couldn't take it—"What truth? What can you liberate us from? Aren't we free already? Don't we follow the orthodox rules of our religion and scripture?" Christians say pretty much the same thing today too. There are not many who can take it.



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<sup>1</sup> *St. John*, VIII, 32.

## “Render Unto Caesar the Things That are Caesar’s”

CHRISTIANITY AS TAUGHT by Christ was a world-renouncing religion. His followers were given no code of civil or criminal law to govern their life in the world. They were not told to build on earth a *‘Darul Salam’* or a *‘City of God’* as the Muslim were later on. Indeed, *‘The Prince of This World’* was an appellation of the devil, while Christ said specifically that His Kingdom was not of this world. That was what infuriated the Jews: that one should come claiming to be the Messiah and yet not restore the Kingdom of David or give them domination over the Gentiles.

Christ’s followers were to live inoffensively in the world, not resisting evil, rendering its dues to the foreign, pagan state that governed them—and all that was essential to God. Mary, who sat listening to the Master, was praised above Martha who attended to the practical job of providing for him. The young man who wished to go further than mere obedience to the law was told to give his property away and become a religious mendicant. There is no record of any of Christ’s immediate followers getting married after joining him; they followed him around as celibate mendicants. It was not the sort of religion that organizes man’s life in the world or attempts to sanctify the world but the sort that turns him away from the world to the quest of his own salvation. “And seek ye not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you.”

Under the circumstances then existing, this otherworldliness was an advantage to the early Christians. Had they attempted to found a Christian State on earth they would have come up

against the full might of the Roman Empire. They were persecuted as it was for being 'atheists', but only sporadically; nothing to what would have happened if they had been considered rebels as well. Owing to their indifference to the social and political life of the pagan world around them, they were able to infiltrate it silently, appeasing the spiritual hunger that always assails men in a materialistic world; until in the end they became too numerous and powerful to be ignored and the walls of Jericho fell: the Empire succumbed to them.

The acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire, the fiction that a whole people could be Christian, was enough to swamp the primitive ardour of any religion. It blurred the distinction between Christian and non-Christian, blunted the keen edge of opting for Christ. Because, of course, it was a fiction. A whole people may be taught to believe that certain historical events occurred in the past or even to accept certain doctrinal beliefs as to what will happen to them after death, but that is not what Christianity had meant to Christ's early followers. It had meant rejecting this world for Christ's sake and being prepared to suffer imprisonment, torture or death in order to be able to say with St. Paul: "I live, yet not I but Christ in me."

Who now was to check that a profession of Christianity implied more than half-measures, when it no longer involved any danger or sacrifice? Indeed, ordination might now be an avenue to position or power. It is no accident that in the same century that Christianity was accepted by the world, the world began to be rejected by Christians, going out into the desert as hermits or banding together as monks.

This change faced Christianity with a new problem. Once whole countries began to be considered Christian and not merely those individuals who had chosen Christianity of their own volition in preference to 'this world', it became necessary to take responsibility for the entire organization of life—government, justice, business, education, everything. The



natural thing to do was to accept and sanctify the law of the land insofar as it was not incompatible with Christ's teaching. If the spread of Christianity had been eastwards to China there is little doubt that it would have accepted Confucianism as its legal and social basis. If it had spread through a number of independent countries it might have accepted a different law in each. In the early centuries of our era, however, the lands through which Christianity spread and which were to become 'Christendom' were to an overwhelming extent provinces of the Roman Empire. Rome already had an international legal code overriding the local customary law of its various provinces, and this was naturally taken over by the Church to become, with appropriate emendations, the canon law of Christendom.

The Church thus transformed Christianity from a world-renouncing to a world-sanctifying religion. The ideal of renunciation still continued, but this now meant withdrawal from the nominally Christian world into a monastery or hermitage. The world was no longer a non-Christian state to be shunned. On the contrary, the Church strove to organize it as a Christian Commonwealth, an earthly reflection of Christ's Kingdom, educating its children in a Christian way, sponsoring and censoring its law and literature, sanctifying its regulation of marriage and inheritance, business and property.

It would not be fair to condemn the Church for this or to represent it as a betrayal of Christ's teaching because once whole peoples were declared Christian by their governments there was really no alternative. It is enough to consider the only two theoretical alternatives to see that neither of them was in fact possible. One would have been a legalised anarchy: to say to every thief and adulteress, "Go and sin no more", and have no enforcement of law, no government. If men of goodwill, the spiritual leaders of the community, had thus refused to accept responsibility for law and order, either men of ill-will would have seized it or others would have brought chaos in its place.

The other apparent alternative would have been to abstain from all interference with law and government, leaving it to the secular power and making a complete cleavage between religious and secular life. But a religious community could not do that. Once organised Christianity had accepted responsibility for men's conscience and conduct it could not restrict this to private life and exclude the whole domain of law and government, literature and education, and the organization of society.

At the end of the Middle Ages, however, the Renaissance-Reformation movement was a revolt against the Church's religious organization of Christendom. It took some centuries to run its course, breaking down bit by bit the opposition that a change of course in history always encounters; but by now it has been completed. Christianity as a complete way of life has been rejected by the world and has once more become an option for individuals. Scarcely a trace remains of the Christian organization of what was once 'Christendom'. Children are no longer educated to a Christian life and faith. Philosophy is secular and mainly irreligious. A science of secular morals and ethics has been evolved. When a man gets entangled in his character he consults a psychologist, not a priest. Neither government nor finance charts its course by Christian regulations. Marriage and divorce have become civil contracts. It is not the Church that has withdrawn from the world but the world that has withdrawn from the Church.

In fact, the situation has come round full circle to what it was in the early days, when Christians were a dedicated few living in an alien un-Christian world. Whether they live in a country where Christianity is frowned upon and persecuted, as was the early Church, or where it is merely ignored, in either case they are outsiders to the world, in it but not of it. But that does not mean that they have to denounce it openly or to rebel against it. There is no need for movements or crusades. So long as they dissociate themselves from its un-Christian actions and policies, that is all Christ demanded of them. They can conform outwardly, obey the laws, render unto

Caesar the things that are Caesar's, while inwardly rejecting the whole unspiritual set-up and rendering all that is essential to God.

One characteristic of the Early Church was the small number of Christians; another was the tremendous spiritual power that informed them and radiated out from them. Now again those one can call Christians are world-renouncers, world-rejecters, and in some at least there is a strong and luminous sincerity. Now again it has become unnecessary to reject the world physically by going into a monastery because the mere fact of opting for Christ is itself a rejection. Is it too much to hope that today again Christians will make themselves felt by sheer spiritual radiance in the inert, lethargic world of materialism which they renounce inwardly while conforming outwardly to its ways?



## I and My Father are One

BUT WHO IS this 'I'? Not the 'I' who is anxious what the morning post will bring, who likes one person and resents another, who plans for the future and broods over the past. I am not raising the question whether it is bad or wrong to do these things but only stating that the person who does them is not One with the Father. Every one admits this; that is why, putting it crudely, they say that they are not One with the Father but only Christ was. But that is putting it very crudely, treating it as a mere accident of birth, just as one person might be born the son of the king and others not, and there is nothing you can do about it. If that were so, would Christ have urged us to do something about it, to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect?

If the 'I' who is One with the Father is not John Robinson, it is also not the individual Jesus of Nazareth, the man who trod the streets and gave sharp rejoinders to his critics. How could it be when the Father is eternal and immutable while John or Jesus is situated in history and subject to change and growth? How can the two be the same?

Then what is this 'I'? If you stop thinking but retain consciousness you become aware of a sense of being that is more essentially 'you' than your thinking mind or your body is. It is hard to describe but it can be experienced, perhaps after some practise. If it could not, describing it would not help much. One clue is that the individual consciousness of John or George is situated in the head, while this, so long as physically located, is in the region of the heart. I say "so long as physically located" because it may involve a state of trance; but it need not. It can be accompanied by full physical awareness. In that case it perceives the physical circumstance of life, its obligations as professional man, husband and father, its powers and liabilities, but all impersonally, as though they concerned somebody else. The whole environment seems a reflection of itself, and at the same time seems to be contained in it. It sees the world as something ephemeral in it, not itself as something ephemeral in the world. It has a sense of changelessness, of reality, of eternity or timelessness, untouched by the world of forms.

And what is the Father that it is One with? The temptation might be to say 'God'; but to answer such a question with an undefined word is no answer. What is meant by 'God'? One can feel rather than understand that there is pure Being manifested in the entire cosmos but unaffected by it, manifested equally and simultaneously in each individual creature and in the whole universe. As good a definition as any is by a Christian woman to whom an experience of Realization came spontaneously: "It was all that is, and there was no God, and equally no Not-God."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Following Feet*, p. 21, by Ancilla, Longmans.

Then how does this differ from the being that one feels in oneself? The whole point of Christ's saying is that they do not differ but are the same. And yet they must be the same differently or there would be no need for the saying. There is a feeling of universal Being within which the worlds and beings are no more than a shadow-show; there is the feeling of being in the heart; there is a feeling that this derives from that and yet is the same as it, that it is the Son of the Father and yet One with the Father. It is not John or Jesus or Horatio Gubbins but the One that manifests equally and simultaneously as all of them. One illustration might be that the water in a bottle is the same as the water in the ocean that it is taken from, but it is not quite adequate, since the water in the bottle can on occasion draw on the power of the Ocean.

It is sometimes queried how this pure being that is One with the Father can function as John Robinson or Horatio Gubbins. It obviously can because there have been examples of it. There was one in modern times in the person of Ramana Maharshi. And such rare exemplars have always been felt to be more human than the rest of us, not incompletely human. Visitors to the Maharshi did not feel that he was unnatural but that they were. They felt that he alone was fully and naturally human, because he alone was fully divine.

But can the 'I' who is One with the Father be trusted to look after my affairs? Will he bring off the business deal I am planning? Will he get the promotion I have been angling for? Will Sarah Jane consent to marry him? The answer to such questions is neither 'yes' nor 'no'; it is that the asker of them is that very ego who must abdicate in order that the true 'I' may appear. The fact that they can be asked is the obstacle to realization of one's true identity as One with the Father. If it is more important for a business deal to come off than for the Self to be realized, then the Self will not be realized. Whether, if the Self were realized, the business deal would also come off is another matter. The only way is to take the great

leap into the dark, to say: “Let the sense of being awoken and take control whether it is good for business or not, whether Sarah Jane will marry me or not.” And once it awakens and takes control, one sees that the questions were unnecessary because what is due to happen will happen, what is appropriate will happen, whether it is what the grasping, scheming ego would have wanted or not.

Then how does it work out in practice? The person in whom the sense of pure being awakens has a body-mind instrument at his disposal just as has the ego-person. He can walk and sit and stand; he can distinguish hot from cold, sweet from sour; therefore he can find one sensation pleasant and another unpleasant. But, and here is the great difference, he accepts both alike impersonally. As a further result of this, it follows that he can react to situations in the way that he feels to be required. For instance, he can get up and open the door when somebody knocks—or not. He can dismiss a dishonest employee—or not. He will feel what is required and act accordingly. This implies that he can think; he can use his mental faculty just as he can his sense of taste or smell. He can say “this calculation is wrong” just as he can say “this apple is sour”.

Then why do they say that Realization means the death of the mind? When they do it means the mind as helmsman, that is to say the ego. The thinking faculty will still exist, and in fact will become more efficient, being no longer distorted by sentiment or self-interest, just as an unrealized person thinks more efficiently in matters that do not concern him personally, where emotion and prejudice do not come in to cloud his judgement. Only when the Self is realized nothing will concern him personally; everything will be impersonal.

Then will life be worth living? Won't that take all the spice out of life? That is what the ego thinks; that is why it insists on a life of frustration punctuated by brief triumphs and pleasures but mortgaged to sickness and dwindling powers instead of the

unclouded happiness the Sages speak about. The best answer would be: "Try and see."

But if we do, what kind of actions can still be performed and what kind have to be given up? There is no such rule. It is not any kind of activity in itself that has to be given up but personal involvement in it, that is to say the idea that you are the performer of it. What remains is impersonal activity, what the Chinese call *wei-wu-wei*, act-no-act, inactive activity. A man may be outwardly Horatio Gubbins, inwardly Wei-Wu-Wei. When personal involvement is eliminated it will become apparent spontaneously what activity is harmonious and what inharmonious.

Another question that is sometimes asked is whether, on realization of the true 'I' who is One with the Father, the fictitious individual 'I' or ego ceases to exist or still survives but in complete submission to the Father. Perhaps it is not very important which. Either is possible. The ego-sense may evaporate completely or may survive, but subjugated, or may occasionally rise up again but too weak to cause obstruction. In Ramakrishna a vestige of it must have remained because he said that he wanted to stay separate in order to serve and enjoy the Mother. In Christ also. It was only the historical, individual Jesus that could pray for the cup of suffering to pass him by and then add: "Not my will be done but Thine." Insofar as he was the 'son of man', as he so often declared, this feeling would come to him; but insofar as he was the Son of God and One with the Father, there would be no 'my will' to surrender to 'Thy Will'. The last gasp of the ego-sense was the despairing cry upon the cross: "My Lord! Why hast Thou forsaken me?" This question of ego-survival is, however, as I said, of secondary importance. The great thing is the awakening of the true sense of being. Thereafter the effort to stabilize it and make it permanent. The rest will follow.

# “Be Ye Therefore Perfect Even As Your Father Which Is In Heaven Is Perfect”

ONE OF THE hidden pearls I alluded to in my previous essay, one of those sayings of Christ's which modern Christians ignore, is his injunction to his followers to be perfect as God is perfect. But it is worse than that; they do not merely ignore it but deny its possibility, thereby revealing a presumptuous disagreement with the Master they claim to follow.

There is no more fundamental injunction in the whole Bible than this, for it is the injunction to realize the Supreme Identity. For how can you be perfect without being one with the Father? Christ himself said that only God is good (*St. Mark*, X, 18). Furthermore, he reminded his Jewish critics of the saying in their own scriptures: “I said, ‘You are gods’.” He referred to men as ‘sons of God’ and bade them address God as ‘Father’; and St. Paul also told them that they were all sons of God in Christ. If, then, a man is the son of God and can be called a god and (as Christ also said) contains the kingdom of heaven within him, what is this but the Supreme Identity?

This injunction marks Christianity as a complete religion envisaging and striving after the Supreme Goal of Identity or Self-Realization, referred to in Hinduism as Moksha, in Buddhism as Nirvana, in Sufism as Fana. By denying its possibility, Christ's purblind followers have degraded their religion, which they still honour with his name, to the lower level of one that envisages only the proximate goal of a purified individuality in a formal paradise. A high goal, no doubt, but not the highest, not the perfection Christ enjoined, not real goodness, for “only God is good”.



So resourceful is the human mind, however, that the blinkered theologians who have thus rejected Christ's command and restricted his religion have managed to turn the tables and make out the inferiority thus accepted to be superiority. They admit the truth of Christ's saying 'I and my Father are One' but limit it to him alone, so that if they have only one Perfect Man, other religions have none at all.

This belief is on a painfully low level of intelligence. Divine laws are universal. Even physically this is obvious, so much more spiritually! The true doctrine of Identity is simple and yet at the same time intellectually satisfying. Being is One; therefore you cannot be other because there is no other; therefore if you realize your true Self you realize your identity with One, the Father, and are perfect, as He is perfect. Only the imperfections of your apparent individual nature make you appear other; therefore if you remove them and become perfect, as the One is perfect, you realize your pre-existent Identity with the One. In place of this they put a myth to be taken on faith: that some perfect but not infinite or universal Being (how can he be infinite or universal if he excludes others?) creates a lot of separate imperfect beings and among them one perfect One. Apart from that, he makes it a rule that none of them can become perfect, although this One who is tells them to. No wonder they have to ignore or reject Christ's sayings if they want to foist so crude a doctrine on people.

This impossibility of obeying Christ's injunction to be perfect has become an article of faith with many who call themselves Christians. One of them once asked Swami Ramdas whether it is possible for a man to be perfect and without sin, and when the Swami cheerfully answered, 'Yes', he looked shocked as though he had heard some blasphemy.

Have none of the Christian saints and mystics attained the perfection of conscious Identity? It is clear from the records they have left that some of them have had an intellectual

understanding of it, forfeited by at least occasional glimpses of Realized Identity. Eckhart certainly came near enough to be excommunicated. “Thou shalt lose thy thy-ness and dissolve in his his-ness; then thine shall be his mine, so utterly one mine that thou in him shalt know eternalwise his is-ness, free from becoming, his nameless nothingness.”

The Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme said, as I quoted in *Jnana and Bhakti in Christianity*: “God has become that which I am and has made me that which He is.” The mystic Tauler said: “When through all manner of exercises the outer man has been converted into the inward man, then the Godhead nakedly descends into the depths of the pure soul, so that the Spirit becomes one with Him.” The modern Christian mystic Joel Goldsmith reiterates it constantly throughout his books.

Now is a time of crass materialism among the masses, both learned and ignorant, and of earnest seeking by the few. It is not too much to hope that some at least of Christ’s followers will assume that he really meant what he said and refuse to hobbled and blinkered any longer by those who claim to speak in his name.



# Can a Christian Follow the Maharshí?

Can a Christian believe in the Maharshí? Even if he does, can he take him as his Guru and follow his path under his guidance?

First of all, what is meant by 'a Christian'? The term is commonly used in Christendom to mean 'one who believes in Christ', but it is not so used in India. Many a Hindu has belief in and reverence for Christ without ceasing to be a Hindu or claiming to be a Christian. By 'Christian', therefore, he means not merely one who believes in Christ but professes his religion and follows his teaching. This seems the more legitimate meaning. In any case it is the meaning that must be taken here, since it is only for such a one that the question can arise. The Hindu's attitude towards him is one of recognition and appreciation: "The boat you are sailing in is seaworthy and can bring you safely to port, but so can mine. I don't ask you to change over to mine but neither do I see any need to change over to yours." Can a Christian reciprocate? Can he show a like appreciation for non-Christian teachings and teachers? If not, is there any sincerity in the widespread modern demand for a 'dialogue' between the religions or is it just a euphemism for proselytism?

For a Christian the immediate obstacle to reciprocal recognition of any other religion may be Christ's own claim to unicity: "I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."<sup>1</sup> "If you believe in Christ," his retort will be, "it means believing everything he said, including this." The question is, therefore, whether Christ meant this literally and physically or whether it was one of the cryptic sayings which puzzled his listeners and have continued to puzzle many of his followers ever since.

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<sup>1</sup> *St. John*, XIV, 6.

If it is understood physically and literally Christianity is *ipso facto* degraded to the level of phenomenology. Just something that once happened. When St. Paul spoke of “the Christ in you” he was, according to their interpretation, indulging in mere poetic fancy. Christ is not within you, he was a separate individual outside you. There is no universality. Salvation is located in time and space.

The Christian mystic Angelus Silesius proclaimed the opposite, the higher point of view when he said: “Christ may be born a thousand times in Bethlehem, but if he be not born anew within your own heart you remain eternally forlorn.” It is this inner Christ, the universal, formless, bodiless Christ, who is the ‘Word’, the ‘only Son of God’, who is unique, ‘the way, the truth and the life’, who is the only way by which one can come to God. With this understanding of ‘Christ’ the claim to unicity becomes a universal doctrinal statement. It is no longer means: “This teacher is authentic and all others, past and future, are spurious.” It no longer ties the hands of God. It means: “The Spirit is One.” In this sense it must be true, for how can the Spirit be other than One? In however many forms the spirit may descend into the heart of man or become incarnate for the good of mankind, it is still the same Spirit, still the “only begotten son of God”. Even humanly there is only one King Lear though many actors may play his part on the stage.

The right understanding of such sayings of Christ’s depends on the meaning given to the word ‘I’. Christ said: “I and my Father are One.” He also said: “The Father is greater than me.” On the face of it the two sayings are contradictory, but only if the word ‘I’ or ‘me’ is given the same meaning in both. It obviously should not be. The ‘I’ who is One with the Father is the universal Self, the ‘I’ of every man born, if only he knew it. If it were not it would not be universal but only one among many. The ‘me’ who is less than the Father is the phenomenal and individual Jesus-self born in a certain time and place, equipped with a certain

temperament, endowed with certain human characteristics. The Maharshi's instruction was to discover the universal 'I' as the reality of oneself. But this implies discovering the unreality of the individual characteristics of mind, body and circumstance with which it is overgrown. The modern Christian mystic Joel Goldsmith says: "However, when you have transcended mind and thought, it is then that both mind and body are governed and controlled by the 'I' that is God."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore a Christian who understands the universal implication of the word 'I' can, without falling into the facile attitude of "all religions are the same", suspend judgement on other religions, recognizing merely that the 'I' which was embodied in full consciousness in Christ and unconsciously in most men may have been fully conscious in other embodiments also.

If he does not want to suspend judgement, he can of course study other religions from their own viewpoint, as set forth by their own exponents, without the idea at the back of his mind that he must somehow prove them wrong. Their viewpoint may differ from the Christian: one mountain path may veer west and another east; they may cross and recross, but that does not prevent them both winding in the end to the summit.

Or he can simply look for evidence of true saints and sages in any religion, remembering Christ's saying that by their fruit ye shall know them. A path that leads to the goal must go to the right way, whether it is the way you have been taught to go or not. The saint or sage is the end-product of religion. A religion that can produce them is *ipso facto* one that can supply what is required of it. To criticise its theory when it shows itself sound in practice would be futile.

However, our question was not only whether a Christian can believe in the Maharshi but whether he can follow him. A Christian

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<sup>2</sup> *The Thunder of Silence*, p. 85, Allen & Unwin.

may recognize a Hindu or Muslim saint as genuine but that does not mean that he can follow them. You can't be both a Christian and a Muslim or Hindu at the same time. Two mountain paths may both reach the summit, but if they run different ways you must choose which one to follow; you can't follow both.

With the Maharshi, however, this practical difficulty does not arise because he was not a Hindu. He was not a Hindu in his path or his state or his teaching, and therefore the question of the validity of Hinduism has nothing to do with the question of the possibility of following him. Realization descended on him when he was a lad of sixteen through a spontaneous act of Self-enquiry. There was nothing specifically Hindu about it.<sup>3</sup> In speaking about it later he said: "I had read no books except the *Periapuranam*,<sup>4</sup> the Bible<sup>5</sup> and bits of *Tayumanavar*<sup>6</sup> or *Tevaram*<sup>7</sup>. My conception of Ishvara (God) was similar to that to be found in the *Puranas* (myths and chronicles); I had never heard of Brahman (the Absolute), samsara (manifestation) and so forth. I did not yet know that there was an Essence or Impersonal Real underlying everything and that Ishvara and I were both identical with It. Later, at Tiruvannamalai, as I listened to the *Ribhu Gita* and other sacred books, I learnt all this and found that the books were analysing and naming what I had felt intuitively without analysis or name."<sup>8</sup>

So also his final state was not specifically Hindu; for the Hindus recognize one who has attained the final perfection of

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<sup>3</sup> For his own description of it, see *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*, p.18- 19, by Arthur Osborne, Rider & Co.; p. 11-12, Sri Ramanasramam, 1997 ed.

<sup>4</sup> A book of the lives of Tamil saints.

<sup>5</sup> He went to an American Mission School.

<sup>6</sup> A Tamil Poet-Saint.

<sup>7</sup> Devotional songs by the four great Tamil saints: Tirujnanasambandar, Appar, Manikkavachakar and Tirusundaramurti.

<sup>8</sup> *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge*.

constant conscious Identity with the Universal Self as being beyond all social and religious categories: outside the castes, neither householder nor sannyasin, above the social order, belonging to no specific religion but at the source of them all.

The same freedom from forms showed in his teaching. After having attained Realization he read Hindu doctrine and might expound it in full technical detail, with quotations from the scriptures, to such Hindus as required technicalities, but to those who could understand simplicity and to foreign seekers his replies were simple, direct and universal: "Ask yourself 'Who am I?' Seek the true Self of you. Abide as that Self which you eternally are. 'Be still and know that I am God.' It is not a question of becoming but being. Just be." Because utterly simple and direct, his teaching was universal, not the exclusive approach of any one religion.

However, another kind of doubt might arise. "I understand intellectually that the Self is One and that I am identical with that One. I admit that, not having realized this Identity, I need the aid of an apparently outer and separate person to enable me to do so. But since for me this intermediary, this personification of the Impersonal, is Christ, can it be at the same time the Maharshi?" This is a question which requires delicate handling. In the first place, it recognizes that the Absolute, Nameless, Impersonal Formless Self is One. Therefore the differences between various personifications of this one can only be formal, phenomenal, superficial, as the Maharshi indicated when he said, "The Sat-Guru is One." The sadhaka who is floundering in the phenomenal world and struggling to climb out of it may well find that he needs the aid of such a personification, but, even though he recognizes that both are personifications of the same One, can he follow the tradition laid down by one while seeking the aid and protection of another?

In the same religion he certainly can. Not only that, but is it normal and usual to. A Hindu may strive through invocation of the Name of Rama or Krishna or both while dependent on the

support of a living Guru. Many Buddhists have sought to attain the goal set for them by the Buddha by the Grace of one who had done so. Christian and Sufi seekers have also sought the guidance of a Saint. The benefit of this is due to the phenomenal power of what the Hindus would call the 'saguna aspect' of a Master. In his nirguna, qualityless or impersonal aspect he is formless and One with the Absolute; therefore it is through his formal or qualified aspect that contact is established with the psychosomatic system, the body-mind complex, of the aspirant. This is obvious so long as the Master himself wears a body. In cases like that of Christ or the Maharshi, where he still remains a guide after shedding the body, this saguna aspect still continues, though only in its more subtle form. Incidentally this explains the importance of Christ's Resurrection and his promise to return. Even the saguna aspect of a Master, that is his subtle form, transcends time and space and it might therefore be argued that the guidance of the most ancient and distant Master the world has ever known should be as potent as that of one who still treads the earth today; but in fact it is not so. Spiritual influences are to some extent maintained by the ardour of those who receive and transmit them and dissipated by their tepidity. The radiance or vibration of the Master's influence may diminish in potency. A contemporary or recent Master may, therefore, give powerful aid in following one more distant. This has normally been so. It is so today. The invisible support of the Maharshi is a tremendous power to be tapped by those who seek.

As I have already said, it would not be a simple matter to tap this phenomenal power of a Master in a case where the technicalities of the path he prescribed clashed with those of the path already being followed, and this would in most cases rule out a Guru from a different religion to one's own. But the simplicity and universality of the Maharshi's path is such that it has no technicalities and therefore clashes with no religion.



# Christian Healing

When Christ sent out representatives in his lifetime, his instructions to them were to heal the sick and cast out devils as well as to teach. There is no doubt whatever that spiritual healing formed part of the legacy he bequeathed to his followers. We have evidence in the Acts of the Apostles that some of his immediate followers did indeed practise it. We have Christ's definite promise that their power would be no less than his. "He that believes in me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father."<sup>1</sup>

And yet after the first generation of Christians this legacy seems to have been dropped. Why should it have been? This is one of the puzzles of the Early Church. It would be tempting to say that they turned instead to sterile theological arguments, accusing one another of heresy; and yet we have ample evidence that, despite the growth of intellectualism, there still were ardent Christians willing to face torture and martyrdom for their faith. And we know from what is happening today that devout Christians are capable of healing in Christ's name, just as he promised them, even without having attained to sainthood.

For it is today only that the legacy of healing that Christ left is being recovered. Throughout the centuries there have been occasional cases of saints performing miracles, but only today has the widespread practice of healing through the name of Christ by ordinary devout Christians, not themselves saints, been revived.

That 'in my name' is a peculiar wealth of Christianity. Muslims do not pray for boons or heal sickness in the name of Mohammad, or Jews in the name of Moses, or Buddhists in the

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<sup>1</sup> *St. John*, XIV, 12.

name of Buddha, or Hindus in the name of Krishna, or Taoists in the name of Lao Tsu. The potency of Christ's name is, as it were, an enormous spiritual bank deposit for Christians to draw upon, and cheques to any amount will be honoured. What a wonder that throughout the centuries they should go on believing that the deposit was there but not cash cheques on it, or not in the way Christ authorised!

In a general way, praying in the name of Christ, they certainly continued to draw on it. Indeed, the principle of intercession was still further extended and continues to be widely used, especially among the Catholics. Mary is called upon to intercede with Christ, and petitions for intercession are addressed also to the saints. Actually, some of the miracles attributed to the saints at the time of canonisation are answers to prayers of intercession made through them after their death. However, the whole body and tradition of Christian prayer continues to be in the name of Christ.

And why, reverting to the quotation given above, does Christ say "because I go to my Father"? What has that got to do with it? Tremendous as is the spiritual power brought on earth by a Master, it is increased, not diminished, by his shedding the body. Even though he already transcends the body during his lifetime, it is to some extent a limitation and localisation of his power. When it falls from him his influence expands without being diluted thereby. This has been found in non-Christian circles also. So competent a witness as Sarada Devi, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna, remarked that his power had increased enormously after his death. The followers of Ramana Maharshi say the same about his power and guidance both at Tiruvannamalai and throughout the world.

There is no religion in which the founder's power has turned so markedly towards healing as in Christianity. Mohammed himself did not perform miracles, let alone empower others to; and Buddha disapproved of his followers doing so. Christ enjoined it. As one sees Christian healing performed today, it is

quite different from either magnetic healing or faith healing. Magnetic healing, of which the modern pioneer is Mesmer, is the utilisation of the animal magnetism which some possess more abundantly than others to draw sickness out of a patient by passes and laying on of hands. Faith healing, which has much in common with the methods of Coue, is self-hypnotism or auto-suggestion, becoming healthy by believing that you are or soon will be healthy. Spiritual healing is healing by the Grace of God. The healer aims at eliminating his ego, thoughts, desires, even the desire to heal, and making himself a mere channel through which the Grace of God flows: and healing takes place. In its purest form, as taught by Joel Goldsmith and practised in the 'Infinite way' groups, the healer does not need to lay on hands or even to be in the presence of the patient, he does not need to know the patient's name or the nature of the sickness; it is enough for him to turn to God, as the source of all health, and allow the healing influence to flow.<sup>2</sup> Even in less direct modes of practice, the essential thing is for the healer to feel in true humility that it is not his power but the Divine Power or, more specifically, the power of Christ flowing through him or answering his prayers, as the case may be, that effects the cure.

Is faith also necessary on the part of the patient? It is certainly a great help, but in this case 'faith' does not mean merely a passive belief that the cure will work but an active response to it, participation in it. Even the patient, the one at the receiving end, ought not to be passive and inert and expect to be carried along. After effecting a cure Christ said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." That means: your active response to the healing influence enabled it to work on you. But this does not equate spiritual healing with faith healing. In faith healing whatever influence there may be is invoked by the faith itself and is often no more than auto-suggestion. In spiritual healing a powerful force is set in motion and faith, although of great importance

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Art of Spiritual Healing* by Joel Goldsmith, Allen & Unwin.

to facilitate its working, is not essential, as may be seen by cases of healing, usually of young children, in which the patient is not informed or asked to co-operate. It will be recalled that G.H. Gedge instances such a case in his article on spiritual healing in *The Mountain Path* of January 1965.

Spiritual healing may go far deeper than the removal of physical symptoms. Christ himself indicated this when, in his lifetime, he said after effecting a cure: "The sins be forgiven thee." We know today that many ailments are psychosomatic, that is to say, are physical symptoms of disordered states of mind. In such a case temporary removal of the symptoms is no cure. They will return or be replaced by others. The only real cure is to smooth out the tangled state of mind that caused them. That is what psychiatrists try to do with varying degrees of success. If the Christian healer does it—and in a far wider range of cases than the psychiatrist can handle—that does not mean that he is a psychiatrist or that he can forgive sins but simply that he has succeeded in making himself a channel through which the Christ-power can flow. Which is more likely to heal the disordered state of mind that has caused a disease: an injection or a prayer?

But that does not mean that prayer or spiritual healing without prayer can work only in psychosomatic cases. The Christ-power is not limited in its applicability. There are examples enough of its effectiveness in cases as near purely physical (broken bones and so on) as anything can be: cases enough for any who will consent to look at them.



# A Christian View of Reincarnation

THE QUESTION that concerns Christians with regard to reincarnation is: if it is true why didn't Christ teach it? It can be parried by the counter question; if he didn't why did some of his early followers believe that he did?

A Spiritual Master is apt to be an intensely practical man. He is on earth to do a job: to lead men from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality, as the *Upanishad* puts it. Not only is elaborate doctrinal theory not essential for this, but it can be an actual distraction. Argument about theory is a facile alternative to spiritual effort, and by it one can sidetrack both oneself and others. It was Buddha who flatly refused to answer theoretical questions on the ground that they would not help one to escape from suffering to Enlightenment—and what mountains of subtle dialectic his followers have piled up! Christ was equally reticent—and how many of his followers have killed or imprisoned one another over points of theory that he kept silent upon and therefore obviously did not consider important. People who knew the Maharshi personally report that he too was averse to answering questions of sterile theory. I hope *The Mountain Path* will not degenerate into a forum for academic discussions of his doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

Returning to the question of Christ: he threw out hints enough for those of his followers who could understand the ultimate truth of Identity—bidding them be perfect as God is perfect, telling them that only he who lays down his life will find it, telling them that the kingdom of heaven was within them—others in plenty. But for those who could only understand heaven and hell he said

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<sup>1</sup> Not as long as the present editorship continues—Ed. [*this was written in 1966*]

little—that there were many departments in heaven, that there would be pain and lamentation in hell; very little, but how much the theologians have spun out of it!

Christ never affirmed reincarnation but he also never denied it; so if it was implicitly assumed by the Jews of his day, his not denying it is tantamount to acceptance. And there are signs that it was. To quote from an old book, *Lux Orientalis* by Joseph Glanvill: “Few speculative truths are delivered in Scripture but such as were called forth by the controversies of those times; and pre-existence was none of them, it being the constant opinion of the Jews, as appears by that question, “Master, was it for this man’s sin or his father’s that he was born blind?<sup>2</sup> . . . for except they supposed that he might have sinned before he was born, the question had been senseless and impertinent. Again when Christ asked them whom men said he was they answered that some said John the Baptist, others Elias, others Jeremias or one of the Prophets,<sup>3</sup> which sayings of theirs suppose their belief of a metempsychosis and consequently of pre-existence. There, one would think, were very proper occasions for our Saviour to have rectified his mistaken followers had their supposition been an error.”

Perhaps the idea has spread since Eastern doctrines began to be more widely known in the West that acceptance of their doctrine of reincarnation would mean rejection of the traditional Christian teaching of heaven and hell, but that is not so. Hinduism and Buddhism also teach heaven and hell.

Their teaching is that, so far as there is an individual being (and individual being is no less real after death than before, but also no more) it reaps the harvest it has sown on earth in a state of heaven or hell and then, having done so, returns again to a new life on earth to build up new karma. There is no need to go farther afield than *The Mountain Path* to substantiate this

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<sup>2</sup> *St. John*, IX, 1-4.

<sup>3</sup> *St. Matthew*, XVI, 13-14.

statement, since it is clearly indicated in the article by the Dalai Lama on Tibetan Buddhism in the issue of April 1964.

Now suppose this is true? It seems a more likely supposition than that it is not true. Why didn't Christ also teach it? Why should he? For those who could understand the essential doctrine of Identity it was not necessary. For those who could not he taught as much as was needed: that there would be a reckoning after this life. So far as hope and fear can be an incentive that was enough to know. Those of real understanding did not need it anyway; those who did need it would be no better off for knowing what comes later on: they would only have more to wrangle about.

Some Christians, it is true, say that the Christian belief in heaven and hell is different and cannot admit of subsequent rebirth, since it implies eternal heaven and hell. It is painful to have to argue about this because the very assertion of it shows such a dismal lack of understanding; also because it does not help at all on one's spiritual pilgrimage. But having undertaken to write for a journal one cannot always extricate oneself from barren theory.

Instead of arguing, let us simply examine what this belief implies. That innumerable beings exist outside God. That God, therefore, is not Infinite, being limited by the exclusion of them. That they are eternal with regard to the future but not with regard to the past, since God made them but made them immortal. (And surely it flies in the face of both reason and experience that anything should have a beginning but not an end!) And that this God, dwelling among the innumerable other beings, everlastingly rejoices some of them and torments others—and everlastingly does not mean for a million years, but everlastingly in an eternity in which a million years are no more than a snap of the fingers, without hope, without possibility of reparation, with no relief ever, endlessly, endlessly—on account of their use or misuse of opportunities during their microscopic span of earth-life. Is it necessary to say more?

Far better to emulate Christ in not discussing such matters. Those who have ears to hear, as he put it, will leave aside argument and devote their lives to the struggle to be perfect as their Father in heaven (which is within them) is perfect. For those who have not, Christ said all that was necessary when he told them that there would be a reckoning. Dialogue and discussion will not save them from it.



## Traces of Reincarnation in the West

REINCARNATION IS COMMONLY THOUGHT OF AS an Eastern doctrine, but it is by no means exclusively so. It was probably not the accepted belief of the common man in Western anti-quity, as it is in Eastern countries, but it was the tradition of the philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato and, through him, to Plotinus and the Gnostics and neo-Platonists.

Pythagoras is recorded not merely to have believed in reincarnation but to have known several of his previous incarnations and those of his companions. Diogenes Laertius declares in his life of him: "He was the first, they say, to declare that the soul, bound now in this creature, now in that, thus goes on a round ordained of necessity." Actually, he may have been the first among the recorded philosophers but the doctrine was already current in the Orphic cult that prevailed before his time. Plato postulates it quite unequivocally: "Know that if you become worse you will go to the worse souls, or if better to the better; and in every succession of life and death you will do and suffer what like may fitly suffer at the hands of like."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Laws*, Book 1.



The neo-Platonic mystic Plotinus formulates the doctrine quite explicitly. "It is a dogma recognized throughout antiquity that the soul expiates its sins in the darkness of the infernal regions, and that afterwards it passes into new bodies, there to undergo new trials. When we have gone astray in multiplicity, we are first punished by our wandering away from the path, and afterwards by less favourable conditions when we take on new bodies. The gods are ever looking down upon us in this world. No reproach we bring against them can be justifiable, for their providence is never-ending; they allot to each individual his appropriate destiny, and that is in harmony with his past conduct, in conformity with his successive existences."<sup>2</sup> It will be seen from the above that not only does he affirm the doctrine but maintains that it was recognized throughout antiquity. Moreover, both he and Plato speak of it as the impersonal, inevitable justice of the law of cause and effect, equivalent to the Hindu law of karma. Although he refers to "the gods", he is describing an impersonal process in which, as he says, each individual receives his appropriate destiny in harmony with his past conduct.

The Hebrew neo-Platonist Philo in the great philosophical metropolis of Alexandria not merely postulated reincarnation but recognized, as do the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*, that it is only the lower path, for those who fail to take the higher path of return to Oneness. "The company of disembodied souls is distributed in various orders. The law of some of them is to enter mortal bodies and after certain prescribed periods to be again set free. But those possessed of a diviner structure are absolved from all local bonds of earth."

In classical Rome the doctrine was proclaimed by the poets (many of whom were under direct or indirect Pythagorean influence). Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid*<sup>3</sup> is shown the souls of the dead and told that, after drinking from Lethe, the river of

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<sup>2</sup> Second Ennead.

<sup>3</sup> Book VI.

forgetfulness, they will return again to earthly bodies with new courage and enterprise, forgetful of their former frustrations. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are largely on this theme. "The soul wanders about, coming from one place to another and assuming any body. It passes from animal to human bodies and also from men to animals, but no expanse of time destroys it. And as pliable wax is it moulded into new forms, no longer remaining as it was before or keeping the same shape, and yet still the same wax; so, I tell you, is the soul ever the same though passing into new forms."

As I have said, it was not the universal belief of the common people, but it was of another people of Western antiquity, that is of the Celts. They probably did not preserve their traditions in writing, and most of what they did write has perished, but Roman observers have recorded this belief among them. For instance, Caesar tells us about the Druids: "As one of their chief dogmas, they teach this, that souls are not annihilated but pass after death from one body to another; and they hold that by this teaching men are much encouraged to valour, through disregarding the fear of death."

One can imagine the Druids smiling at this simple utilitarian appraisal by a Roman observer. Some vestiges of the doctrine continued in Celtic mythology, and it is interesting to find echoes of it in the modern poet W. B. Yeats, who steeped himself in the old legends:

I see myself go drifting like a river  
From change to change; I have been many things—  
A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light  
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,  
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,  
A king sitting upon a chair of gold—  
And all these things were wonderful and great,  
But now I have grown nothing, knowing all.

Here again, as in Philo of Alexandria, is the recognition that karma can be transcended. Nothingness, which is the same as universality, absorbs and nullifies the succession of separate forms.

However, the indigenous traditions of the West were overlaid and largely replaced by Semitic traditions, so it becomes interesting to see whether reincarnation has any place in these. The answer is not as conclusively negative as might be expected. Certainly the doctrine was not theoretically formulated in Judaism, but then no doctrine was. It was a practical, not a doctrinal or philosophical religion. There are signs, however, that reincarnation was tacitly assumed, at least by those with a doctrinal turn of mind. *The Wisdom of Solomon*, a book which is accepted as canonical in the Roman Catholic version of the Bible, though not in the Anglican, contains the statement: "Now I was a good child by nature, and a good soul fell to my lot. Nay, rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled."<sup>4</sup> What is this but reincarnation according to the law of karma?

Similarly, Christ's disciples seem to have taken reincarnation for granted, though without ever formulating it. For instance, on one occasion, when Christ gave sight to a man who had been blind from birth, they pertinently asked whether it was in punishment for the man's own sins or those of his parents that he had been born blind.<sup>5</sup> They obviously did not mean his sins in this life, since the affliction had been on him from birth; therefore they could only have been referring to his sins in a previous life. That is to say, they were tacitly assuming that a man's sins in one life would be punished by an afflicted birth in the next, which is the doctrine of karma and reincarnation. It is true that Christ repudiated both suggestions, saying instead that the man had been born blind so that Christ could have an opportunity to work a miracle on him ("that the works of God should be made manifest in him") but he did not decry the

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<sup>4</sup> VIII, 19-20

<sup>5</sup> *St. John*, IX, 1-4.

query about punishment of the man's own previous sins as impossible or heretical, as he might have been expected to had it been so. He merely said that it did not apply in this case.

On another occasion, when Christ announced himself to his disciples as the Messiah, they replied, legitimately puzzled, that they had been taught to believe that the Prophet Elias must first be reborn before the Messiah could come; and Christ replied that Elias had indeed been reborn but people had not recognized him. "Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." In other words, that John the Baptist had been an unrecognized reincarnation of the Prophet Elias.<sup>6</sup> This indicates that some measure of reincarnation—at least the return of some of the Prophets—was regular teaching among the Rabbis of Christ's time.

With the rise of Christianity the formulation of doctrine became a passion and beliefs were no longer left implicit. No wonder, then, that some of the early Christians postulated reincarnation, while others denied it. One of the most prominent of its advocates was Origen. "Is it not rational that souls should be introduced into bodies in accordance with their merits and previous deeds, and that those who have used their bodies in doing the utmost possible good should have a right to bodies endowed with qualities superior to the bodies of others?"<sup>7</sup> This doctrine came to be ignored or repudiated in later Christianity, but was it ever formally repudiated? Here again, the answer is less clear than might be expected. It was indeed repudiated and anathematised at the Second Council of Constantinople in 533 AD, but this was a shamefully packed Council convoked by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, at which the Western Church was almost unrepresented, and which the Pope protested against and boycotted. Can the resolutions of such a Council be held valid?

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<sup>6</sup> *St. Matthew*, XVII, 10-13.

<sup>7</sup> *Contra Celsium*.

Be that as it may, the doctrine of reincarnation certainly did drop out in Christendom and ceased to be generally taught or accepted, although a long succession of poets and philosophers have continued personally to proclaim it. In modern times their number has been swelled enormously by those, such as Schopenhauer, who have drawn their wisdom from India, and the doctrine has come to be thought of as purely Eastern. In fact, it is one of the many treasures which the West has had and lost.

I will conclude this article by pointing out one curious traditional survival of it in the West: that is in Western astrology. The various planets all move at different speeds, like the hands of a clock. Therefore an aspect or angle between two planets will be getting more and more exact up to the point of exactness and then less and less so, just as a time such as a quarter-to-twelve or a quarter-past-twelve will be getting more and more exact as the minute hand approaches 11-45 or 12-15 and then less and less exact as it gets beyond them. The former type of aspect is termed “applying” and the latter “separating”; and it is a common belief among astrologers that a separating aspect applies to some development that was achieved (for good or ill) in the previous life and is now an acquired asset or liability, and an applying aspect to something that has to be actualised in this lifetime.



# The Basic Christian Symbol

CHRISTIANITY is based on a symbol.

When people argue whether Christ is the son of God, whether he is the only son of God, whether all who say 'Our Father' are the sons of God, whether they are in the same sense in which Christ is or in some different sense, they are apt to forget that they are using a symbol. Every one knows what a son means literally: a separate person begotten by his father upon his mother and growing into manhood as his father's manhood declines, so as to be able to act as a replacement for his father. Also every Christian knows that that is not what he means when he speaks of Christ as the Son of God or when he himself addresses God as 'Father'. In other words he is using a symbol. He is saying: "Christ is to God as a son is to his father" or, more correctly, since it is the lower that symbolises the higher and not the higher the lower: "A son is to his father as Christ is to God". But no symbol is perfect or corresponds in all particulars, since physical realities can never wholly reflect spiritual, and therefore this symbol is incomplete, as the above definition of 'son' in the human sense of the word shows. To forget that one is using a symbol leads to woolly thinking and to argument about undefined terms.

When, for instance, a Muslim speaks of Christ as the 'Spirit of God' but denies that he was the 'Son of God' or that God ever can have a son, the correct Christian reply would be: "All right, you explain what you mean by 'Son of God' and I will explain what I mean by it." If this were done it might be found that the difference was more apparent than real.

On the other hand, to say that an expression is symbolical does not imply that it is meaningless. That would be quite a wrong

deduction. Although the ultimate Truth is One, the approaches to it vary. Islam concentrates more on the conception of the One:

Say He is God, the One,  
God the Undifferentiated;  
He never begot nor was He begotten;  
He has no companions, He, the One.

(*Koran, sura CXII*)

Christianity on the other hand concentrates on the Intermediary, the Word or Logos, the Power or Expression of God, the Son of God “without whom was not anything made that was made”. In Hindu terminology, Islam concentrates on Shiva and Christianity on Shakti. The active, dynamic aspect of God, that which creates and redeems, is symbolised in Hinduism by the Spouse of Shiva and Mother of the universe, in Christianity by the Son of God. This does not imply pluralism: the son is One with the Father, Shakti is One with Shiva.

There have been Christian mystics who have been immersed in the symbolism of the Son, of the indwelling the redeeming Christ. To refer again to Hindu terminology, they correspond to the bhakta, the devotional saint. However the purest and most complete mystic, equivalent to the Hindu jnani, is apt to hold to Christ’s saying ‘I and my Father are One’ and to claim that it is universal, that it is true of any who can realize its truth. I have tended to stress this attitude in some of my *Mountain Path* articles because it has been too much forgotten in Christendom; nevertheless it cannot be the general Christian attitude and the Church is therefore justified in ignoring (though not in condemning) it.

The general Christian attitude focuses attention rather on the path than the goal—and indeed Christ said “I am the way”. “I and my Father are One” may be ultimate truth, but arguing whether it is or not does not help the ordinary practising Christian. What he needs is a way to the ultimate truth, whatever this may turn out to be; and Christ is that way. Certainly Christ is the

model of the perfect man that I could be if the Great Work had been completed, but also and more dynamically He is the infused Spirit of God that can enable me to complete the Work.

Ultimately, it may be said, God is One; the Word or Christ is the same as God. "Granted," the Christian admits; "That is why I say 'Three Persons in one God'. But along the path I follow, for the purpose of bringing me to realization of this Oneness, it is the Intermediary, the Second Person, the Son of God to whom I must cling." Thus it is that the Christian comes through the Son to the Father and that "no man cometh to the Father save through the Son". It is not a vulgar historical claim that one teacher is authentic and all others, past and to come, are bound to be spurious.



## The Cult of Suffering

"Suffering is the badge of all our tribe," Shylock said. Strangely enough, it is of Christianity too. Indeed it is even more essential to Christianity than to Judaism, since the suffering of the Jews was forced on them by a tragic destiny, whereas that of Christianity lies at the very root of the religion.

The Deutero-Isaiah's description of the 'Suffering Servant' is taken by Jews as a symbol of their race, by Christians as a prefiguration of Christ:

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him not, stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.



“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; and we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”<sup>1</sup>

The essence of Christianity is the doctrine of Redemption. St. Paul put it in the forefront and it has remained so ever since. “I delivered to you among the fundamentals what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”<sup>2</sup> And this means a far more personal bond than with any other founder of a religion. Christ is not merely some one who came to announce the way; he *is* the Way. “I am the way, the truth and the life.”<sup>3</sup> He did not merely teach us, he ransomed us. And the doctrine of ransom or redemption implies emphasis on the price paid in pain and suffering by the Redeemer.

Out of this also springs the craving of those consumed by love of Christ to share in the suffering he took on himself for our sake. And did he not tell his disciples that the time would come when they also would drink of the cup from which he drank? Did he not warn them that in following him they would be imprisoned, tortured, even killed? From this root grew the craving for martyrdom that has possessed so many ardent Christians, the passionate acceptance of suffering, whether from persecutors or God-bestowed or even self-inflicted like the many forms of asceticism that have been practised. Typically Christian is the prayer of St. Bernadatte:

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah*, LIII, 3-7.

<sup>2</sup> *I Cor.*, XV, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *St. John*, XIV, 6.

“O my God! I promised by the help of Thy Grace to prove my love for Thee by receiving the sufferings it may please Thee to send me, whether from my superiors or my companions or even the devil himself, as well as I can. O Jesus! Make me love Thee and then crucify me as much as Thou wilt!...O God! If I stop to consider my many faults and Your justice, I am terrified and bewildered. O God! Pity my misery and my great weakness! Let me suffer! Give me pain and difficulty! They are the only ways of getting rid of myself.”

It would be superficial to see this cult of suffering as pathological or masochistic. It can have been so only in superficial people, in those who did not understand its motivation. Bernadette did. That is obvious from her last sentence: “They are the only ways of getting rid of myself.” So she was quite conscious of what she was trying to do: to get rid of herself, to extinguish the ego, to give up her life for Christ’s sake. Having even a tooth pulled out is painful, and ego is far more than a tooth. What prevents a man transcending this world is attachment to the ego, and as long as both attachment to it and the aspiration to transcend it continue there must be suffering. It is caused by the wild horses in a man pulling opposite ways. That does not mean that there is only suffering on the quest; there is much joy also: the joy of divine Love, the joy of ecstasy surpassing all worldly joys. Nor does it mean that there is no suffering for those who do not undertake the quest. The ego is insatiable and therefore if it is not deliberately uprooted, life itself will bruise it and cause it suffering. But the quest makes suffering a deliberate and intelligent choice.

Being a natural result of the effort to drag oneself out of the world to which one is attracted, suffering obviously cannot be the badge of any one religion. Nor can the welcome extended to it. For instance, Kunti, the mother of the Pandava brothers who are the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, prayed, much like Bernadette: “O guide of the universe, may calamities befall us

at every step, for in distress we are blessed with a vision of Thee to put an end to our rebirth.” (*Bhagavata*, 1, VIII, 25.)<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, neither Moses nor Mohammed, neither Krishna nor Buddha, so warned his followers of the sufferings they would have to undergo as did Christ; and in fact none of their followers did encounter anything like the persecution that befell the early Christians. So also, in none of their religions is austerity so much in the forefront as it has been in traditional Christianity. The fully dedicated Christian aspirant is expected to be a celibate, as Christ and his immediate followers were. The saint is thought of as a gaunt, austere man who has known much suffering in his battling with ‘the world, the flesh and the devil’, though ecstatic joy also in vanquishing them. Christ is the ‘Man of Sorrows’. The favourite theme for artists in depicting him is torture upon the cross. Naturally, because it is the theme which illustrates in its pathos the whole doctrine of Redemption. His Mother is Mater Dolorosa, the Sorrowful Mother.

Other religions have a different emphasis. Buddha, for instance, is represented in art with a serene smile; Taoist sages very often with a broad grin. The Muslim saint is rather a type of benign dignity and benevolence. In India there are gaunt ascetics, but in general the saint or sage is expected to be cheerful, to have overcome the very possibility of grief by uprooting the ego that grieves. He is likely to expound his teaching with laughter and humour, as his followers report of Ramana Maharshi.

Escape from suffering is the very essence of Buddhism. “There is suffering; there is a cause for suffering; there is a cure for suffering; and there is a path to this cure.” These are its four basic truths. And for one who pins his faith on them the thing to do is to take this path, that is the Noble Eightfold Way from suffering to serenity. For the Buddhist, therefore, to be immersed in suffering would be a sign not of progress but retardation.

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted in the editorial of *Prabuddha Bharata*, May, 1965.

Although the ultimate state of Realization must be the same, however or through whatever religion attained, the ways of approaching it vary. The characteristically Christian way is to take the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, to hurl oneself against it regardless of pain and suffering, armed only with fierce determination and the love of God.

Is that the way of the modern Christian also?



## Christian Free Will

HAS THE CHRISTIAN free will? Free will to do what? The only question worthy of the true Christian is whether he has the freedom or power, whichever one may call it, to strive in the way of Christ until he can say with St. Paul: "I live, yet not I but Christ in me."<sup>1</sup> Christ called on men to turn from the life of the world and follow him so as to become sons of God through a spiritual rebirth. He would not have wasted his time and sacrificed his life doing this if they had not had the freedom to respond. And we are assured that some did. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, which were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh, but of God."<sup>2</sup>

It does not matter what philosophers say about it; we have evidence enough that men have freedom not to respond to Christ's call. The whole of history is one long tragic proof of it. But we have also evidence that they are free to respond, evidence

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<sup>1</sup> *Galatians*, 11, 20.

<sup>2</sup> *St. John*, 1, 12-13.

in the strength and wisdom of the saints, the beauty and magnanimity of those in whom Christ lives.

A sort of pusillanimity grips aspirants sometimes: “People in the past have attained beatitude, but now can I?” How can you not? It is not some strange state that you are aiming at but your own true state with self-will, free will, egoism, whatever it was that St. Paul got rid of, rubbed out. Christ came to restore men—as many as would go along with him—to their natural state by setting them free from the enveloping dark cloud of original sin. True, we grew up under a heavy burden of ego sense (which is original sin); but if we did not, no redemption would be necessary. To doubt whether the burden can ever be removed or the cloud dispelled and the light of pure, spontaneous being come through is to doubt not your power to rise but Christ’s power to redeem.

Despondency is a great impediment. The whole purpose of the quest is to give up your life for Christ’s sake, your ego-sense for life of the Spirit, so that you do not live but Christ in you. To say “I can’t achieve,” means “there is an ego-sense in me that can’t be liquidated.” Naturally such a belief will prevent its liquidation. To believe that you can’t attain prevents you attaining.

But it is not easy. An active quest is needed. Christ demanded total dedication of the young man who said he had kept the law from his youth up. Simply renouncing evil is only one half of the process, and one that is not likely to succeed for long if left to itself since (when left to itself) it depends on the human will, a notably weak instrument. That is only the negative movement; the positive movement of seeking the love of God is also necessary, combining the rejection of evil with the pursuit of Good. “Both movements are necessary, we are told; and the reminder is by no means strange when one considers that the negative aspect, the avoiding of evil, too often plays the dominant

and even almost exclusive role in Christian life. But it is not enough to renounce all evil. It is necessary also to show an inflexible valour, to resist boldly and unceasingly all laxity, never ceasing to desire with holy love the True, and tending continually and constantly towards it with all one's power, striving always to rise to the highest perfections that come from the divinity.”<sup>3</sup>

But have we free will? Have we the ability or choice to do this? Is this talk of obligation not side-stepping the question? Let us answer with a counter-question: is the question practical or academic? If it is academic it makes no difference which decision you come to, because it will have no effect on your life. It is as useless as solving a crossword puzzle. If it is practical, the only practical answer is: try and see. One hears of people turning aside from the quest out of strong passions and violent attachments, dropping it out of pusillanimity, claiming to have attained when they have not, out of vanity; but I have yet to hear of any one falling out of predestination.



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<sup>3</sup> *Cosmic Theology*, p.76, by Dom Denys Rutledge, commenting on 'The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy of the Pseudo-Dionysius'.

# Good and Evil

CHRIST SAID THAT EVIL MUST NEEDS COME. WHY? Christ was God incarnate and God is Omnipotent. Then why *must* evil come? Couldn't God will it not to come?

Christ did not stop there. He added: "But woe unto him through whom it cometh." Again, why? If evil must come why should the person who is instrumental in bringing it be condemned? Isn't it unjust?

There is a deceptive simplicity in these sayings. We must probe deeper. In order to do so we must also ask why Adam and Eve were free from a knowledge of good and evil in their Edenic state and why its acquisition caused their exile from paradise and fall into a state of toil and suffering.

The whole universe is a going out from the pure, formless Being of God into more and more condensed form and then a return through ever rarified spheres to Union with the Formless.<sup>1</sup> Physically, the undifferentiated basic substance or energy coalesces into atoms, each atom a miniature solar system, these into molecules, into substances, into primitive organisms, and gradually into more and more elaborate beings. Spiritually, consciousness is encased in mental and sense perceptions. Is the creation of Adam and his union with Eve the point at which the devoluting human consciousness meets and fuses with a physical body evolved to the point of being a fitting vehicle for a soul? Does Eve symbolise the physical form that, from one point of view, completes man, from another limits him?

Suppose man, at this point of fusion of soul and body, lived in a state of harmony without self-will, without egoism, without

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<sup>1</sup> But these two processes are not only successive; they are also simultaneous and complementary.

denial of his true nature or assertion of independence from God, without introducing corruption into nature or himself, in the pristine beauty of the world. That would indeed be paradise. He would be in what the anthropologists call the 'food-gathering stage'; but what they do not reckon with is that the world reflects man, the outer the inner, and therefore the world would be more bounteous, the earth more fertile, the weather more clement. The so-called 'primitive' tribes who scrape a precarious existence today as food-gatherers no more compare with this happy childhood of man than a Mongoloid idiot does with the happiness of real childhood.

In such a paradise there would be no 'good' because there would be no 'evil' yet to compare it with. Everything would be good in a different sense, in the sense of being right, as it should be, true to its own nature. "And God saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good." Good in that sense.

Man's perceptions get knotted together into a self-will which regards itself as a separate being independent of the universal Being of God. This is the serpent, the ego, the adversary. It tempts him through the body, that is through Eve. Some things seem desirable or 'good' to him, others undesirable or 'evil'. This brings the fall into craving and fear which exiles him from the paradise of his spontaneous, carefree state. It subjects him to death, because the pure consciousness of man does not die; it returns to Union with God; only the ego, the self-will has to die. Under the lash of fear and desire life becomes hazardous, needs increase, demanding toil and accumulation; enmity arises. Henceforth, although mankind pursues its outward course into ever greater spiritual darkness and alienation, the life of each intelligent man is, or should be, a struggle to return to the lost paradise. This brings about a reversal of the poles by which he begins to call what he found desirable 'evil', since it leads him outwards from God into ego-assertion, and what he found undesirable 'good', since it leads him back by mortification (that



is ego-deadening) to God. Life is a war between good and evil and he has to range himself on one side or the other.

What light does this throw on Christ's saying that evil must needs come? Creation is not an act that happened once and for all; it is continuous. Strange that even physical scientists should have come to an understanding of this! The outgoing from Oneness into form and the return from diversity to Union is the nature of continuous creation. One might even say that it is a definition of creation. Therefore so long as there is creation, so long as there is a universe, it must continue. For it to stop would be for the universe to stop. But on the human plane the outgoing is an alienation from God into ego-assertion and is therefore 'evil', while the in-coming is a return to conscious Union with God and is therefore 'good'. In other words, out-going into form is one half or aspect of the process of continuous creation, and out-going into self-will or ego-assertion is one half or aspect of the process of human creation. There could be no out-going only on condition that there were no return, that is to say no creation, no universe; for to say that there could be a coming back without a going out is nonsense. Applied to the human level, this means that there could be no alienation from God on condition that there were no return to God, no evil on condition that there were no good; but then there would be no mankind.

Theologians of an earlier day asserted that mankind had to fall through Adam in order that they could be redeemed by Christ. Some modern critics have derided this and called it crude. It is their understanding of it that is crude. Rightly understood, it is profound. There must be an outgoing before there can be a conscious return. In the life of each separate individual also, the self-will, the life of the ego, must be developed before it can be laid down for Christ's sake, so that there can be return through Grace to Union.

Then what about the second part of Christ's saying: "But woe unto him through whom it cometh"? There is nothing arbitrary or unjust about that. It is a statement of a natural law. Rightly understood, theological truths are natural laws. In all except the perfect saint who has laid down his life for Christ's sake and can say with St. Paul, "I live, yet not I but Christ in me", the tendencies to alienation and return both exist. In all except the pure saint or complete villain both are actually working, however feeble and fitful one of them may be. In all men and at different stages in the life of each man they are differently balanced. That is what gives its infinite variety to life. The alienating tendency puts a man in the grip of disruptive forces in himself. Taking the form of grasping, cruelty, arrogance and other destructive forces, it spreads evil in the world but also, in doing so, creates an attraction towards evil in the mind of the person himself and leaves him defenceless against these very forces. Christ's saying is not a threat that some one or other will punish the evil-doer (though the chain reaction he sets up may well result in that) but an observation that he is putting himself at the mercy of destructive forces. A man does not sin without an incentive. Ultimately the incentive is a false sense of values which makes things appear desirable which would not be so to a truly harmonious mind and thereby prompts to inharmonious activity. Such activity is not without an effect on a man's character and thereby on his destiny.



## Was Christ an Avatar?

I HAVE JUST been reading a book which declares that Christ was not what the Hindus mean by 'Avatar' but something much more. There is no need to give the title of the book or the name of the author, because it is by no means alone in its declaration. Many Christian writers have said the same. This, of course, raises the question what the Hindus do mean by 'Avatar'. The explanation given was so vague and perfunctory that it prompted me to turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and see what Krishna himself meant by it. Reading that, I began to wonder whether the author of the book I mentioned had ever read it himself and what he meant by 'something much more'. Here are some of the statements of what it means:-

“Supporting this whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain as I am.” (X, 42)

“I am the Self dwelling in the hearts of all beings. I am the beginning and the middle and the end of all beings.” (X, 20)

“Knowing Me to be the source of all and all to emanate from Me, the wise worship Me with understanding.” (X, 8)

“No action is incumbent on Me in the three worlds, nor is there anything unattained for Me to attain, yet do I act ... If I ever ceased from action, these worlds would fall in ruin.” (III, 22-24)

“Though I am the Unborn and Deathless Self, though I am the Lord of all beings, yet, resorting to My Nature, I take birth through My own Power.” (IV, 6)

“Whenever righteousness decays and wrong prevails I incarnate. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the evil and for the establishment of right, I take birth from age to age.” (IV, 7-8)

“In whatever way men approach Me, in that way do I come to them. All the paths men follow lead to Me.” (IV, 11)

“I shall not be lost to him who sees Me everywhere and sees all in Me, nor will he be lost to Me.” (VI, 30)

“Out of thousands, perhaps one strives for perfection; out of thousands who strive, perhaps one knows Me as I am. I am the origin of the whole universe and also its dissolution. There is nothing higher than Me. All this is strung on Me like beads on a string.” (VII, 7)

I had thought of going systematically through the *Gita* and picking out such declarations, but is there any need? Is this not enough to make the “something much more” sound like a vulgar bazaar cry of “My religion is better than your religion”?



## Predestination and Prayer

IT IS DANGEROUS to speak to people about predestination because so many misunderstand its implications. They take it to mean that the law of cause and effect is overruled, whereas actually it postulates the working of the law of cause and effect. Some people say: “If what is going to happen is predestined anyway, why should I trouble to pray?” But perhaps it is predestined to happen through prayer. The end is not predestined without the means but through it.

Let us take an example. If a man is undergoing treatment in a hospital and is told that he will recover, that means he will recover through the treatment. Perhaps if, on the strength of this, he left

the hospital while still running a temperature, rushed out and got caught in a blizzard, he would catch pneumonia and die; but the prediction takes his character also into consideration, presuming that he will not be such a fool as to do this.

Or another example. Suppose a woman is mixing ingredients and we are told they are going to be a Dundee cake. That does not mean that she can go off and play bridge and it will mix and bake itself; it means that it is going to be a Dundee cake as a result of her work.

These examples show two mistakes between which many people oscillate when speaking about predestination. On the one hand, it does not mean that the end-product (the cure or the cake) will appear without the process leading up to it (the treatment or the baking); but on the other hand it also does not mean that what is predestined is only probable and that one can change it by discontinuing the process leading up to it. What it means is that both process and end-product are predestined either to happen or not to happen. And since one does not know which in any particular case until it happens or does not happen, it is no use arguing. In fact it is rather a game for philosophers than a policy guide for practical men. All one can say is that in many cases process and end-product go together: if the former is going to happen, the latter is too; if not, not. If you are going to press the trigger the bullet is going to speed on its way; if not, not.

If the end-product is a cake no one is so foolish as to argue that it will appear without the process of mixing and baking. If the end-product is health, we all know that it will emerge (if it is at all destined to) from the process of treatment. But when the process required is prayer people are apt to forget this logic and say: "If so and so is going to happen, why should I pray? And if it is not going to happen, why should I pray?" The answer may be that it is going to happen as a result of prayer or not going to

happen as a result of not praying. That is no more illogical than to say that it is going to happen because of penicillin.

In that very wise book, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna does not tell Arjuna that he will win the battle or that he will lose it, but that his own nature will compel him to fight in it. He does not urge him to fight in order to win but to do his duty because it is his duty, regardless of what the outcome will be. Ends and means. It is a sign of egoism and perversity to focus on ends. It is a sign of purity and nobility to focus on means. Ends achieved by wrong means turn bitter, like Dead Sea fruit. Right means become an end in themselves and can be more important than the end for which they were instituted. That is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* and Gandhi and the English public school. Prayer is a purifying activity. Its harmonising influence may be more important than its factual efficacy—though that does not mean that the latter also cannot be real.



# The Concept of Progress

THE CONCEPT of progress came to birth in the West in the nineteenth century. It is dying in the West today. In its original form of automatic, inevitable, almost biological progress it is already dead except among the Communists who, being anchored to a 19<sup>th</sup> century prophet, cannot progress beyond him but remain the most unprogressive of people, since they still believe in progress.

One is apt to forget that it is a child of the nineteenth century, but so it is. Eighteenth century thinkers as recent and reputed as Voltaire in France and Dr Johnson in England had never heard of it. Nor had the ancients, whether in India, Greece, or Egypt. And that is curious, because if they really were newly evolved from savagery, as the advocates of the theory used to hold, they would surely have been very conscious of the fact, but not at all. On the contrary, they had great respect for their ancestors and an almost guilty feeling of being unworthy successors of them.

The first question, then, is why the concept arose when it did and why it is now dying. The opinions of philosophers are far more influenced by the spirit of the age, that is by the general emotional background, than philosophers like to think. The reason is an excellent builder but allows the temperament or emotion to provide the foundation on which to build. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century the West was intoxicated by its new power and exploits—steamships, railways, the internal combustion engine, the use of electricity; then aeroplanes, the telephone, machine guns, bombs; then radio. And all the time the wheels going round, things being manufactured quickly by machinery which used to be made slowly though much better by hand. It was exhilarating. They were making a new world. At the same time, with their new armaments, they were conquering the ancient civilisations of the old world and dumping their factory products on them. What more natural than to imagine themselves the heirs of all the ages, the machine makers, the pinnacle towards which mankind had always been progressing?



Two things happened at the same time to confirm their belief in progress. One was Darwin's theory of evolution. Life, it postulated, was evolving from lower to higher types. Man himself had evolved from an ape-like creature. So here again it seemed natural to suppose that since man became man he had continued evolving or progressing to higher and higher types naturally, biologically, inevitably, culminating in modern Western man, the machine-maker, the heir of all ages. So arose the belief in automatic progress.

The other thing that happened to confirm this belief was that Western man was coming into contact with uncivilised peoples in various parts of the world. Without a shred of evidence, such peoples were called 'primitive', a tendentious misnomer suggested that they were nearer to their subhuman origins and that modern Western man was 'higher' than them because he had started in the race earlier and therefore progressed farther.

And what is causing the death of the concept of progress in the west today? The briefest answer would be the single word—Hiroshima. The concept was based mainly on pride in the achievements of physical science, and once this was found to be a Frankenstein threatening its creator with destruction, the glamour left it. Of course, the change of outlook is more complicated than that, more variously motivated, but that, the fear of destruction, is the core of it.

In the west today all the gods have failed. The great plague is meaninglessness. People feel that there is no meaning or purpose in life, nothing worth living for or dying for. How then can they believe that they have progressed? Progressed to what? To this? And they are likely to answer with a cynical laugh. What now have they to be proud of? More and more of them, in quest of meaning, are tempted to turn back to their own lost spiritual values or to the eternal values of Zen or Vedanta.

Science and mechanisation are a source of nervous tension rather than pride now that they have created the constant threat of destruction hanging over mankind. Historians are discovering that civilisations have fallen as well as risen and are speaking now only of cyclic progress. Even though people refuse to speak of the nuclear terror, it haunts their minds. Apart from that, too, many a finding a mechanised way of life inhuman and hateful now that they have got it and are turning nostalgically to the natural ways of living of former centuries and undeveloped peoples, but find it impossible to get back to them.

What then of the vaunted superiority of the Nordic races? Hitler made such a devilish travesty of that that the idea stinks nowadays. In any case, the evidence of man's existence on earth has been pushed back so far and traces of human culture so expanded that any such view seems petty and parochial today. To mention only one example; there is no modern school of art which can claim superiority over the paintings of bison made on cave walls in France twenty-five thousand years ago.

That brings up the general question of the arts. A queer kind of progress that does not include art or poetry or music! No one, I think, contends that we write better poems nowadays than the Vedic hymns or the Greek or Hindu epics. Even the civilisation of Western Europe does not claim, in its brief life, to have advanced beyond Dante or Shakespeare in poetry or drama. A modern dramatist can use a fountain pen whereas Shakespeare had to use a quill; but which is better, to write a modern play with a fountain pen or *Hamlet* with a quill? Personally I would rather write *Hamlet*.

Moreover, poetry is not divorced from religion, the Vedic hymns from the *Upanishads*, and no one has progressed beyond them. Even the painters on cave walls of twenty-five thousand years ago to whom I referred are thought now to have been shamanists, and the shaman was a man who knew trance and

ecstasy and had access to higher and lower states of being. If we cannot rival his achievements or those of his artists, on what grounds can we claim to be superior? Actually, it is self-evident that in religion the general tendency is not to progress but decline. Every religion with a historical point of origin was at its highest at that point. No religion claims to have progressed beyond it. Buddha is said to have declared that his own time was the highest point in Buddhism and that thereafter it would gradually decline, and Mohammed similarly; and none of their followers have ever denied that so it has been. Christians also revere the early church as the summit. Indeed, any Christian who claimed to have advanced beyond Christ would *ipso facto* cease to be a Christian. Nor can any theory be put forward of a cyclic progress, each new religion being on a higher plane than the previous. The very idea is absurd, because religions are not on higher or lower planes but enunciate in one form or another the timeless Truth. And in any case, they are not spaced out in history in a way that would make such a theory possible, most of them being more or less contemporary. Even in the Sanatana Dharma Sri Krishna announced the same downward tendency when he told Arjuna that the imperishable religion which he was teaching him had been taught long ago to the ancient royal sages but had been lost through long lapse of time.<sup>1</sup> The Truth is imperishable, but, because of their impurities, men lose their comprehension of it through long lapse of time. The decline is not unbroken; there are periodical stabilisations, though on a lower level. There is evidence of this in all religions. In Christianity, for instance, with the rise of monasticism, or with the monastic reforms associated with St. Bernard, or with the Franciscan and Dominican orders of friars. This also Sri Krishna declared when he told Arjuna that whenever *adharma* prevails and *dharma* is obscured, he appears on earth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, IV, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, IV, 7.

But it is not only in religion that people decline. Anthropologists have now established that this is the general tendency and that the various peoples who were glibly termed 'primitive' are in fact degenerate. I once read a newspaper report of a team of Indian anthropologists on the Andamans discovering that discarded artifacts of earlier centuries showed considerably more skill than those made today. More detailed studies have been made of other isolated communities, such as the Polynesian, and it had been found that some skills— archery, for instance, or the making of boats and canoes—have been lost altogether, while others have declined. In no case is there any record of progress.

The same is true in religion also. It used to be glibly stated of such peoples that they had not yet progressed to the conception of a Supreme Being, but now it has been established that they either have such a conception or have had it but let it fall into disuse. Supreme Being does not exist to gratify men's desires but to extinguish them. When men are set on gratifying them, they therefore cultivate lesser powers and beings and turn away from the Supreme Being. "Men who worship the gods go to the gods; those who worship Me come to Me," Sri Krishna said.<sup>3</sup>

What, then, remains of progress apart from mechanisation? Concern for the rights and welfare of mankind? In the thirties many Western idealists turned to Communism as the hope of a new age, but within a few years they had learned of Stalin's slave labour camps and the grim realities of Communism. It was in that connection, we must remember, that the phrase 'The God That Failed' first came into use, as the title of a book by a group of idealists, each explaining how he had become disillusioned with Communism.

But even apart from Communism, has there not been a general increase in humanity, in respect for the rights of man, in care for the individual? Has there? Aren't we too near to Hitler's

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, VII, 23.

extermination camps and Stalin's slave labour camps to say much about modern humanity? And even today a highly civilised nation is dropping napalm bombs on simple villages and remnants of China's ancient culture are being stamped out by modern vandals. There was much violence in ancient times and there is today too. If people today have become very sensitive to it, is it because they are more humane or because they go in fear of total destruction? Read the *Mahabharata* and the daily papers. You will find plenty of violence and plenty of dishonourable actions in both; but where will you find the greater preoccupation with *dharma* and conviction that *dharma* must prevail? Surely in the *Mahabharata*. Just consider one little episode: how the Pandava brothers approached their elders unarmed in the opposite camp at the beginning of the battle of Kurukshetra to do reverence to them, and no one had the bright idea of taking advantage of it to give a quick end to the war. Can we imagine Hitler paying such a call on Churchill or Stalin or either of them on him and being allowed back unharmed?

Then has there been any rise in general well-being and standard of living? It is a strange thing about the standard of living, that the more we do to raise it the lower it seems to fall. Any one of past middle age, looking back, will recall life to have been easier in his youth than now. But never mind about that; let us look much farther back, at the conditions depicted in the Hindu epics and the Buddhist *Jataka* tales. The general background of social life depicted in such stories can be accepted as authentic for the simple reason that it is quite unselfconscious, taken for granted, with no motive for colouring it in any way; and it shows a considerably higher standard of prosperity and culture than one finds in rural India today.

But today we are approaching universal education; is that not progress? Is it? It implies mainly the ability to read, but what is the reading matter of our new literates? Mainly cheap fiction and political propaganda. Does it really elevate them in mind and character? Are they more enriched by it culturally

than their illiterate ancestors were by hearing stories from the epics emphasising the value of *dharma*? I remember reading an account of seventeenth century Western merchants who, after trading in the Far East, would bank their profits with Gujarati merchants while passing through India and not even demand a document, so certain were they that the debts would be honoured on their return. Could traders do that today?

It says in the *Bhagavad Gita* that yoga is “skill in action”. Surely education is largely the imparting of skill in action? There was a time when Indian handicrafts were such as comprise valued museum pieces today; but are modern Indian manufacturers famous for their quality? Are the literate factory hands who produce them really more educated than the illiterate artisans who produced the museum pieces of handicraft? Actually, not only in India but throughout the world, the quality of manufactures tends to fall, though they become more elaborate as ever new gadgets are invented. Also the attitude of dedication to one’s work which used to make work almost synonymous with worship has almost disappeared. There is no place for it in factory production. Quantity has taken the place of quality as the main goal.

Neither in spiritual understanding nor in art and culture are we superior to the ancients, neither in honesty nor ethical standard, neither in poetry nor philosophy, only in one thing: physical science with its attendant mechanisation. Then, it may be asked, how can we explain this superiority? What has caused it? It is not necessary to be able to answer that question in order to show that it is the only type of superiority that we have achieved; however I believe an answer can be found in Christ’s saying that where a man’s heart is there will his treasure be also. At the time of the Renaissance modern Western man transferred his heart from spiritual to worldly welfare. His world, as his own historians love to boast, ceased to be theocentric and became homocentric. He lost interest in spiritual knowledge, progress and achievements and became interested in the worldly. When the energies of the

intelligent young men of a nation are turned in a certain direction they achieve results in that direction. When they are taken away from another mode of development, results cease to be made there. The same process is now taking place in the East and the same results will follow. Only now, by a strange reversal, more and more of the energetic, aspiring intellectuals of the West are turning back to seek the spiritual treasure that they have lost. It will be strange indeed if the time comes when the mechanised, materialistic East begins to talk about the mystic West!

I hope this paper will not be considered pessimistic. Optimism and pessimism are sentimental attitudes, and this is neither. It is mere consideration of evidence. For instance, calling uncivilised peoples 'primitive' when there was no evidence for it was using a loaded word to imply progress when there was no proof of it; pointing out the findings of anthropologists in the matter is simply scholastic integrity.

There is no doubt that Western man has advanced enormously in physical science, both theoretical and applied, in the last three centuries and that in the last century this advance has spread to Eastern countries also; but the word 'progress' implies more than that; it carries the implication of general superiority. It implies that a man who drops napalm bombs on villagers is a superior type to those on whom he drops them. And of this there is no evidence. What kind of evidence would be acceptable? Personally I would suggest spiritual understanding, ethical standards and cultural and artistic achievements. I am not concerned with the question whether such evidence would be easy to collect but simply with the fact that no attempt is made to collect it when we talk about progress. Such evidence as is available points neither to general progress nor to the necessary superiority of the bombers over the bombed.

THE QUESTION  
OF PROGRESS



# 1 - Progress and History

THERE ARE VARIOUS philosophies of history current today but almost all of them have the hypothesis of progress as their foundation. To take two very different ones as examples, those of Marx and Toynbee, the former bases history on a theory of combined material and social progress, improved living conditions producing a more advanced social system leading in its turn to improved living conditions. And this progress, according to the classical Marxist theory is inevitable. Toynbee, on the other hand, believes in cyclic progress with the rise of civilizations and cultures but also the possibility of their fall. Very different theories but both of them variants of progress.

So basic to modern thought is the hypothesis of progress that it is seldom realised how new it is. It arose only in the nineteenth century. Dr. Johnson had never heard of it. It was also unknown to older civilizations. Some modern historians have described the miracle of Greek civilization emerging from a still recent background of savagery, but the Greeks themselves did not see it so. Even their earliest poets saw behind them not a hateful savagery but an age of wisdom and dignity in comparison with which their own time seemed ignoble. Modern archaeologists tend to agree with the Ancient Greeks having found traces of a very interesting Minoan civilization before that of Greece. However it is not so much a question of facts as interpretation, and the Greeks were most probably not referring to Crete when they spoke of a golden age from which their own age had declined: they were referring to their own past, with or without the outer forms of civilization. They had an almost guilty feeling of being unworthy of their ancestors.

This belief in the decline of man from a nobler and wiser age was by no means confined to the Greeks. It was almost

universal among ancient peoples. The Chinese had it. Lao Tsu refers to the Ancients following the Tao, and there are legends of ideal emperors already ancient in his time that are distinctly reminiscent of the Hindu belief in *Ramrajya*. Even the Hindu belief in a graduated decline through four successive *yugas* is paralleled by the Greek doctrine of four declining ages of gold, silver, copper and iron.

Then how and why did the theory of progress arise in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe? To say merely that it was due to a more extensive knowledge of history would not be a satisfactory answer because, I have said already, history is more a matter of interpretation than facts. Moreover, today, when far more of the facts of history and prehistory are known than in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we see the belief in progress weakened rather than confirmed and a philosopher of history such as Toynbee reducing it to cyclic progress with the possibility of decline as well as rise. Certainly none except the followers of Marx any longer consider it inevitable and automatic.

It was not merely a question of the hypothesis of progress being accepted by historians. The general public are not on the whole vitally interested in the views of historians but progress became a universally accepted dogma, even, one might say, the doctrinal basis of modernism, percolating through all classes, spread by politicians, journalists, novelists, teachers, scientists, all who mould the beliefs of the age, and acclaimed by all.

This, I believe, had less to do with its historical basis than with the fact that it epitomised the spirit of the age. It was what people wanted. It had two roots, mechanisation and the theory of evolution.

Let us consider mechanisation first. This, on any large scale, is quite a recent thing. When Dr. Johnson—to take again a characteristic 18<sup>th</sup> century figure—was told of a man moving on a machine with wheels he replied that the man must be a fool because he would have to walk and carry the machine. But people of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw people riding

bicycles, then cars, then aeroplanes; steamships crossing the seas; trains thundering along the rails; mills spinning and weaving; all sorts of new factories turning out new goods. Then electricity began to be harnessed. One thing after another. It was exhilarating. Men were doing what nobody had ever done before. What more natural than to deduce that men were abler than they had ever been before? In one word—progress.

And at the same time, as the ideal doctrinal basis of progress, Darwin launched his theory of evolution. Through a fusion of the two a simple pattern evolved that seemed to answer all questions: lower types of life gradually, inevitably evolved into higher, culminating in man; man, having become man, gradually, inevitably continued the process, progressing into higher and higher types of man, culminating in modern mechanised man, the heir of all the ages, the machine-maker. It was comforting, it explained our modern superiority, justified our way of life and reassured us that our modern mechanised civilization would go on for ever, getting better and better as man progressed.

The theory of evolution was no less suited to the spirit of the age. That is why it was so enthusiastically taken up and regarded as beyond dispute. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Renaissance revolt against religion reached its culmination. It was the most anti-religious age the West has yet known. And the combined theories of evolution and progress seemed to make God dispensable. Blind mechanical laws of nature seemed quite sufficient. By the natural process of survival of the fittest every species gradually perfected itself and periodically (how or why was never explained) changed into some other species, finally culminating in man. Then, bringing in the theory of progress, man, by a similar blind, mechanical, inevitable process, became a higher and higher type until he learned to make textile mills and motor cars. And no Creator need be postulated, no God of any kind. It was just the doctrine people wanted and they seized on it enthusiastically and uncritically.

Today the pendulum is swinging back the other way and there is a reaction from materialism back to religion. I do not mean that less people went to church in the nineteenth century than now; more did. There was far more formal religion. But the intellectuals, those who shape the minds of the people, were atheists or agnostics. It was considered natural, almost obligatory, for a scientist or intellectual to reject religion either openly or by implication. Today it is the other way round. There is always a time lag between an attitude of mind being taken up by the intellectuals and its percolating to the masses. Today, with all our media of mass instruction, the process is speeded up, but it still takes time. The present situation is that the masses who were indoctrinated by yesterday's intellectuals into agnosticism or atheism reject or ignore religion while more and more of today's intellectual leaders perceive its reality. In recent times we have a Nobel Prize winner in medicine, Alexis Carrol, declaring his faith in the miracles of Lourdes; a nuclear scientist, Oppenheimer, quoting the *Bhagavad Gita* as the first atom bomb detonates; a physicist like Sir James Jean declaring that the universe looks more like a great idea than a great machine. Of course, there still are plenty of atheists and agnostics among the intellectuals, but they are survivors from a past age. It is those who see beyond materialism who are the pioneers. And indeed, since nuclear physics has destroyed the belief in matter, it is by no means easy to be a materialist. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a table was a table: now it is a cluster of whirling electrons which can just as well be called energy as matter.

I shall come back at the end to this question of the spirit of the age and the changed attitude, towards progress; but first let us investigate the evidence or lack of evidence for progress itself.

It can now be shown historically that the original idea that man has been gradually, steadily increasing his mechanical skill throughout history and that this implies an increase in general culture and ability involves such a distortion of perspective as to be an error of fact. The graph of mechanical improvement is not

a steady upward slope but a horizontal line with a few very widely spaced upward steps; and indeed the really great advance has come about in the last two or three centuries. There was very little improvement in the way men prepared their food, housing and clothing and arranged their transport between the time of Buddha and that of Shakespeare. The change to mechanisation has come since then. And when it did come it came (until diffused) only in one civilization, that of Western Europe, a civilization which had not previously excelled others in the elegance of its culture, the profundity of its philosophy, the beauty of its arts or even the convenience of its living conditions.

Can a rise which has occurred so rapidly and after so long a level stretch be called progress within the meaning of the term? And does it indicate any general increase in ability, enterprise, culture—anything that could reasonably be called progress? Do we produce better poets than Shakespeare or Milton? Are we more enterprising than Drake or Frobisher? Are our philosophers more profound than the writers of the *Upanishads*? Or, to go back not twenty-five centuries but twenty-five millennia, are our artists more skilled than those who painted bison on the walls of Altamira? No; the questions only have to be asked to reveal their absurdity. The improvement is only in mechanisation. A modern dramatist can write a play with a fountain pen whereas Shakespeare had to use a quill; but is it better to write a modern play with a fountain pen or *Hamlet* with a quill? Personally I would rather write *Hamlet*.

But if the change that has taken place is not progress what is it? Mechanisation did take place and it has created a new type of civilization. On what other hypothesis can it be explained? I suggest that a sufficient explanation is that at the time of the Renaissance the West turned away from its religious tradition towards a worldly and secular way of life. As Christ said, where a man's heart is there will his treasure be. The heart of the new secular civilization is in this world and it began to build its

treasure there. As I have said. there is always a time lag. Processes affecting a whole people move slowly. Conservatism and opposition have to be broken down. But when the energy and ability of its young men begin to be canalised in a new direction a people naturally achieves new results. More and more young men began to be trained in this-worldly direction, and this-worldly results accrued. As the tempo quickened they began to turn specifically to theoretical and applied science, and that quickened the tempo still more. It did not imply progress in the sense of increased ability but only a change of direction in which the ability was utilised.

Indeed, a sign of this can be seen today in the opinions put forward by some American sociologists that it is Hinduism which obstructs India's march to progress by its other-worldly ideals. Actually, viewed either as a doctrine or in the light of its Early Church, Christianity is far more other-worldly in its orientation than Hinduism, since three of the Hindu *Purusharthas* or aims in life have to do with this world and only the fourth transcends it, whereas Christ declared specifically that his Kingdom was not of this world. But what has been happening since the Renaissance (although few admit it openly) is the replacement of Christianity by modernism as the creed of the West. As a result of this, mechanisation has been achieved; and India is now being exhorted to do the same, to make its religion merely nominal and ineffective. It is not my purpose to discuss here whether that is necessary or whether it is possible to combine the best of both worlds.

Certain it is that in traditional civilizations not only were men's minds not turned to the quest of new inventions but these were usually frowned upon. The established order of life was held to rest upon divine sanction and was not to be upset for reasons of mere convenience. This has been succinctly stated by Lord Raglan in his thought provoking book *The Temple and the House*: "... in most parts of the world and in most periods of the world's history no new inventions have been made. For the great majority of

mankind in the past and a large minority even now, inventiveness has not been merely not encouraged but has been actively discouraged. The proper ways to do everything . . . had been laid down by the ancestors long ago and any innovation would be fatal to the innovator and disastrous to the whole community.”<sup>1</sup>

Even when inventions were made they were not pressed into general employment or allowed to revolutionise the conditions of life. For instance, a steam turbine was invented in ancient Alexandria and printing in China, but the spirit of the age was not such as to popularise them or allow them to undermine the existing social order.

What happened at the Industrial Revolution was that the change of direction in which men’s ability was canalised led to a wholly ungrounded supposition that their ability had increased. A remarkable sign of this is that it was firmly believed and freely stated in the West that mechanical skill and inventive ability were peculiarly Western attributes which Indians and Chinese and other Easterners would never be able to acquire. Therefore Eastern countries would always need to be governed and exploited by the West. By now, of course, it has become quite clear that as soon as Easterners become materialistic they achieve materialistic results in science and industry, the same as Westerners. Where their heart is there will their treasure be. It is not a question of the ability to create a mechanistic civilisation but the desire. As soon as the desire is there the minds of the young men are turned in that direction and produce the required results.

Of course, the actual historical background on which the inventors of progress imposed their theory was very limited compared with what we dispose of today. History began for them with the brilliant emergence of the Greco-Roman civilization from a sea of barbarism. With the Teutonic inroads about the 4<sup>th</sup> century A. D. this civilization was submerged in a new sea of barbarism;

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<sup>1</sup> Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964, p. 196.

Europe was plunged in the Dark Ages from which Western man succeeded in struggling up again into the light only at the Renaissance. India, China and Egypt were left out of the picture; and peoples who lacked urban civilization were conveniently removed from the picture by labelling them 'primitives'.

We know now that there have been urban civilizations for at least five thousand years, probably more. These have extended over Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Mediterranean regions, India, China and Central and South America. Most of them have perished due to either inner decadence or foreign conquest. We can probably postulate inner decadence in most, if not all, that have perished, because in the first place a virile civilization is not likely to let itself be conquered, and in the second place it is not likely to collapse even if it is. Two civilizations illustrate this: India and Israel. North India was under foreign domination for some six centuries, first by Muslim fanaticism and then by British materialism, and still Hindu civilization survived. The Jews were not merely conquered by the Romans but driven from their homeland and dispersed, and yet they maintained their identity. On the other hand, Egypt was conquered militarily by Rome and then spiritually first by Christianity and then by Islam. What other deduction is to be made than that its ancient civilization had grown effete and lost its vitality? Iran was conquered by Islam, as North India was, but its civilization did not survive, as did that of India, but collapsed with surprising rapidity. Even more striking is the swift and complete collapse of the pre-Columbian American civilization before the conquering Spaniards. In the case of classical Greece one cannot even say when or how its civilization collapsed. It was not as a result of conquest by Rome, because Rome was its disciple. It just faded out.

This consideration is not irrelevant, because foreign conquest might be regarded as a natural hazard of history, but what we see is civilizations falling or getting overthrown through



decrepitude like men or trees; we see them first aging, growing rigid, losing their creative energy and then only collapsing.

And what about the peoples outside the great urban civilizations of mankind? They were simply labelled 'primitive' and comparison with them was used as a sign of progress, but without any basis of proof or evidence. The implication of the term was that they were less mature, less evolved, than civilized peoples. But how was that possible? Did it mean that they had evolved from an animal to a human state at a later date and had a lot of ground to make up? But it was held that Western man himself had been barbarian not so long ago, when he overran the Roman Empire. Then had these people called 'primitive' evolved into the human state even more recently? To the best of my knowledge this question was never clearly faced, but the length of man's existence on earth was so drastically under-estimated that even such a belief may have been possible.

Today this prop to progress has been broken. Further research has shown that it was simply calling in one gratuitous supposition to buttress another. There are many people outside the urban civilizations—in Africa, Polynesia, Melonesia, Australia, North America, Mongolia—and the evidence produced by historical, anthropological and archaeological study of them goes to show that, far from progressing, they have declined. And this is the general tendency among mankind. To quote again from *The Temple and the House*, Lord Raglan writes: "W. H. R. Rivers pointed out long ago (*Psychology and Ethnology*, p. 190) that uncivilized peoples are not merely unprogressive, they are decadent. He showed that the Polynesians and Melanesians whom he studied had lost many arts since they reached their island homes. Some, though wood is available, have forgotten how to build canoes. Some can no longer shoot with bows. On many islands sherds of fine pottery are dug up but, though clay is available, the art of making good pottery was lost long ago." Then Lord Raglan continues for himself: "And on many islands

there are ruins of fine stone buildings of which the present inhabitants know nothing. The same applies to many other parts of the world.” (p. 197).

Evidence to this effect, which is now generally accepted, shows that one important aspect of the original theory of progress has now been definitely disproved: that is its supposed inevitability and universality. We know now that it is not a general biological or historical law. Without that it remains at best a greatly attenuated theory—simply that it is possible for man to progress and that Ancient Greece and modern Europe have done so. Only presumably Marxists, being anchored to a 19<sup>th</sup> century prophet, still have to cling, in defiance of evidence, to the full doctrine in which he believed, since it makes their millennium appear inevitable and their victory over free enterprise predestined.

I have referred to civilizations five thousand years old, but now let us skip to twenty-five thousand. Part of the stock-in-trade of the original theory of automatic, biological evolution and progress—and a part which has stuck in the modern mind as a sort of mental cliché—was the picture of the caveman as a brutish, sub-human sort of creature. One of the few fragments of evidence for this among reams of supposition was the skeleton that was dug up of a very ancient type who could barely stand upright. More recently, however, medical examination has decided that the poor fellow had arthritis of the spine.

In his profound and learned study of Shamanism<sup>2</sup>, Mircea Eliade, probably the leading authority on the subject, has shown reason for believing that some of the cave drawings of far-distant palaeolithic men represent Shamanistic dances and that Shamanism, therefore goes back at least twenty-five thousand years. Let us see what this implies. Traces of Shamanism are still

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<sup>2</sup> *Shamanism, Archaic Technique of Ecstasy* (Publishers, Routledge and Kegan Paul).

to be found in many parts of the world today—Siberia the Arctic North and South America, Malaya, Polynesia, Australia. In all cases they are gravely degenerate both according to the findings of anthropologists and on their own admission. Some modern students have represented the shaman as a weak and neurotic creature. Where that is true it seems plausible to regard it, as Prof. Eliade does, as a feature not of Shamanism but of its present decadence. Traditionally the shaman was the guardian of his tribe and their protector against evil influences. Prof. Eliade gives some remarkable, examples of a shaman's strength and endurance. He was supposed to have the ability of throwing himself into states of ecstasy (in modern times this is often faked by means of drugs and alcohol) and to have access to higher states of being, implying a spiritual cosmology which is not so much theoretical as practical.

Now what kind of picture can we reconstruct of palaeolithic men some twenty-five thousand years ago and perhaps very much earlier than that? They held ritualistic meetings in large caves, though whether they also lived in caves or not we have no way of knowing—that is pure supposition. In artistic ability they were not inferior to any modern school of art. They wore clothing, as some of the pictures show. They performed ritualistic dances connected with a shamanist cult which implies states of ecstasy and a spiritual cosmology with access to higher states of being. Such people were certainly not sub-human or blindly materialistic. Have we any right to claim that we are superior to them? They had probably very few tools, but are we sure they wanted them? They must have had some to be able to make clothing and paint pictures. There are two kinds of prosperity: that which Gandhi advocated, of having few wants, and that which modernism advocates, of having a vast supply. The former kind produces contentment, the latter more often leads to frustration since new needs arise as fast as the old ones are met. The ancient traditions of all religions depict their remote

ancestors as possessing the former type of prosperity. How do we know that they are not right? How do we know that the ancients who painted pictures on cave walls and knew Shamanistic techniques of ecstasy had not a fuller and more contented life than us? We have substituted television for ecstasy but does that mean that we have progressed? Is it not another case of writing a modern play with a fountain pen instead of *Hamlet* with a quill?

Now let us revert to civilizations of the last few thousand years. A few of them have survived to our time, for instance the Hindu, the Israeli, the Islamic. About that of China it is too early to say whether it still survives or has collapsed and been replaced by the Marxist version of modernism. But none has survived in its pure form; all have been greatly changed by adaptation to modernism. It might be asked whether that does not in itself prove the superiority of modernism. In the first place, it is not superiority that we are considering but a gradual advance towards superiority which can be called progress. In the second place, I should say it proves rather that the modern civilization is more adapted to the spirit of the age and that the various traditional civilizations which have adapted themselves to it are already to some extent degenerate, although not sufficiently so to be completely overthrown as that of Mediaeval Europe was and that of China may be.

I have already spoken of the evidence which recent scholarship has produced that the natural tendency of any community, civilized or not, after reaching a certain level, is not to progress but to degenerate. It is time now to add that this applies not only to the physical conditions of life but to spiritual and intellectual life also. There is no need to look farther for authorities when Sri Krishna himself says so in the *Gita*: “Whenever *dharma* is eclipsed and *adhharma* prevails I incarnate; for the protection of the good, the destruction of the evil and the establishment of *dharma* I manifest myself.” (IV, 7-8). This indicates in spiritual life the same

downward course that Lord Raglan and Mr. Rivers have demonstrated in material civilization. Moreover in spiritual life also this downward course has been found among peoples outside the great centres of civilization as well as within them. It used to be said that such people were too 'primitive' to have risen to a conception of a Supreme Being, but later research has shown that all of them either have this belief or have had it and lost it in the course of their decline.

I shall say more about this in the next chapter but it cannot be altogether overlooked here because there is no sharp dividing line between the material and spiritual life of a community. Indeed, the former is the outer form taken by the latter. The importance of purely material aids to what has been called 'progress' such as the discovery of a new building material, has been grossly exaggerated as part of the generally anti-religious trend of modern scholarship. The civilizations which arose north, south and east of India were mainly the efflorescence of Buddhism; that of Mediaeval Christendom was the structure built by Christianity; that of the Near East was animated by Islam. It requires no great insight to perceive that the strong aspiration of Gothic architecture with its high roofs and buttresses was as expressive of Mediaeval Christianity as the graceful arch and massive dome was of Islam. Even if there had been no ferroconcrete it would be impossible to conceive of either style in modern civilization. They would not express it. Its architecture is not superior to them; it is different.

Having thus examined the evidence for progress in general and not found any, let us now consider the vaunted superiority of the modern world and see in what it lies. First and foremost, of course, is mechanisation. No one can dispute that this has made life in many ways more convenient. But no one can dispute either that it is this very achievement which threatens our civilization with total destruction, and many are beginning to ask whether it is worth the price, whether a skill which puts the

world under a constant tension of fear is really worth having. Would it not be better to kill each other by hand and write plays with a quill as people did in Shakespeare's time?

Is there no other way in which modern civilization excels? Some will say that it does in humanity, in its social and political order, its democracy, its regard for the rights of the individual. That is a question that a sociologist could go into at some length. There have been many civilizations, of some of which we know the social and political organization and of others not. There have been times when life was secure and other times when it was perilous. I should say that the unconscious background picture revealed by the Buddhist *Jataka* tales and the Hindu epics shows a rural India both more prosperous and more dignified than that of today. China has been through prosperous and miserable, secure and perilous ages, but the general picture we have of the times of Confucius and Lao Tzu or of the early Han Dynasty seems to show greater prosperity and less insecurity of life than either the time leading up to the Communist Revolution or that which has followed it. Certainly there has been no steady upward trend.

As for our social and political order, there are two variants of it, the capitalist and communist, and neither has a good word to say for the other, so which is it that excels all previous ones? And when we come to consider regard for the individual each denies that the other has any. And in only for his material welfare? People of Mediaeval Europe would be horrified to hear of a civilization which gave the individual no spiritual guidance or instruction and would consider it an evil joke that it should claim at the same time to protect his welfare. And most traditional civilizations would agree with them. So here again it is rather a question of different outlook than of absolute progress or decline. Communism aims at a state of affairs where every person will have the material needs of life—"to each according to his needs"; Western capitalist countries have more or less achieved this, though

not by the Communist route—there is very little poverty left in them. But the leaders of a traditional civilization would say that it is far too banal a goal to be worth aiming at. It leaves people frustrated, disintegrated, with food and clothing and ready-made amusements but with no aspiration, no understanding of life, nothing to live for. And as a result the suicide rate is highest in the countries with the highest standard of living. Is that regard for the individual? Nor is it only a question of suicide; the number of neurotics, of the mentally unbalanced, of people in need of psychiatry in modern mechanised societies is fantastic. The rush, the speed, the noise, the competition, the clamour of new needs to be satisfied, the fierce grasping at pleasure and self-indulgence—all these fray a man's nerves, often to breaking point. Men have lost their peace of mind and clutch after pleasure and success to replace it, finding only too often frustration.

And are we really so humane and peace-loving as we like to think? We are still too near the Nazi extermination camps and Stalinist slave-labour camps to say much about that. And despite our professed love of peace there seems to be chronically a state of war in some part of the world or other.

The whole question of social and political order has to be considered not merely empirically but more profoundly as indicative of the idea behind it. It is no use arguing simply that in this respect people are better off today and in that respect things were better formerly; it is a question of what underlies the organisation. Today the ideal in the so-called 'free world', as against the Communist ideal of "to each according to his needs" is "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". But does that not carry the assumption that physical amenities and ready-made amusements are all that men need to make them happy? That is not so. It might be all right for horses or cows, but man differs from other animals in that he has innate spiritual aspiration and an urge to understand and transcend the human state and is not really happy until he does so.

The social and political organisers of the modern world would say: "That's not our business." Those of a traditional civilization would reply: "It's just what should be your business." An achievement must be judged in terms of its aim, and given this difference in aims between modern and traditional social orders it is unrealistic to compare their achievements. A traditional civilization aimed less at making life as comfortable as possible than at maintaining an organic society which should promote harmonious living and facilitate spiritual attainment. For the West the spiritual cosmology underlying the social order and symbolised by it was described by Dante in his *De Monarchia*. It shows that the aim was not progress but stability and that change, if at all, was not to be in an uncharted direction but only back to the ideal pattern, never fully achieved but also never renounced. To have renounced it would have been an act of despair. In Islam the law reflected neither the will of the people nor the wishes of the ruler but the Divine Ordinances laid down in the *Holy Koran* and interpreted by the Doctors of Law. The ruler could apply it to the needs of the times but not change it. In India life was supposed to be lived in accordance with the *shastras*, and these said little about the rights of men, far more about their duties. The goal aimed at was not pleasure but *dharma*, that is right and harmonious living.

I am not for a moment suggesting that this goal was always or ever attained. I am not speaking as a romantic defender of old times. There was much brutality and insecurity, as there is today; there were wars, as there are today. The ideal order to which I have been referring was not what was attained but what was attained but what was kept in mind as the goal to be aimed at. The difference was that reforms or changes were an attempt at closer approximation to the ideal pattern never fully achieved but also never abandoned, whereas now they are eclectic and valued for their own sake.



The modern claim to superiority which I have left to last is that which most modernists would put first: that is pure scientific knowledge. I have already shown that the general claim of an increase in ability is untenable, so what advance scientific knowledge there is must be accounted for by a change in the direction in which ability is utilised. It is really, therefore, not so distinct as might appear from the question of social order and mental outlook, since there first had to be the sort of society in which men would have the desire to master physical science and apply it to the mechanisation of life. Prof. J. Macmurray says, in this connection, in his *The Boundaries of Science*: "The attitude of mind which was characteristic of the Middle Ages could not have produced science. It had no interest in doing so. Mediaeval society did not want scientific questions asked because it had no intention of modifying the traditional forms of social life." (p. 42). Here we see an author writing from the view point of modern science who takes the same attitude that I have expressed here, that is to say that it is the underlying mental outlook of a community which decides in what direction the ability of its young men is to be turned. In justice it should be added as a counterpoise to his dictum that the attitude of mind characteristic of the modern age could not restore the Hermetic sciences of the Middle Ages and has no interest in doing so. A modernist might retort: "Of course not; why should it?" But that would be prejudging the case in his own favour; let us consider it impartially.

Modern science has indeed changed the whole structure of life, both social and individual, by mechanisation. It has produced telephones and nuclear bombs. Until this latter product was achieved people were enthusiastic about it; now they are scared and begin to look upon it as a Frankenstein threatening to destroy its creator. Hermetic sciences supplied techniques for the integration of mind and character and for spiritual development and as a by-product they gave rise to the grandest and noblest

architecture the west has ever known. Adherents of each of the two civilizations might declare that they considered the products of the other not worth striving for, so once again it comes down to a question of values and viewpoint.

But can we not consider the two kinds of science in themselves, simply from the point of truth, without bringing in the question of their application or utility? It is not so easy as might be thought, because the application of science is on the one hand a test of its accuracy and on the other a large part of the motivation of pursuing it. If we try to do so the answer must be that both kinds of science are true in different ways. There is no doubt that modern physical science has gone farther than any previous science of which we have record in probing the actual physical structure and composition of the universe. It is also true that traditional civilizations, with the partial exception of Ancient Greece, which was only partially traditional, have shown little or no interest in acquiring such a science. On the other hand, the Tantric science of Kundalini and the *chakras*, to take only one traditional science among many, is also true and can be proved experimentally; but it is not physical science so much as spiritual and the modern scientist would not be likely to be interested in it—partly for that reason, partly because it can produce nothing but beatitude.

What it comes to is that even in what can be called pure science there are different types of science and one's estimate will depend on one's viewpoint, on which type one considers worth while. In fact modern science has gained much and lost much. It has gained a considerable insight into the physical structure of man and the universe; it has lost the symbolism underlying traditional art and music and, above all, the sciences of integration and spiritualisation of the individual. Would it not be possible to combine both? It would, of course, if it were possible to want to, but up to now the sober truth has been that the exponents of one kind of science have not valued the other.

In any case, the change from one to the other cannot be called progress but only change of direction. The partisans of modernism might call it progress, but that would be a partisan judgement.

After thus exposing the lack of evidence for progress in history I should like to go back to the theory itself and the acceptance it has had. As I said at the outset of this chapter, it still holds the field, though with a great deal of modification. Indeed, the two exponents of it that I took as examples, Marx and Toynbee, are typical respectively of the 19th and 20th Century attitudes to it. It is odd, incidentally, that the followers of Marx should like to label themselves 'progressives' when actually they are arch-conservatives, being anchored to a 19th Century prophet. One might be tempted to say that they have failed to progress. Marx was typical of his age—his atheism, his materialism, his belief in inevitable, automatic progress, his confining his vision to social and mechanical changes, his narrow and fallacious view of history. Actually, his Utopia, a community with joint ownership of assets and with each person expected to contribute to the general welfare according to his ability and allowed to draw from it according to his needs, is not anything unknown to history. It has been found existent among various uncivilized tribes in different parts of the world. Who is to say that they were not happy? But they had created no culture or civilization and made no impact on the rest of mankind. They were simply stagnating.

As for his belief in inevitable progress (necessary for faith in the ultimate triumph of Communism), I have already shown that to be a pure myth. So much at least twentieth century theorists such as Toynbee now perceive. Without by any means accepting Toynbee's peculiar theories, one can at least agree with him that there have been many different civilizations which have met different challenges in different ways and that some of them have perished. Also that there must be a spiritual life in a civilization to ensure its survival.

An odd thing about the original theory of inevitable evolution followed by equally inevitable progress once the human state had been achieved that it should have been thought to do away with the need for Divine Providence. One would have supposed just the contrary, that it would postulate this need, for who could expect blind chance to be so benevolent as to lead men animals, frogs and grasshoppers, constantly to higher and higher forms of life, and from life the civilization of the time of Buddha to that of the time of Marx.

Together with the theory of progress, its ally, evolution, has also run into troubled waters. When first propounded by Darwin it suited the spirit of the age so well that it was gleefully seized upon. True, Darwin's suggestion of how it worked by sexual selection and survival of the fittest was soon found to be unacceptable, but that didn't matter; some biologist was sure to stumble on its real way of working before long. But a century has now elapsed and no biologist has been able to show a single proved case of evolution or to suggest a plausible technique by which it may have occurred. It is still the official doctrine but has grown more tentative. Some biologists now postulate sudden radical changes but are unable to suggest how or why they come about. If the object is to dispense with Divine Providence, sudden radical changes seem ill fitted to do so; on the contrary they would seem to presuppose a controlling intelligence of some kind or other. Evolution is now rather in need of aid than able to give it.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century apostles of progress used to marvel what unproven and contradictory beliefs members of a traditional community were capable of harbouring. This chapter has shown that they themselves were by no means deficient in this regard. Consider, for instance, their believing at one and the same time that progress was inevitable and universal and that it was attainable only by Europeans. It would be tempting to say that it is on account of wider study and a more intelligent approach that we have now become so much more, tentative in our attitude to

progress; but is that not arrogating to ourselves too much progress over our ancestors—who, after all, are only two or three generations behind us: our grandfathers or greatgrandfathers? Would it not imply that we have suddenly outgrown man's capacity for harbouring unproven or contradictory beliefs? I have already shown that followers of Marx—who probably account for about half mankind—still have this capacity as strongly developed as ever. Gullibility is indeed one of the most outstanding characteristics of man and only too often those who flatter themselves on having escaped it have only fallen into another form of it. Today's modernists, for example, would probably contend that the one thing they can safely claim is to be hard-boiled and not easily taken in; and yet they are duped by the utterly untenable suggestion that contentment can be achieved by constant satisfaction of constantly created new needs, with the result that they rush into ever new dissatisfaction and frustration.

It is more realistic to suppose that the second thoughts people are having about progress today are not due to the progress we have made since the days of our muddled grandfathers but to the extraneous factor that, as I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, the theory of progress does not suit the spirit of the age as it did that of yesterday. Let us now see why not. The most obvious answer is: fear. Since Hiroshima we have been living in a frightened world. The comfortable assurance that our civilization is in no danger of perishing as so many earlier ones have, has been destroyed. The danger is all too visible. And the destruction of that assurance destroys also our conviction of superiority over all previous civilizations. True, we have a form of science which they did not have, but if it is a Frankenstein which we have evoked for our own destruction were they not fortunate to be without it? In the popular mind it was just this science with its inventions that formed the incontrovertible sign of progress, whatever the historians might say; and it is this science which has now come to be seen as the threat to our very

existence. Historians, being creatures of their age, look around and that there has been no steady upward trend, that civilizations have fallen as well as risen, and that uncivilized peoples are not primitive but decadent.

There is another, more deep-seated way in which the spirit that I shall elaborate more on what I said at the beginning of this chapter. The historical trend that set in at the Renaissance has now run its course and a reaction against it is setting in. The Renaissance was a revolt against tradition—against the socio-political tradition of Pope and Emperor, kings and nobles, the philosophical tradition of scholasticism, the traditional ways of living and thinking, and above all against the spiritual basis of life and thought, art and government. Such a movement naturally takes time to run its course and achieve full victory—to percolate from the intellectuals to the masses, to break down barriers of conservatism and crush revolts. Indeed, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it seemed that people were more concerned with religion than formerly; they even fought wars about it. But the 18<sup>th</sup> century showed that that had been a superficial reaction. Life and thought were becoming more and more superficial and materialistic. Science and philosophy were breaking away from their religious moorings. The purely spiritual or mystical training which should be the heart of religion and, through religion, of the whole civilization was lost.

It might be said that the Renaissance revolt against tradition and religion culminated not in the 19<sup>th</sup> but the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> the churches were still full; society still had a class structure, family life was till organic. Only today has society been atomised into an amorphous mass of irreligious, materialistic, pleasure-seeking individuals. So it appears, but that is on account of the timelag, of which I have already spoken, between the intellectual pioneers and the masses. The Renaissance revolt was inaugurated by pioneering intellectuals at a time when the general masses, educated and uneducated,

rulers and ruled, were still traditional. Similarly now the reaction against this revolt has already set in among the intellectuals even while the tide is still flowing among the masses. This reaction is to be seen in all those who find that mechanised and materialistic life, now that it has been achieved (in countries where it has), has turned to Dead Sea fruit, that it has not brought satisfaction but frustration, and especially among all those who seek now at last to restore a spiritual foundation to life, to both personal and public life, in place of that which has been lost. They follow many paths in their search, some turning to Hindu *ashrams* and Zen monasteries, some introducing the Buddha Dharma into the West, some seeking to restore the full vitality of their own Christian tradition, some reviving the tradition of spiritual healing in the West. All these groups and movements together may be no more than a tiny minority compared with the vast masses who are being swept along in a meaningless existence, but the early Christians were few, the pioneers of the Renaissance were few, Lenin's Communists who seized control of Russia were few. Every movement is pioneered by a minority and this is the pioneering minority of today; and they are not duped by talk of progress.

327

## 2 - Progress in Religion

WHEN THE THEORY of evolution was first launched it was thought to be a denial of religion. It is hard to see why. A Creator could just as well create gradually as suddenly and just as well through the action of law as by the suspension of law. Indeed, the very idea of a time when there was not a created universe followed by a time when there was is superficial and unphilosophical.

Although this was not realised at the time, the theory of progress was in fact more inimical to religion. With regard to general culture and ability there is no theoretical reason why it might not be true, although in fact, as I showed in the last chapter, the evidence is against it; but with regard to religion it is even theoretically impossible, since the presumption that religion can rise from lower to higher levels implies that it is a mere concoction of human ideas and theories or something that can be worked out intellectually. Perhaps that is what the originators of the study of the history of religions wanted to imply when they read progress into religion.

Religion is not philosophy or theology; it is not something that can be learned stage by stage as students learn at college; it is a harmonious ordering of life, individual and social, based on direct intuitional certitude. This certitude has nothing to do with social or educational background or intellectual brilliance. It is not a system of ideas worked out by philosophers, not anything that could progress or be added to. Even among civilized communities there are examples to show that it is not an intellectual achievement, since some of the outstanding religious leaders have not been intellectuals. Ignatius Loyola was not an intellectual but an ecstatic and was middle-aged before he could obtain the university degree without which the Church would not allow him to teach. Sri Ramakrishna had little



education and was anything but an intellectual, and yet intellectuals became his disciples. In China the 5<sup>th</sup> Ch'an Patriarch was looking for a successor among his disciples but found true understanding only in the illiterate provincial labourer who was to become the great 6<sup>th</sup> Patriarch Hui Neng.

All this is theory. It will appeal to those who believe that there is divine reality in religion, not to those who would like religion to be made to appear a mere human invention. But now let us pass from theory to evidence. From this viewpoint religions fall into three groups: those with a known historical origin, those that used to be called 'primitive', and those that are followed by peoples on a high cultural level, like the ancient Greeks, the Hindus and the Hebrews but have no known point of origin.

The obvious ones to study first are those with a known historical origin, since their whole course lies open before us. Strangely enough, this was not done when the theory of progress was applied to religion. If it had been, the answer would immediately have negated progress; for any Christian claiming to have progressed beyond Christ would thereby cease to be a Christian, and similarly with the followers of any other religion stemming from a single founder. How could the historians of religion who spoke of progress overlook so obvious a fad? Was it because they were so divorced from reality? Did they even try to understand a religion—any religion at all—from the inside?

Not only have all religions with a single founder not progressed but they have not even remained static; they have declined. Both Buddha and Mohammed are reported to have declared that the best epoch of their religion would be that immediately following themselves and that thereafter it would decline; and other religions also have followed the same course. Christianity also honours the Early Church as its apex. What was it that enabled the early Christians to infiltrate the Roman Empire and the rough, semi-barbarian countries beyond and

to carry conviction even in the face of persecution? They must have had a spiritual power that would be rare to find today. No argument or dialogue could do that.

Nor can it be said that there is any sort of cyclic progress which makes each successive historical religion higher in the scale than the previous one. In the first place, how is any historian of religion going to arrogate to himself the right to call one religion higher than another? The purpose of religion is to lead man to the supreme goal of beatitude or liberation. If it can do that there is nothing higher; if not it is an incomplete or degenerate religion. But before trying to decide that, a historian would have to understand what beatitude or liberation implies and how to recognise its traces.

Even apart from this, however, the theory of cyclic progress would be absurd because the religions are not spaced out in time in a way that would make it possible. If a new religion appeared every few centuries it might be argued, but most of them are contemporaneous. Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Confucianism and probably Zoroastrianism all started about the same time, about the 5<sup>th</sup> century B. C. Christianity came five centuries later and Islam after another five, so if any one did want to believe in cyclic progress in the face of evidence he would have to become a Muslim, since Islam, being the latest religion to be promulgated, would have to be the highest. Some Muslims do in fact claim this.

Dismissing, then, the fantasy of cyclic progress and getting back to the internal history of each religion: I do not mean to say that religions simply decline after the death of their founder. It is a more complex and more organic process than that. And it follows the same course in every religion. The potentialities latent in the early form of a religion become manifest, growing into a varied though homogeneous civilization and covering all aspects of life. Ritualistic worship is developed, but also art, poetry, philosophy, spiritual sciences, all branches from a single

trunk. There is glowing devotion, great saints appear, often with miraculous powers, paths of spiritual training are elaborated and find many followers; then, after its season of florescence, the philosophy becomes academic, the ritual formalistic, the art ornate, the poetry trite, spiritual aspirants are few and those who achieve still fewer, and decadence sets in.

Some time after Mohammed the law scattered in stray injunctions throughout the *Koran* was systematised by the Doctors of Law; the ritual was stabilised; philosophy became voluminous; dogmas that had been implicit were formulated; the glories of Islamic architecture were developed; the great Sufi poets wove their webs of splendour. Similarly, Mediaeval Christendom developed Gothic architecture and scholastic philosophy and envisaged an ideal socio-political organisation or Christendom as an earthly reflection of the Kingdom of Heaven. A similar process occurred in Buddhism also. But in every case the simplicity of the primitive religion was recognised as having been higher and purer. And in every case the efflorescence was followed by ossification and decline.

This brings up the interesting question of the relation between religion and art. There is a striking paradox in this. Most of the great art and poetry of the world is an outcome and interpretation of religion—and lest Ancient Greece be considered an exception, let it be remembered that the Greeks themselves regarded Homer as a religious authority and that the great Athenian plays were expositions of traditional religious themes. And yet—here is the other side of the paradox—every religion at its outset seems indifferent or hostile to art. The *Koran* forbids representational art and speaks scornfully of poets. The *Tao Te King* declares that the five senses dull the mind and that the Sage is therefore not deluded by them. Both Christ and Buddha completely ignore art, as do their immediate followers. And yet in their later stage of efflorescence all the religions produced sublime poetry and magnificent visual art. Nor can

this be regarded as infidelity to their source or as a clash between two types, a revolt of the poets against the Puritans; for the poets were not rebels against the religion but the great spiritual masters within it—a Dante, a Rumi, a Kabir and a Milarepa.

In explaining this paradox I quote from an article that I wrote in *The Mountain Path*<sup>1</sup>: “In the incandescent white heat of the origin of a religion the energy of those who aspire, strengthened as by a springboard by their rejection of the degenerate world around them, shoots straight upwards. The *sattva guna*, the upward tendency, dominates. Directing the energy outwards to forms, even beautiful forms, would be a weakness, almost a betrayal, for however beautiful the forms may be they limit and obscure the pure beauty of the Formless. As a poet saw intuitively long after the certainty of religion had been lost, even though life be a dome of many-coloured glass, it still stains the white radiance of eternity.

“Coming to the Mediaeval epoch, we find that the incandescent white heat has cooled to a mellow golden glow. *Sattva* is combined now with *rajas*, the upward-tending with the outward-tending urge. Indirect paths to realization begin to be followed.....Art is now deliberately encouraged and developed; it is not merely allowed as a concession to those who are not one-pointed enough to strive without it, still less is it indulged in as a luxury; it is used as a technique of discipline and development.”

If this is the course followed by all historical religions, if they are at their highest in their earliest stage, it would be reckless to presume that those with no known historical origin have followed a directly opposite course. And yet that is what the theory of progress did and perhaps still does presume. Let us turn next, then, to the religions which the apostles of progress, with no evidence at all, labelled ‘primitive’. As I showed in the previous

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<sup>1</sup> *The Relations Between Religion and Art*, January 1964, p. 41[p. 398 of this volume].

chapter, anthropologists have now discovered the peoples who used to be called primitives to be degenerate inheritors of a culture which, high or low, was at least higher than they have now, insofar as concerns handicrafts and the outer traits of civilization. The same also has been found to be true of their religion. Far from being too primitive to rise to the conception of one Supreme God, they have been found in all cases either to have this belief or to have had it and lost it.

It may be asked whether, if gradual progress in religion is impossible, gradual decline, such as this new evidence points to, is not also impossible. Unfortunately it is not. Gradual progress would imply that religion was something that could be learnt piecemeal or invented or thought out by man, which it is not; gradual decline implies only that the human ego manifesting as inertia or desire or self-will can lose its grip on religion, which is only too true. We see it happening in the world today.

Indeed, this is a natural process and has to be fought against. Supreme Being takes no cognisance of the individual. Individuality or the ego-self is an ephemeral thing eventually to be extinguished. However powerful or wealthy or fortunate it may be, it will eventually be crushed by sickness and old age and devoured by death. All religions agree that the only way of attaining felicity is to surrender it completely. As Christ said, he who gives up his life will find it but he who seeks to save it will lose it. One who surrenders self-will finds Supreme Being benevolent and gracious, not because it has a preference for him over other people but because that is its nature and he has ceased to oppose its nature. If sickness or misfortune come he will still feel the Grace and Benevolence. But one who wishes to cling to his egoism and still obtain benefits and good fortune will find that it is no use appealing to Supreme Being. He will have to find some other way of gratifying his ego until the time comes for the ego itself to be broken and devoured. In modern civilization he does so by physical means. In fact the whole of

modern civilization is geared to the gratification of the ego with countless gadgets, synthetic amusements, drugs and stimulants, tobacco and alcohol, quick travel and cheap thrills. But there are other ways of gratifying the ego too; for instance by placating and harnessing subtle powers, which is called animism. Materialistic investigators of an animistic cult, finding themselves up against a technique they understood nothing of, were apt to dismiss it as meaningless and useless, but it was neither. Their presuming that it was, without troubling to investigate, was only a measure of their arrogance. The anthropologist might vaguely believe in a Supreme God but rely on physical means to gratify his desires; the animist he was studying might also vaguely believe in a Supreme God but use the intermediary spirit world to gratify his desires. In both cases religion was degenerate and only a shadow remained of the original cult of the One God.

The case is similar with magic. The original students of comparative religion, men of the school of Sir James Frazer, were trying to show that religion evolved out of magic. Their underlying contention, though seldom openly expressed, was that the magic of people they considered 'primitive' was humbug and therefore the religion that grew out of it among people they considered 'evolved' could not be much better. As a matter of fact, they were doubly wrong. Magic is not humbug and religion did not grow out of it. On the contrary, magic is a debased residue of religion, and it may be very potent—more often for evil than good.

Let us see how this comes about. The essence of religion is the quest of Liberation or Beatitude or at least spiritual states or experiences on the way to it. (And, in parenthesis, the early exponents of the history of religion, such as Frazer, did not know of the very possibility of this!) To this end various methods are employed. Some of these may be formless, such as sitting in meditation; others, for instance in Hermetism, Tantrism and

Yoga, have a physical technique also. Any spiritual training, but especially the latter type, may develop certain powers by the way. There are a wide variety of these, including thought-reading, healing, levitation; Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* give a compendious list of them. A Guru usually cautions an aspirant against making use of them. Ramakrishna warned in his usual blunt manner: "Shun them like filthy excrement. Sometimes they come of themselves when you practise *sadhana*. But if you take any notice of them you'll stick fast. You won't be able to reach God."<sup>2</sup> But it often happens that an aspirant, after taking to the path and making some initial progress, lacks the purity or perseverance to persist and falls out. If he has already attained certain powers they do not then necessarily leave him, especially if they are evoked by some technique or formula that he knows. Thus the misuse and diffusion of techniques originally intended for a spiritual purpose can lead to magic or occultism.

Materialistic as the modern world is, there is quite a lot of occultism practised in it, though for the most part it shuns publicity and is little heard of. Among some of the peoples who used to be called 'primitive' obscuration of worship of the One God has left a residue mainly of animism and magic. Some of this may have degenerated to the point of losing all efficacy, but by no means all of it has.

In some cases animism has been recognised as the degeneracy that it is. For instance in Burma anthropologists have expressed surprise at finding animism and Buddhism side by side. And yet it is a natural outcome of human weakness. It is no more surprising than finding materialism and Christianity side by side in Europe. Buddha taught that the way to felicity is by abnegation of desires, but not all the people who live in a Buddhist country or all the anthropologists who go there to study them are able to achieve this. Those who aim at achieving

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<sup>2</sup> *Ramakrishna and his Disciples*, p.90 (by Christopher Isherwood, Methuen)

it do so by following the Buddha Dhamma; for those who do not, Buddha did not prescribe any technique for gratifying desires. The anthropologists do so mainly by money and machines, the Burmese at least partly by animism and magic.

Another feature which is sometimes classed as a sign of degeneracy in religions that used to be called 'primitive' is polytheism; but here the issue is more involved because polytheism, like monotheism, can be valid or degenerate according to how it is understood. Polytheism is found not only among uncultured peoples but over a great part of the world including all branches of the Aryan race—Scandinavian, Germanic, Slavonic, Graeco-Roman, Iranian and Hindu. Indeed this question can serve as a transition point from the religion of peoples called 'primitive' to that of highly cultured peoples such as the Ancient Greeks and Hindus.

Polytheism is degenerate when it implies worship of a lot of separate gods like a group of deathless men and women, just as monotheism is degenerate when it means worshipping a person called 'God', like man, only bigger and stronger. There is a vast difference; between understanding that man is made in the likeness of God and trying to make God in the likeness of man. However, polytheism is as meaningful as monotheism when a Hindu guru tells his disciple to concentrate on his Ishta Devata, that is on the form of God which most appeals to him, for in doing this he is merely leading him on to realization of the Formless.

There seems little doubt that in classical times Graeco-Roman polytheism had degenerated and given place to a civilization almost though not quite as materialistic and utilitarian as our own. Some of the later writers, both Greek and Roman, obviously had no understanding of the gods, did not know whether to believe in them or not, and looked at them simply as a group of specially privileged people. However some spirituality did remain in the Mysteries, and it is also clear that some of the older writers, such as Aeschylus, still understood



the profound meaning of the mythology. To one who knows how to read symbols and mythology it is quite clear that there had been a profound meaning. For an understanding of this, readers can be referred to the remarkable study of it by that strange mystic-scholar-ascetic Simone Weil published posthumously under the title *Intimations of Christianity Among the Ancient Greeks*.<sup>3</sup>

We have all heard the myth of the rape of Persephone, daughter of Demeter, the Earth-Mother, by Pluto, the Lord of Hades. She was playing in the fields and stooping to pluck a narcissus flower when the earth opened at her feet and Pluto or Hades, Lord of the Underworld, rose up in his chariot and carried her away to his domain. Her mother complained to Zeus and, because she had refused to eat in the Underworld, her release was ordered. Before leaving, however, she was induced to eat a single pomegranate seed and, since this signified a certain measure of consent, she was obliged to spend a certain part of each year with Pluto in the Underworld. Materialist commentators have seen in this no more than a myth of the seasons, the death of greenery in the winter and its rebirth in spring, but why does that need a symbol? Physical symbols for physical things are unnecessary. Moreover it does not account for the whole story—for the narcissus flower or the pomegranate seed. The following is the profound interpretation that Simone Weil gives of it in the book referred to.

“Hades or Aidoneus, a name which means ‘Invisible’ or ‘Eternal’, or the two at once, is presented sometimes as the brother of Zeus, sometimes as Zeus himself, for there is a subterranean Zeus. The name of Demeter very probably means Earth-Mother, and Demeter is identical with all those goddess mothers whose cult has so many analogies with the role played by the Virgin in the Catholic conception. The narcissus flower represents Narcissus, a being so beautiful that, he could be in

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<sup>3</sup> Published by Routledge and Kegan Paul.

love only with himself. The only beauty that can be an object of love for itself, which can be its own object, is the divine beauty. The soul in quest of pleasure encounters the divine beauty, here below, in the form of the beauty of the world, as a snare for the soul. By the power of this snare God seizes the soul in spite of itself. This is the very same conception that we find in Plato's *Phaedrus*. God must allow the soul to return to nature; but before that, by surprise and by strategy, He furtively gives it a pomegranate seed to eat. If the soul eats this it is captured for ever. The pomegranate seed is that consent which the soul gives to God almost without knowing it, and without admitting it to itself. This is an infinitely small thing among all the carnal inclinations of the soul, and nevertheless this decides its destiny for ever. This is the grain of mustard seed to which Christ compares the Kingdom of Heaven, the smallest of seeds, but which later should become the tree where in the birds of heaven alight."<sup>4</sup> The Scandinavian, Hindu and Iranian mythologies are patently of the same family as the Graeco-Roman and it would be possible to elucidate their symbolism also, but this is not the place to do so. It may be remarked, however, that one form of degeneracy in religion is for mythology to remain but its profounder symbolism to be forgotten. Thus it may be possible to find meanings in the myths of uncivilized peoples which they themselves are no longer aware of. This sort of forgetting certainly took place among the Greeks and Romans. For that matter, it has in the civilization of the modern West also; for there are many Mediaeval stories of quest and fulfillment, such as *Snow White* or *The Sleeping Beauty* which have survived only as tales for children, their meaning forgotten.

Let us next look at Judaism. This is a very interesting case, perhaps the most interesting of all, because it is a religion, perhaps the only one, in which the historians of religion seem to have some evidence of progress. They tell us that early Hebrew

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

religion was crude and had not yet any conception of Universal God but, worshipped Yahveh as a mere tribal deity. However, having seen the opposite process at work in all other religions we should be cautious of any such evidence. This is not the place to examine it in detail, but a few important considerations may be pointed out in connection with it.

First: the Hebrews themselves did not look down on the Patriarchs or their early ancestors but had the highest regard for them.

Secondly: Christ showed the highest regard for the Hebrew scriptures and quoted them constantly.

Thirdly: Islam also shows great regard for the Hebrew Patriarchs. The *Koran*, for instance, refers to Abraham as being neither Jew nor Christian but a pure Muslim, that is one submitted purely to God without the complicated ritual and theology that came later.

Fourthly: it is by no means easy to interpret the idiom of an alien race and age. Its sayings can be misleading. For instance, many writers have quoted the saying "The Lord thy God is a jealous God" as showing a crude idea of an angry tribal deity, whereas in fact it is the same as Christ's saying that you cannot serve God and Mammon and as the Islamic creed that there is no god but God. It simply states the universal truth that half measures are no use in religion: it is total surrender that is required.

Then what about the generally accepted statement that the Hebrews worshipped Yahveh as a limited tribal deity? Is it possible to worship God and at the same time to consider Him limited? I don't think so. The feeling, sense, intuition of God is a feeling of pure, boundless Being, of 'I am that I am' according to the words spoken to Moses when he asked the name of God. It makes no difference in what religion or in what period of history, one cannot conceive of the pure I AM of God and at the same time consider it limited. It is true that the Hebrews did often

speak of 'the God of Israel', but I suggest that the limitation which this term implies was not on God but on people and that what they meant was: 'Supreme, Universal Being worshipped by the Israelites but neglected by the neighbouring peoples who preferred instead to cultivate intermediary powers and forces which they called gods.' God is the same whether worshipped or not and whether worshipped by one people or by all peoples. There is no justification for supposing that the Israelites did not understand this, as worshippers in all other religions do.

It is natural, of course, to have a strong emotional attachment to the form in which one has always worshipped the Formless, and even today one can imagine a Hindu family warning a daughter who wanted to leave home and marry a foreigner that she would have to worship Allah instead of Shiva or Christ instead of Krishna or whatever it might be. It might cause a great emotional upheaval but that does not mean that they really look upon God as limited.

But the Hebrews in the *Old Testament* often refer to the gods of some of their neighbours as 'abominations' and certainly no Hindu family would refer to Allah or Christ in such a way. This is far too large a subject to go into here; I will simply suggest that there are three possible explanations of such an attitude: first that Divine Providence which cared for the Hebrews was completely indifferent to the spiritual welfare of the neighbouring peoples and allowed them to waste their lives in abominations with no guidelines and revelation; second that the Hebrews, like some missionaries of not very long ago, considered every religion different from their own an abomination without trying to understand it; and thirdly that these neighbouring religions really had degenerated and become 'abominations' like those of some of the peoples who used to be 'primitives'. Of the three possibilities, the first seems the least likely and the last the most.

If all other religions could be shown to have progressed, the historians of religion could be given the benefit of the doubt

with regard to Judaism; but since religions in general can be shown to have followed the opposite course, there must be strong presumption that they have misread the evidence.

Let us now turn to the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Harmony (or law or righteousness or religion, there is no adequate translation), called by foreigners 'Hinduism'. Being eternal does not exempt it from degeneration, for that is a universal law. But so is the possibility of regeneration. There is no need to quote any lesser authorities for this when Sri Krishna himself said so: "I proclaimed this imperishable yoga to Vivasvan; he told it to Manu and Manu to Ikshavaku. Thus handed down from one princely sage to another, it was known until, through long lapse of time, it was lost to the world. This same ancient yoga have I today declared to you."<sup>5</sup> Note that the teaching's being imperishable does not prevent it being lost through long lapse of time. It is not truth that perishes but only man's comprehension of it; and this is restored through Divine Grace. A few verses later Sri Krishna confirms that this is not simply an isolated event but is the regular course by which Divine Providence counteracts human perversity. "Whenever dharma is eclipsed and *adharma* prevails, I incarnate Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of dharma I manifest Myself from age to age."<sup>6</sup>

Here, then, we have a further law in the history of religions. After the burgeoning out of latent possibilities, when the decline sets in, this decline is arrested by periodical manifestations of Divine Grace which bring about a partial and temporary restoration of the diminished spiritual current. This is to be seen in the historical religions as well as in the Sanatana Dharma. In Christianity it happened with the establishment of monasticism by the Egyptian Desert Fathers and then, for the West, by St. Benedict; later by the monastic reforms in which St. Bernard was

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<sup>5</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, IV, 1-3

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, IV, 7-8.

the central figure, and still later with the Orders of Friars instituted by St. Francis and St. Dominic. In Islam the most powerful such movement was the founding of the great Sufi orders about the 12<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era by Abdu'l Qadir in Iran, Ibn Arabi in Spain, Muinuddin Chishti in India and others. In Mahayana Buddhism the most prominent instance of it was the rise of Ch'an in China. In Judaism it is to be seen in the preaching of the great prophets, from Amos to Isaiah.

This, then is the course taken by civilizations: a vigorous but austere youthful period, a luxuriant flowering of potentialities, and then a long decline, possibly arrested temporarily by new injections of life.

The Greco-Roman civilization received three such injections. The first was Platonism, leading to neo-Platonism and Gnosticism. This marked the change from what is commonly known as the Greek to the Hellenic period and the transference of the intellectual metropolis from Athens to Alexandria. The second was mainly administrative, for the Roman civilization was, after all, mainly an outer and administrative one. I refer to the creation of the Empire which changed an overgrown city-state into an international bureaucratic empire and thereby gave it several more centuries lease of life. The third was the injection of Christianity, which gave the civilization a new soul and enabled Roman law and Greek philosophy to survive the disintegration of the already decadent outer form.

These three rejuvenations delayed the collapse of the civilization but could not prevent it. No sudden shock killed Ancient Greek civilization. It just faded out and Greece ceased to be anything more than a province, first of the Roman Empire and then of the Byzantine. The new form of Hellenism and neo-Platonism lasted longer to fuse with Christianity before being superseded by it. As for Rome, historians disagree whether it was more due to economic decay or social or ethical or military

or political that it collapsed, but all these existed and it simply lacked the vitality to endure.

It will be noticed that I have been speaking here of civilizations instead of religions, but really there is little difference because normally a civilization is the outer form taken by a religion. The idea of an empirical, elective, secular civilization based on pure material convenience is quite modern. It is, in fact, the peculiar characteristic of the modern world. To some extent it was foreshadowed by the Greco-Roman civilization but much less than is commonly supposed.

I shall return to this question of modern civilization, but first let us consider others cases of rejuvenation. Some two or three thousand years ago the peoples north, south and east of India were in need of a new injection of spiritual vitality, that is to say a new source of spiritual life with its new outer crust of civilisation. And it seems to me that Buddhism came to fill this need. It is true that Hindu colonies had already begun to be formed in Java, Cambodia and other places before the rise of Buddhism, but Hinduism is a complete *dharma* covering all aspects of life, social as well as spiritual, and is therefore not easily exportable. Buddhism is much more formless and therefore more adaptable to countries with different social conditions. Therefore it served this purpose of spiritual rejuvenation better. In fact I should call it the export variety of Hinduism.

This explains why Buddhism took root in neighboring countries but not in India. It also explains much in the relations between the two religions. Many Buddhists are reluctant to admit the validity of Hinduism, the obvious difficulty in the way of their doing so being the question: if Hinduism is valid why was Buddhism necessary? Of course, Hinduism is valid. Even apart from its doctrine which, rightly interpreted, is true

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<sup>7</sup> In *Buddhism and Chirstianity in the Light of Hinduism* (Sri Ramanasramam, 1996).

and complete, this is evidenced by its long succession of saints and sages. Primarily a religion is a path to Liberation and a path which leads to this goal can not be wrong. A wrong path can not lead to the right goal. But if it is realised that Buddhism is the export variety of the dharma for peoples who have not got the Sanatana Dharma this difficulty disappears. Those who follow it need not force themselves to deny that Sanatana Dharma in the face of evidence.

This also explains the attitude of Hindus to the Buddha Dharma. When it threatened to submerge India, saints like the Shankara himself attacked it and drove it out. Its function was not to replace the Sanatana Dharma but to meet the needs of those whose own religions had become effete through lapse of time and who needed this spiritual rejuvenation. So long as it does that, Hindus can approve of it. Indeed, Buddha may well be regarded as the 9<sup>th</sup> or 'Foreign' Avatar in the Puranic list. It is true that his Dhamma was not of foreign origin, but it was for foreign consumption, which would justify the name.

Indeed, my conviction is, as I have explained elsewhere,<sup>7</sup> that the 9<sup>th</sup> Avatar, coming under the dual sign of Pisces, is the twofold appearance of Buddha for the East and Christ for the West. Just as the Sanatana Dharma was the great metropolitan current of law and tradition in the East, so Judaism was for the West. Just as the peoples to the east of India needed a spiritual renewal, so did those to the west of Judea. Just as Buddhism carried the spirit abroad to the East without the intricacies of law and ritual, so did Christianity to the West. Just as Buddhism proved unnecessary in the land of its origin, so did Christianity. In fact both export varieties.

This seems to me incontrovertible; but whether one accepts it or not does not affect my main contention: that religions and the civilizations with which they clothe themselves, do not progress but, after an efflorescence of great splendour, atrophy and degenerate.



Even apart from the factual non-existence of progress, no traditional civilization could accept the doctrine of indefinite, uncharted change called progress, because each one of them has been built to a blue-print provided by its religion. I have been speaking of religion primarily as a path to Liberation, and so it is, but, as I remarked when pointing out the difference between Hinduism and Buddhism, it is also secondarily a harmony blinding up and shaping the life of a community—that is to say, creating a culture or civilization. The two modes of activity interweave, reinforcing each other: the harmonized social life facilitates spiritual development for the individual, while spiritually developed individuals promote social harmony. But the point to be considered here is that each such civilization has its own ideal pattern, probably never fully achieved but always a goal to aim at, and therefore no such civilization could welcome uncharted change and call it progress. Mediaeval Christendom had its ideal pattern of the mundane towards this pattern. The blueprint for Islam was perfect observance of the Shari'at and a return to the days of the Prophet. The ideal for India was not some undefined future but a return to Ramrajya. To the modern mind, however, progress means uncharted change, not approaching any ideal pattern but simply getting better and better machines for making more and more unnecessary necessities.

Reverting to the question of individual and social aspects, one might say that religion has modalities, the vertical and horizontal. Vertically it is man's path to Beatitude or Liberation; horizontally it is the harmonization of individual and social life and is the soul of civilization. The vertical is the essence and the horizontal the substance. Once vertical perishes the horizontal becomes hollow within and is bound to decay. The horizontal aspect of religion can not exist without the vertical, although, as I shall point out, an attempt is now being made. The vertical can exist without the horizontal which is, in any case, only an application of it the contingent circumstances. There is an

example of this in our own days in the path of Self- enquiry which Ramana Maharshi has established for all who follow him, whether their way of life follows the pattern laid down by Hinduism or any other religion or none at all.

Now let us look at modernism, the civilization not built upon religion, man's attempt to live by bread alone—mechanically, materialistically, for physical convenience only. Like a number of religions, it has spilt into two main sects. Islam did into Sunni and Shia, Buddhism into Mahayana and Hinayana, Christianity into Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox and then again later into Catholic and Protestant; similarly modernism has spilt into the two branches of free enterprises and Communism, and they have the same mutual hostility that rival sects of a religion usually do have. Which of them can be considered the more legitimate representative of modernism and the real embodiment of progress? The honours are divided.

There are two outstanding characteristics of modernism: one is its materialism and antipathy to religion, the other is its cult of unguided progress, change towards no ideal pattern, with the simple belief that science and initiative will constantly make life better and better. With regard to the first of these, Communism is more true to the spirit of modernism, since the intellectuals in the west are getting less and less hostile to religion and many of them are even seeking truth and solace in it. With regard to uncharted progress, however, it is Communism which has betrayed the modern spirit since it has accepted the Marxist blueprint and, like any traditional civilization, is aiming at achievement of an ideal pattern, not an open future. This is the attempt to which I referred to create the horizontal without the vertical aspect of religion, a body without soul. It is probably the only one in history. It may be a necessary phenomenon in this spiritually degenerate age, but it is nonetheless a monstrosity and cannot succeed.

# COMPARATIVE RELIGION

# Comparative Religion as a University Discipline

IF COMPARATIVE RELIGION is a fairly recent subject of study it is because the need for it is recent. For most of known history the world has been divided into a number of separate cultures or civilizations each based on its own religion and knowing practically nothing about each other. As recently as two centuries ago an average Christian scarcely knew that there was a religion called Buddhism and had probably never heard of Taoism. The only two non-Christian religions that he might conceivably come in contact with were Judaism and Islam, and even of them his knowledge was very little and grossly distorted.<sup>1</sup> If the representatives of a religion taught that theirs was the only true doctrine and the only valid way, they were not really to be blamed, because it was the only truth that they or their followers were likely to come in contact with. The only predictable alternative was materialism or heresy.

Today the situation has completely changed. The spread of a one-world civilization has come about so rapidly that an average Christian has only to go to the nearest public library to get a score of books about Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> In the former state of affairs it was not necessary to study comparative religion; in the present there is urgent need for inter-religious understanding. If the representatives of each religion continue to claim a

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<sup>1</sup> There are cases, as in India and China, where religions co-existed: a Kabir or Nanak could appreciate Sufism, a Dara Shikoh write of the merging of the two seas, a Taoist expound Buddhism; but by and large the religions, with the cultures based on them, remained separate.

<sup>2</sup> In fact he is very likely to have a Buddhist society in his home town and the Buddhist a Christian missionary in his.

monopoly of truth they are no longer justified by lack of contact with other religions but, on the contrary, are wilfully rejecting such contact in order to protect their blindness. Such an attitude, formerly harmless, has now become dangerous, because if each religion is going to decry others and claim a unique position for itself the effect on non-believers will be to make them decide that all religions are equally untrue... This is a very real danger. The militant representatives of all three proselytising religions—Buddhism, Christianity and Islam (to give them in chronological and alphabetical order)—must know in their hearts that they will never draw every one into their own camp, but do they realize that they risk alienating people from every camp?

In the present state of the world it is no use telling people that only one religion is valid, because too much knowledge of other religions is available. It is also no use telling them that all religions are the same, because they are so obviously not the same, they differ in so many points of doctrine and ethics. What is needed is to impart understanding of them and show how different structures can be erected on the same substratum of truth or different mountain paths lead to the same peak. That is to say, that it is urgently necessary to impart not merely information but understanding about the various religions. In this domain there is no such thing as 'the facts of the case'. Facts can be very misleading. What is needed is to understand the viewpoint from which each religion starts. It is like a group of white-robed dancers on a stage. If one section of the audience sees them through a screen of blue cellophane, another green and another red, most people in each section will really believe that the dancers are the colour they see and that the other section must be perverse to argue otherwise. Some years back a book was published by F. H. Hilliard called *The Buddha, the Prophet and the Christ*. The author, after discussing which of the three had the best right to be considered a Divine Man, comes down, with much satisfaction, on the side of Christianity. Now this is

the kind of comparative religion which, by foisting the author's own misunderstanding on others, is not only unhelpful, but downright harmful. I do not say that the author was arguing unfairly: he was not, he was trying very hard to be fair; but he was unconsciously biased by the fact that his argument was entirely from the viewpoint of his own religion, like the people seeing the dancers only through a blue or a red screen. What he overlooked is that, of the three religions compared, Christianity is the only one based primarily on the conception of the Divine Man. Islam is based rather on the conception of a revealed scripture, and if a Muslim had written the book its title might have been: *The Gospels, the Sutras and the Quran as Revealed Scripture*; and Islam would have won. If a Buddhist had written it, it might have been: *The Sermon on the Mount, the Shari'at and the Noble Eightfold Path as a Way to Beatitude*, and supremacy would have gone to Buddhism. The role of the teacher of comparative religion would be to explain that the three religions mentioned start from different viewpoints and show what those viewpoints are. And that is not an easy thing to do.

This means that although the teaching of comparative religion has become urgently necessary in our age, it may not be at all easy to find people competent to teach it. Mere factual information is obviously not enough. It is the attitude of mind of the teacher that is more important.

With a few honourable exceptions the subject has not had a good record in the past. It began in the 19th century when Europe's intellectuals were expected to be atheist or agnostic, the century of Freud, Darwin and Marx; and its early exponents, the school of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, were seeking to undermine Christianity and religion in general by showing that the so-called higher religions had grown out of what were then thought to be 'primitive superstitions' (though they were debased remnants of religion). Later comparative religion fell largely into the hands of proselytisers whose aim was to belittle or

disprove all religions except their own. It is a shameful fact that some of its chairs, even some of the most eminent, still remain in such hands.

This raises the very important question whether and on what basis professors of comparative religion can be expected to grade the religions. It is a terribly presumptuous thing to do—to set oneself up in judgement over the religions. On the other hand, since they differ in doctrine, can they be accepted as different paths to the same ultimate Truth? I suggest applying Christ's criterion, that is: "By their fruits you shall know them." This applies to religions as well as individuals. If a tree produces mangoes I still believe it to be a mango tree however cleverly my neighbour may argue that mango trees grow only in his garden. To put it differently, anything that performs its function is satisfactory. The function of a fountain pen is to hold ink and to write, and one that does so is therefore satisfactory while one that fails to is not, even though it may be of solid gold.

So now we are driven back to the question: what is the function of religion? I suggest that it is twofold, horizontal and vertical. Horizontally it is to establish a harmonious way of life for a community, regulating personal relations, social conditions, education, law, etc. Vertically it is to provide pathways to Beatitude. Each facilitates the other; the harmonious way of life facilitates the quest of Beatitude for those who undertake it, while the perennial flow of Grace through those who attain Beatitude maintains the Divine Spirit in the way of life and counteracts the natural tendency of all institutions to petrify. Without the vertical modality, the horizontal will rapidly become lifeless and unjust; but without the horizontal the vertical can still persist. The horizontal modality of religion is almost defunct in all religions today. There are few if any communities now of which it could be said that they follow a Christian way of life, or an Islamic, or a Buddhist, or a Hindu. Life in our one-world civilization has been secularized. Education, finance and civil and criminal law have

been withdrawn from the custody of religion. To pronounce on the horizontal modality of any religion we would have to consult the historian; and even in doing that we would have to check his prejudices as well as his facts, because the same pattern of life can be depicted in various lights.

But the vertical modality of religion, the ascent to Beatitude, still remains; and this brings us back to the subject of comparative religion, because I suggest that the possibility of attaining Beatitude under the guidance of any religion is the proof of its validity. A religion which can produce a St. Francis or a Meister Eckhart is a true religion whether its doctrinal theory seems acceptable to me or not. So is one which can produce a Ramakrishna or a Ramana Maharshi. If you object that it has not made a St. Francis out of you, the reply is that that is your fault; once it is established that, given suitable material, a religion can produce a St. Francis the blame for its not doing so in any specific case cannot be imputed to the religion.

Suppose a group of people in Bangalore are discussing the possibility of going to Delhi by road or rail or air, the discussion of the practicability of any of these routes ends as soon as some one can be produced who has taken it. What remains is only the explanation of how he did so. Similarly, as soon as it can be shown that some one has attained a beatific state through any religion there ceases to be any question whether it is possible to do so and the task of the professor of comparative religion becomes to explain how it can be done rather than to argue whether it can be done.

There is one qualification to this; that is that a path to Beatitude may have been valid in some religion but have got overgrown and lost through disuse. Because religions do not progress. In spiritual power they degenerate. This is true always of all religions, though it is also true that so long as there is sufficient spiritual vitality in a religion it is periodically restored by Divine Grace. Sri Krishna told Arjuna that he had taught that same yoga to the



ancient royal sages that he was now teaching to him, but it had been lost through long lapse of time. That is what happens. He also proclaimed: "Whenever dharma is eclipsed and adharma prevails I manifest Myself." That also is what happens. Before asserting the possibility of going to Delhi by train it would be necessary not only to produce some one who once went that way but to check whether the track is still usable or has since been washed away by floods. Before asserting the validity of a religion the professor of comparative religion would have to check up that it not only produced great saints centuries ago but still can today. If he is to do this successfully and thus bring real benefit to his students he should be a mango-eater in Ramakrishna's use of the term. You will remember that Ramakrishna said that, coming upon a mango-grove a sensible man will not waste his time counting trees and branches and leaves but will pick and eat a mango. People who talk about comparative religion can be classified at large into leaf-counters and mango-eaters; it is the latter that are needed. Also, to revert to what I said earlier about proselytism, what is needed is some one who can appreciate not only a mango but an apple or a peach as well, not some one who argues that because a mango is sweet an apple must be sour.

So the conclusion is that adequate teaching of comparative religion at the universities is urgently necessary but might not be very easy to organize. One possibility in a multi-religious country like India might be to split the discipline up among exponents of different religions, each one lecturing on his own religion. But then there is the danger that it might strike the students as being like a bazaar with each shopkeeper crying up his own wares. It would be better if one single mango-eater with an appreciation for apples and peaches also could be found.



# A New Approach To Comparative Religion

IT IS USUAL to divide up a study of comparative religion into the various religions, allotting a chapter to each, but that is not the only mode of approach. It would also be possible to divide it according to subject, allowing, for instance, one chapter for theistic and non-theistic religions, another for proselytising and non-proselytising, and so on. This would have the advantage of bringing out more clearly the affinities between the religions by showing the groupings into which they fall.

Let us see, for instance, how Christianity would fare in such a study. In the chapter on theistic and non-theistic religions it would be classed with Judaeism and Islam as contrasted with Buddhism and Taoism (Hinduism would stand apart as containing both possibilities). In the chapter on proselytism and its absence, on the other hand, Christianity would be grouped with Buddhism and Islam as contrasted with Hinduism and Judaeism. In the division into world-renouncing and world-sanctifying religions still another grouping would arise, with Christianity and Buddhism on the one side and Judaeism, Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism on the other.

The first division that would have to be taken up would be between the horizontal and vertical modes of religion to which I referred in my previous article on *Comparative Religion as a University Discipline*.<sup>1</sup> This, however, does not involve any contrast between the religions but rather a definition of the very nature of religion (which is, after all, a necessary starting point) since every religion contains both modes. Horizontally every religion is (as the word *religio* implies) a binding together of a community into a pattern of life. This involves the organization of life, worship, society, education, etc., in such a

way as to facilitate conformity with religion and impede its rejection. Vertically it is an ascent to Beatitude by those few in each community who see the possibility and follow it.

Now let us consider the division into theistic and non-theistic religions. The three Semitic religions and Zoroastrianism are theistic, while Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Jainism and Shinto are non-theistic. Hinduism contains both possibilities. This at once faces one with the realization that on the whole the Western peoples tend to theism and the Eastern to non-theism. The question has to be carried farther, however, by the subdivision of theistic religions into monotheistic and polytheistic. By and large, the Aryan religions—Hindu, Graeco-Roman and Scandinavian—are polytheistic while the Semitic—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—are monotheistic. This consideration, however, has to be modified by the reminder that, through Buddhism, the non-theistic form of Hinduism has overspread most of Asia, while through Christianity Semitic monotheism has dominated the West.

Both these facts need commenting on. In connection with the Christian domination of the West, it is to be noted that Christianity, affected by the cultural heritage it has absorbed, has remained less rigorously and exclusively monotheistic than Judaism or Islam. Neither of these religions would accept the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity or veneration of the Virgin and saints as true monotheism. From the other side, the spread of Buddhism, that is of the non-theistic mode of Hinduism, through the East reminds us that Hinduism escapes all these categories, including in its scope the polytheism of the ordinary worshipper, the monotheism of the bhakta and the non-theism of the advaitin. And indeed, it is significant that the Hindu has never called it 'Hinduism' but simply 'Sanatana Dharma', the Eternal Religion. In general it may be said that monotheism concentrates on the supreme Oneness of Being, polytheism on the endless possibilities and countless forms within that One,

and non-theism on the Stillness transcending alike the affirmation of being and its negation.

Let us next consider the division into proselytising and non-proselytising religions. It has often been said that all religions seek to convert others to their view and condemn those who hold different views; but this is glib. It simply does not accord with the facts. Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are proselytising religions; Hinduism, Taoism, Shinto, Judaeism, Confucianism and Jainism are not. There are two possible attitudes that one can take up with regard to other religions. One is "My religion is a true path and suitable to me; yours may also be a true path and suitable to you." The other is: "My religion is the best and therefore I have the moral duty of bringing it to your notice and doing what I can to induce you to follow it." The former attitude is the older. The latter, when deprived of understanding and allied with ignorance, becomes: "My religion is true and therefore yours is false and threatens you with spiritual destruction, therefore I have the moral duty of doing whatever I can to turn you away from yours and, in your own good, of inducing or forcing you to accept mine."

The question is vitiated by the general modern acceptance of the gratuitous postulate of progress. In spiritual life there is no progress. Religions do not progress, they decline. Every religion with a known historical origin was at its highest at that origin and has since declined. Any Christian who claims to have progressed beyond Christ *ipso facto* ceases to be a Christian. People know this and yet such is the allure of a false doctrine that they talk as though the opposite were true.

The same process of decline can be observed in religions which do not stem from a known historical origin. When Krishna proclaimed the *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna he told him: "I proclaimed this imperishable yoga to Vivasvan, he to Manu and Manu to Ikshvaku. Thus handed down, the royal sages knew it until it was lost through long lapse of time."<sup>2</sup> This is

what happens spiritually: not progress but the opposite; the wisdom is lost 'through long lapse of time'. And then what happens? This also Krishna explained: "When righteousness decays and unrighteousness (adharma) prevails, I manifest Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil and for the establishment of dharma (righteousness), I take birth from age to age."<sup>3</sup> And indeed, that is just what we see happening in the history of every religion: a long, gradual decline redressed periodically by a powerful spiritual readjustment (as, for instance, with the monastic revivals in Christendom or the Sufi orders in Islam). The readjustment, however, is normally on a lower level, so that it marks on the one hand a stabilisation but on the other a step downwards.

A point may be reached in the decline of a religion when its rehabilitation is hardly feasible. There is a providence, what might be called a 'divine economy' watching over the affairs of men, and when a religion has gone too far in its decline it is swept away and replaced by another. This brings us back to the question of proselytism. It is no question of the achievements of a civilization, for this fate can befall even the highest civilizations, as when that of Ancient Greece was superseded by Christianity, of Egypt first by Christianity and then by Islam, of Persia by Islam, and that of China greatly modified by Buddhism.

In the fifth century B.C. such a decline had already set in throughout the lands east of India. Hindu colonies were being established in Indonesia, Cambodia and other places. However, Hinduism has such a strong and closely knit dharma or horizontal pattern that it cannot well be adapted to different conditions of life; it would have to be adopted as a complete whole. An alternative solution was provided when Buddhism arose as a sort of 'export variety' of Hinduism, supplying the necessary doctrine without the whole social and legal structure which in India went

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<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, Ch. 4, v. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 4, v. 7-8.

with it. That explains why Buddhism faded out in India but became established in the lands to the north, south and east, thus becoming the world's first proselytising religion. In India it was not needed because the sanatana dharma was still spiritually vigorous; in those other countries there was a vacuum to be filled.

The second proselytising religion arose when Christianity was needed to replace the spiritually bankrupt Graeco-Roman, Celtic and Scandinavian religions. In this case also it was not needed in its homeland where the indigenous tradition was still strong. Islam was the third proselytising religion, replacing those of Egypt, Arabia and Persia.

The question of proselytism calls for at least a reference to that of intolerance. The adherent of a non-proselytising religion has no difficulty in tolerating others. It never occurs to him not to. The fact that his religion provides a valid path for him is never taken to imply that yours does not for you. In the sanatana dharma a Hindu who worships God in the form of Krishna never thinks of opposing another who worships God in the form of Rama; why then should he oppose one who worships God in the form of Christ? However, proselytisation, by its very nature, implies a claim to superiority. And in fact the proselytising religions only arose when and where there was an effete religion which needed to be replaced, so that at the outset they had actual as well as theoretical superiority. All three of them went out with a mission to teach the ignorant or convert the heathen. This was a necessary part of their equipment. Without it they would never have had the incentive to carry their message over land and sea among peoples often ill disposed to receive it. Nor would they have carried conviction if they had. Their difficulty arises in later ages when they are claiming a superiority which no longer exists. Having lost the inherent spiritual potency which made them superior, they have to find a spurious superiority in an allegedly superior doctrine. Actually, every true doctrine is an adequate instrument for spiritual

achievement and none can be more than that, so there is no such thing as an inherently superior doctrine.

It is a striking testimony to Buddhism that even during its rapid expansion it never thrust itself on people by violence and persecution, as the other two proselytising religions did. Even in Buddhism, however, intellectual tolerance is not common. It requires real understanding, and in no religion is understanding a common commodity.

I have written at some length about proselytism, even though touching only on the salient features; let us now consider another difference of approach among the religions: that between a world-renouncing and a world sanctifying religion. Seeing the world so largely given over to egoism, exploitation and self-indulgence, I can adopt either of two attitudes to it: I can renounce it, lumping it with 'the flesh and the devil' as unholy, or I can dedicate myself to the high endeavour to hold at least my little fragment of it to accordance with divine justice. Christianity and Buddhism take the former path and are by nature world-renouncing religions. When the rich young man asks Christ what he should do he is told to give his property to the poor and become a mendicant; when Rahula asks Buddha for his heritage he is given a begging bowl. A Muslim, on the other hand, is told to pay the poor rate. When slaves ask Christ their duty they are told to obey their masters; in Islam masters are told to free slaves. Neither in Christianity nor Buddhism was an organization of life and religion established by the founder for his followers; each continued an 'Old Testament' of as much as had not been abrogated from the previous religion. It might be said that Christ's mission on earth was too short to allow for a complete organization of life, but such things are not decided by chance. If more time had been needed it would have been available. Also, that would not explain the parallel of the Buddha who taught for close on forty years and yet established no organization of life for the laity, only for the monastic community.

Judaism and Islam are world-stabilising religions. Every Jew is expected to marry and work for his living, even though he may be a rabbi. A Muslim too. It is expressly stated in the *Koran*: “No monasticism in Islam”. As one of our contributors pointed out, the Christian fear of ‘the world’, the flesh and the devil’ does not apply in Islam, since the first two of these are not regarded as enemies but as bounties created by God to be used wisely and in due measure. Hinduism is a world-stabilising religion, but the institution of the sadhu and the sannyasin gives it the possibility of renunciation also, as a sort of safety-valve which Judaism and Islam lack.

The position of Christianity is particularly remarkable in this respect because it seems to have made a complete volte face. At its origin it was completely world-renouncing. Its followers were told that Christ’s kingdom was not of this world, they were to take no thought for the morrow, they were to pay taxes to an alien and irreligious government. In modern times, however, Christianity, especially Protestant Christianity, though Catholicism also, has gone to the opposite extreme and become pre-eminently the religion of outer organization, practical work and social service. In this connection the Islamic interpretation may be mentioned as an interesting sidelight. That is that Christianity remained incomplete when Christ was taken from his disciples (as he himself told them), and that the “many things” which he still had to explain to them included also the outer organization of life. This was added by Islam and ought to have been accepted by Christians. Since it was not, they were driven to hammer out such an organization for themselves in later centuries.

Let us also see how the question of renunciation or sanctification of the world interweaves with that of proselytism. Of the three proselytising religions two—Buddhism and Christianity—are world-renouncing, while the third—Islam—is world sanctifying. This involves an important difference in procedure. A world-renouncing religion can infiltrate invisibly



until even a powerful organization like the Roman Empire crumbles before it; a world-sanctifying religion on the other hand has to build an entire civilization with its civil and criminal law and whole framework of life. This involves breaking up any old order that may exist and replacing it by a new one from the ground up. Therefore Islam had to destroy the Persian Empire by war before it could replace it, whereas Christianity could build up the New Rome gradually within the crumbling framework of the old.

These are only fragmentary suggestions for the study of comparative religion. But they should suffice to show that it is possible to group such a study round central themes and not merely treat each religion as a separate case. Before leaving the subject, there are three cases of recognition of an alien religion which are particularly difficult and therefore merit special consideration: that is for a Jew to recognize Christianity, for a Christian to recognize Islam and for a Buddhist to recognize Hinduism. All three of these recognitions are, however, possible, as I shall show.

A Jew who recognizes Christianity invites the retort: "That means that you recognize Christ to have been the Messiah, so why don't you become a Christian?" His reply can be that he awaits a Messiah whose kingdom will be of this world also, as Christ's is to be at his Second Coming, and that that is therefore the consummation which both he and the Christian await.

A Christian who recognizes Mohammed to have been a genuine prophet is faced with the Koranic claim to be the completion of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and may be similarly challenged to explain why he does not become a Muslim. Without descending, as most Christians do, to the low level of denying another religion in order to affirm his own, he can say that Islam has indeed constructed a world-sanctifying religion but that for those who renounce the world, the flesh

and the devil, as Christ bade, this is not needed. They can continue to follow the path of renunciation that Christ laid down for them and that remains valid so long as Christ's kingdom is not of this world. Only in order to justify this claim he should indeed be a world renouncer. It is a path for the monastic rather than the lay follower and would incidentally explain a paradox in Islam: that on the one hand the *Koran* states: "No monasticism in Islam"; while on the other it states that the Christians are the closest to the Muslims because they have monks among them.

A Buddhist who recognizes Hinduism may feel called upon to explain why then Buddhism broke away from it and became a separate religion instead of remaining one of its many schools. The answer to that has been indicated already. A Buddhist can admit the doctrinal traditions which Buddha neither denied nor confirmed but declared that he is not concerned with them but with a world-wide religion stemming from the Enlightened One. To seek grounds for attacking a religion whose long tradition of spiritual achievement speaks louder than any doctrine would obviously be a regrettable policy. As Christ said, "By their fruits you shall know them"; and the fruit of religion is Realization.

The Hindu attitude to Buddhism also calls for consideration. On the whole it has been one of recognition. The basic doctrine of Buddhism is anatta, no-ego, which is the same as advaita—not that the ego will not continue after death but that it is not now. The possibility of following a formal path to a formal but transient heaven is recognized in both religions, but the possibility of transcending this is also recognized. Some Hindus have indeed given an unfavourable interpretation to Buddhism, but this was at a time when Buddhism was trying to replace Hinduism in India, and that was not its dharma; its was to carry the sanatana dharma in a new form to the world outside India.

In general, if the followers of any religion compare another with their own they are likely to do so from the viewpoint of their own and will therefore find the other inferior. If one wishes to compare religions one should be willing to regard each from its own viewpoint. If not, one can treat them all respectfully from a distance. To suggest that all the people who happen to have been brought up in one's own religion are rightly guided and all those who happen to have been brought up in any other are misguided does not speak highly for one's intelligence. And yet a man's own viewpoint is usually so natural to him that it is not at all easy to see beyond it. For instance, a Christian once wrote a book entitled *The Buddha, the Prophet and the Christ*, considering the claims of each of these to be considered a Divine Incarnation and came down in favour of the Christ. In his examination he was trying to be impartial and to a large extent was; where he was not impartial was in taking the conception of the Divine Saviour, which is the very essence of Christianity, as his starting-point. It would probably never occur to a Christian that any other starting point for a comparison was possible. But if a Muslim had written the book he would probably have entitled it *The Gospels, the Tripitaka and the Koran* and shown that of the three the *Koran* had the best claim to be considered a revealed scripture. That would have been his starting point for comparison. If a Buddhist had written the book it might have been called: *The Sermon on the Mount, the Shariat and the Noble Eightfold Path* and argued which of the three showed most clearly the path from darkness to light, from death to immortality. Thus, beneath an appearance of impartiality and without any deliberate partiality, each of the three would have picked out that aspect of doctrine which was most developed in his own religion and on the basis of that proclaimed his religion the best.

From the Hindu viewpoint, comparison between the religions requires reference to the doctrine of Avatars. An Avatar is a Divine Descent or Incarnation for the purpose of "protecting

the good, destroying evil and establishing right". Many such are recorded but ten are listed in the *Puranas* as principal Avatars. The Seventh of these was Rama and the Eighth Krishna. The Tenth is the Avatar of the White Horse who is to bring about the closing of this cycle and the opening of the next and is identified with the Second Coming of Christ in the West and Maitreya Buddha in the East. It is recognized that the Ninth has appeared already but there is no unanimity as to his identity. Most Hindus identify him with Buddha, some with Christ. My own conviction is that, as I have explained elsewhere, he is the twofold appearance of Buddha for the East and Christ for the West, represented by the dual sign of Pisces. It is noteworthy that the two currents (Buddhism in the East and in terms of non-theism and Christianity in the West and in terms of theism) performed the same function of introducing a new religion based on the love and compassion of its Founder to supplement the ancient tradition, Semitic in the West and Aryan in the East, and that both proved unnecessary in their doctrinal homeland but essential in the lands beyond.

Many matters have been touched on in this article; let us end by saying that at this time when most people in the world have rejected religion altogether and a fervent few are ardently seeking spiritual guidance beyond the ordinary level of religion, to confuse the issue by praising one religion at the cost of another is worse than futile. It is culpable folly which can benefit only the adversary.



# Modern Idolatries

AN IDOL IS not the same as an image. An image may be a symbol, that is a physical representation, whether lifelike or not, of non-physical being. 'Idol' is a pejorative term used by the followers of certain religions with the purpose of bringing other religions into contempt by suggesting that the images and symbols that they worship are not in fact symbols but idols, that is to say objects to which independent reality and sanctity is attributed. That implies that there can be no hard and fast rule when an object is an idol and when it is not. When independent divinity is attributed to an object it is being treated as an idol; when that same object is used as a support to concentrate the devotion of the worshipper and canalise the Grace of God it is a symbol. Therefore to use the term 'idol' indiscriminately is tendentious.

However, the term 'idol' has come to be used in a wider connotation and need not necessarily imply an image or symbol; it can also mean a cause or idea. It is natural for man to give his allegiance to pure Being or a symbol of Being. When he ceases to do so he can either live for mere pleasure and convenience, like an animal, or switch his allegiance to some substitute; and this is idolatry, whether the substitute is in the form of an image or not.

The lowest kind of idolatry is the worship of some other human being, some Hitler or Stalin or Mao Tse Tung, because worship of the human degrades one to the subhuman level. This does not apply, of course, to a disciple's worship of his Guru, because it is not the human but the superhuman that he is worshipping in the Guru; he is not worshipping him as a man but as manifestation of the Divine which he himself also manifests and a channel through which its Grace flows.

Nationalism is a powerful modern idolatry. Most men require some emotional attachment, and as religious attachment has faded out, first in the West and more recently in Eastern civilizations also, nationalism has grown up to take its place. It was unknown in the ancient world, practically unknown until the Reformation dissolved religious attachment in the modern West. What might look like nationalism in ancient times—in China, Japan, Israel, Egypt, for instance—was quite a different phenomenon; it was attachment to a civilization and way of life based on a religion. The Ancient Greeks felt loyalty to their civilization, as many Europeans do to theirs today, but politically they were a group of warring states, as modern Europe is now. The Romans were a city-state that expanded into a bureaucratic empire. Devotion to a territorial unit within a wider civilization, devoid of any spiritual or profoundly cultural identity, such as a modern nation, is pure idolatry. It is acceptance of a worldly instead of a divine allegiance, and that is the very definition of idolatry.

In this case the emotional and materialistic aspects of allegiance outweigh the intellectual; intellectually the great modern idolatry is science. When some one says that science agrees with such and such a religious tenet the usual implication is that science is true and religion is to be accepted on sufferance so long as it does not disagree with it. That is to say that it is really science in which the speaker believes, not religion. It depends on the attitude of mind from which the statement is made. It is possible for some one who understands the Eternal Dharma to say that nuclear science is coming nearer to the Upanishadic teaching of primordial nature as formless substance or energy, meaning thereby that within its own domain (the domain of Prakriti, for Purusha is beyond it) science is correcting its former errors and penetrating farther than hitherto; but more often such statements are an attempt to shelter religion, of which the speaker is not certain, behind science, of which he is or thinks he is.

Psychology is only one branch of science. It is becoming fashionable in the countries which used to be Christendom to go to one's psychiatrist as one used to go to one's father confessor to get one's problems in life straightened out and one's emotional scars healed. Both in theory and treatment psychology is replacing religion. Those who understand the ancient Guru-disciple tradition see that psychology is a truncated counterfeit of it. Just as physical science can attain only to Prakriti without Purusha, so psychology can only to the subconscious without the superconscious. Some psychologists are indeed coming to suspect and some even to admit openly that there is a superconscious, but that is not enough. What is needed is to have access to it, to have traversed it in oneself and to be able to guide the aspirant in doing so. Treating patients on the psychological level without access to the spiritual may produce a superficial amelioration or an aggravation but can lead to no permanent cure. And yet when true reverence for a religious intermediary is lost idolatrous belief in a psychiatrist comes in its place. The late Dr. Jung, for instance, one of the most conciliatory of the famous scientists towards religion, declared that at the root of the trouble of all his patients of over middle age was lack of religion. He could observe this but he could not remedy it since he himself had no religious power of experience to draw upon. Indeed, the preface he wrote to Zimmer's German book on the Maharshi entitled *Der Weg zum Selbst* shows woeful lack of understanding.

In the modern hall of idols art also has its place. People speak with superstitious awe of music, painting, poetry, regarding their creators as some sort of divine intermediaries. Where there is true reverence and humility they may indeed be, but not in the clamorous ego-assertive works of today. Traditionally the artist was often no different from the craftsman—not that art was less inspired but craftsmanship more. In some cases he was an ordinary workman who in the evening after his day's work

repaired to the temple or cathedral to serve God in creating forms. In some he remained anonymous. Even when known and honoured, there was not the idolatrous glorification of today. Whereas in fact the spiritual authentication of art has been lost, the claim based upon it has been exaggerated beyond measure. An artist is spoken of as a specially dedicated sort of man, when often enough it is only his own fame or success that he is dedicated to; apart from that he is simply a person with one type of ability more highly developed than in most people.

A similar claim is made for the scientist, the historian, the research scholar: an austere, passionate dedication to Truth. But here again there is a false attribution. The 'Truth' they seek is in fact seldom worthy of a capital letter, being for the most part merely factual. Spiritual Truth transmutes the nature of its seeker. To discover is to experience it; to know is to be united with it. The truth of science and research, on the other hand, leaves a man the same narrow individual he was when he started, with the same faults and limitations. And when scientists are faced with some truth contrary to their presumptions, some display of unexplained powers, for instance, or some religious phenomenon, in few enough is the dedication to truth sufficient to make them admit it. The usual attitude is to look the other way and refrain from seeing it.

While the divinity of Truth is turned to an idolatry of science and learning, the divinity of Union is turned to an idolatry of sex. In film and fiction the union of man and woman is endlessly presented as the inspiration for effort and the sublime achievement. And, as with art, this idolatry goes hand in hand with actual degradation. As in art these two extremes survive when the truth profundity based on divine symbolism has been lost.

There are other idolatries also in the modern world. Social service is one. Help people who come one's way by all means, but to make a profession of helping them materially while neglecting



both oneself and them spiritually is an idolatry. It is only a branch of the greater idolatry of humanism. The human is worthy of adoration, study, service, insofar as it reflects the divine, insofar as “in doing it unto one of the least of these ye do it also unto Me.” The true bhakta serves men because he sees and serves God in them. Humanism is an attempt to deprive the human shadow of its divine substance and still find it worshipful.

Communism is not merely an idolatry but a complete idolatrous religion which will brook no other, no sharing of allegiance. That is why it condemns religion, nationalism, sex adulation, and regiments art and psychology.

But perhaps the most pervading idolatry of the modern world is its worship of itself. Just as the rootless individual of modern times is left with only himself to worship and becomes a natural egoist, so the modern world itself endlessly extols itself knowing nothing more stable or profound. The very word ‘modern’ has become adulation when it should be condemnation. To say that a thing is ‘modern’ is taken to mean that it is excellent, unencumbered, serviceable; in fact it means that it is meaningless, symbolising no higher reality.

Religion is not a department of life; life is a department of religion. If there were a true religious community, civilization including politics, art, education, marriage, learning, social organization, would be manifestations of it in the various departments of life. To make any of them independent and self-sufficient is to make it an idolatry. Our modern world is a world of idols, an idolatrous world. No individual can change this. Even the seeker must outwardly conform to it. What each person can do is to reject inwardly the sense of values that it implies and remember that, for himself, there is only the Self to be attained.

# Moral Philosophy

THE DECLINE IN religion which has been going on for a long time now, in all religions, has naturally led to a fall in moral standards as well. Religious injunctions cover all departments of life, spiritual, moral and social. Suppose people are told that they must not eat meat on Friday, must go to confession and take communion at stated intervals, must dress decently and must not steal. Intellectuals begin deriding religious authority and telling them that its injunctions can be ignored; and ordinary people do not distinguish too clearly between disciplinary injunctions such as not eating meat on Friday and moral injunctions such as not stealing. Both rested on the same authority and if this authority is no longer valid, both can be ignored. That is what is happening. The intellectuals, who are themselves responsible for this, have become alarmed by it and try to rectify it by creating a so called 'moral philosophy' or 'science of ethics'.

This is an attempt to prove that right action has intrinsically nothing to do with religion but is a matter of social convention to which religion has merely added its sanction. Actions, it holds, are not inherently right or wrong but only in accord or disaccord with social conventions; and these are based on considerations of social security. For instance, I cannot expect society to safeguard my property unless I respect the property rights of others; therefore theft is outlawed and is considered wrong and immoral. Most modern philosophers and psychologists accept this modern synthetic ethics, and therefore they do not speak of 'sin' or even 'crime' but only of 'socially unacceptable actions'. In support of their outlook they point out that different actions are unacceptable in different civilizations and have been in different epochs in the same civilization.

Superficially there is something to be said for this. For instance, a Muslim is not infringing his moral code by having two wives at the same time, whereas a Christian is; a Christian is not infringing his by gambling, whereas a Muslim is. In an age when duelling was an accepted mode of setting disputes between gentlemen a man who killed a private enemy in that way was not guilty of murder, whereas today he would be.

This is superficial outlook, however, because it ignores the effect of a man's actions on himself. Primarily it is himself and his own inner development or deterioration that a man is responsible for; it is his own heaven or hell that he creates. Modern intellectuals have decried this teaching as superstitious sanctions to enforce moral laws by hope or fear of what comes after death. They are woefully mistaken. Heaven and hell can be real enough in this present life without waiting for after death—not that that means that they are not real after death also. It is easy to deride what one has not understood. If death tears away the mental veil which has hidden the subconscious from view, at least the psychologist ought to be able to imagine the heaven or hell that would result. He at least is interested in the state of a man in himself, whereas the so-called moral philosopher goes no deeper than his relations with others, and even that not individually but only with 'society' as a group or concept.

Because of its superficiality, social security ethics is quite impotent to stem the general moral decline. It has no emotional force; it makes no appeal to a man's conscience, his sense of right and wrong. It even sets him free from it, and the social sense that it offers instead is a very weak substitute. It leaves the door wide open to the sort of self-indulgence such as greed, pride, laziness, which religions used to condemn as sinful but which can be argued to have no clearly demonstrable social consequences. It even invites casuistry with regard to actions such as dishonesty and sexual irregularities which may affect

society; there are many ways of justifying an action and arguing that society is not harmed by it.

Moreover, the very conception of 'socially unacceptable action' is misleading, since such action is not necessarily below the norms accepted by society; it may be above them. It may be society that is in the wrong, not the misfit. It is customary to think of the criminal as socially maladjusted, but the reformer is too. He would have no urge to reform if he were not. If we were to accept social acceptability as the norm for right action, what should we do with some one who challenged that acceptability itself? Crucify him? Give him hemlock?

Actually, morality is an essential part of religion. Religion has two modalities, horizontal and vertical. Horizontally it is a discipline binding its followers together in a harmonious pattern of life in which the physical is subordinated to the spiritual and a high moral standard is upheld. Vertically it is a way of ascent from the human to the divine. Horizontally its yoke is upon all its followers, vertically only on those who undertake the quest.

The harmonious pattern of life sponsored by a religion covers every aspect of life, both private and public, individual and social. It establishes modes and times of worship, regulates personal relationships, lays down a disciplinary code, including positive acts such as alms-giving and acts of abnegation such as fasting. It demands the rejection of vices and cultivation of their opposite virtues. It is a glib misreading of history to assert that its dietary regulations are for reasons of hygiene or its demand for honesty for reasons of social security. There is no evidence whatever for this in any religion. In the scriptures of every religion it is the spiritual welfare of the person himself that is the prime consideration.

In most religions the horizontal modality of religion is almost dead today. Very little worship remains. The regulation of human relationships and education of the young have been taken out

of the hands of religion. The conception of sin has been replaced by that of social acceptability. What remains—vague piety and a belief that such and such will happen when one dies—is scarcely worth the name of religion. And as a result morality has declined and there is incipient social anarchy.

What concerns *The Mountain Path* readers more is the vertical modality of religion, the way of ascent from the human to the Divine. In reaction against the soullessness of the modern world, more and more people—isolated individuals or scattered groups—are being driven to seek some such way. Those who do are little concerned with social acceptability—if at all only so as to be left undisturbed in their quest. Their norms are not outer but inner. It is not what society approves of that concerns them but what advances their inner development. Even the injunctions of the horizontal modality of religion concern them little.

And here lies the danger. They are apt to feel themselves privileged to ignore these injunctions, when actually they should exceed them, at least those of them that refer to moral purity. The horizontal injunction may be to stone an adulteress; the vertical may be more gracious in bidding her ‘Go and sin no more’, but it is also more severe in equating lewd thoughts with adultery. Religion in its horizontal modality aims at disciplining the individual and society, in its vertical at transcending the individuality altogether. Moral philosophy aims only at enabling the multitudinous individuals to co-exist without too much friction. It does not even consider the inner state of man.



## Rene Guenon, Restorer of Traditional Symbolism in the West

TRADITIONAL WISDOM IS TAUGHT MORE IN SYMBOLS than in verbal formulations. This is in the natural order of things, because words can only hint at that which lies beyond them and are almost inevitably twisted to point in the wrong directions whereas symbols are natural reflections on a physical plane of truths from a higher plane. They do not have to be created but only recognised, and they exist whether we recognise them or not. For instance, a seed containing all the possibilities of branches, leaves, flowers and fruit really does symbolise the original, mute intuition of truth in the heart, out of which all later experiences evolve. It symbolises also the germ that passes on from this life to the next, where it will sprout into a new life in the soil of its new environment.

At the time of the Renaissance, Europe turned away from traditional wisdom in pursuit of “the things of this world”. The understanding of symbolism was lost and was replaced by academic philosophy and experimental science. So far as concerns theoretical materialism and rationalism, this trend reached its apogee in the nineteenth century. There are many signs that a contrary trend—both above and below rationalism—has now set in; and perhaps the most spectacular of them is the discovery by materialist science itself that there is no matter. Physically and symbolically we no longer stand on the solid ground of materialism: physically we stand on a whirling mass of electrons dashing around in empty space, symbolically on the quicksands of new occultisms, the subconscious mind, dangerous drugs, unbridled individualism, nuclear destruction. But today those who seek to rise above the ground-floor level of rationalism and materialism, have

rediscovered the ancient paths “from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality.”<sup>1</sup> Mysticism is no longer merely a freak phenomenon but also a path that can be followed.

The one person who was instrumental more than any other in the restoration of traditional wisdom to the West was Rene Guenon. Far from founding any school of his own, he kept himself in the background while proclaiming the eternal, universal Truth underlying all religions. He poured forth a stream of books and articles in the twenties and thirties of this century in which, with brilliant lucidity, vast erudition and scathing contempt for all who differed with him, he attacked modern civilisation and revealed traditional wisdom. Above all, he explained what is meant by Self-Realization and how it differs from spasmodic mystical trances and psychic experiences. He taught that the Divine or Realized State is the natural fulfilment of man and that there are paths to it and guides to show the paths. And in book after book, article after article, he restored the ancient language of symbolism. The writer of this article was one of many who took him as the prophet of our times—unpopular to the multitudes, as all prophets have been, but divinely inspired for this purpose. Certainly he educated us into the truths of tradition and symbolism of which the academic education of our time had lost the key. The result of his work may have been less spectacular than that of many self-styled teachers, but it had a far firmer foundation, it bred up a new type of intellectual seeker in the West, prepared to set forth on the quest wherever a path and a guide could be found. There can be no automatic safeguard against the dangers that beset every path, the symbolical enemies, the wild beasts of the senses, the pitfalls of delusion, but at least the followers of Guenon went forth with a sound route-map, that is a knowledge of doctrinal theory

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<sup>1</sup> *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 1, 3, 28.

such as Western seekers had not had for centuries back. It was no guarantee against being led into danger by false guides, as some of its possessors, in their youthful enthusiasm, had believed it would be, but even so it was much.

A peculiar feature about Guenon's expositions was that, although he himself was a Muslim following a Sufi path, he expounded doctrine almost entirely in terms of Hinduism. His first book, which contained in germ all the others, was *A General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, and perhaps his most influential was *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*. He considered the Hindu concepts the most complete intellectually, and he thoroughly familiarised his readers with them.

In his recognition of all religions he was no syncretist. While prepared to show how the same fundamental Truth underlay all religions, and how parallel concepts appeared in them, he insisted no less on their difference in the contingent domain of theology, ethics, ritual and social application. He taught that each religion is a living, organic whole and that attempts to combine features of one with features of another would create a monstrosity, like trying to combine parts of a horse, a cow and a dog in the same body. Therefore, while demanding an intellectual recognition of all religions he was scathing in his denunciation of any attempt to fuse them. He even wrote a book against one such attempt which was enjoying popularity in his day.

His books are less necessary today, because they have done their work so well that the essence of their teaching pervades the atmosphere of the quest even among those Western intellectuals who do not approach it through them; also because translations of scriptures and other works of genuine guidance from one religion or another are now available. Nevertheless, they still have a wide appeal both in the original French and in English translations. And the periodical which served as his mouthpiece, *Etudes Traditionelles*, is still published by his followers. Indeed,



series of his articles on various aspects of symbolism have been put together in book form and are also republished.

And what of his mistakes? Men who, in their youthful impetuosity, would have staked their lives on his infallibility now find his mistakes to be colossal. He declared that Buddhism was a heresy and a false religion and that Hindus do not believe in reincarnation. He asserted that Ramana Maharshi was not a guru, without troubling to go and see him in order to form an opinion, and ignoring a letter sent with the Maharshi's explicit approval by one of the Maharshi's disciples, stating that he was. Unaware that all Hindu gurus since Ramakrishna have been waiving the demands of orthodoxy, he taught that rigid orthodoxy was still necessary whatever path one might follow in whatever religion. The best way is to openly admit his mistakes. To try to gloss them over would only lead to further criticism. It is best to say quite simply: "Yes, he strayed into quite colossal errors, but his mistakes were factual, whereas his truth was principial (to use a word he coined). He knew that there is a Goal and there are paths to the Goal, he taught the eternity and unanimity and universality of Truth, he understood the language of symbols pointing to Truth like fingers to the moon. All this he expounded with force and clarity. But for him, many who now follow a path would either be bogged down in modern materialism or have fallen victim to some freak esoterism. Let us recognize his errors and reject them, but let us recognize the tremendous service he performed and honour him for it".



# The Symbolism of the Quest in the *Odyssey*

WHY DID THE ancient Greeks regard the homeric poems as a religious authority? They could be considered religious in the sense that they recorded norms of conduct, even though they lacked the high ethical standards and the preoccupation with dharma of the Hindu epics. They were religious too in that they comprised allegories of the quest. They were composed in the language of symbolism.

The question how many of the ancients saw the symbolism would be as pointless as the question how many moderns see the allegory of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. It was certainly there to see and some must have seen it or the epics would not have been regarded with such reverence.

*The Odyssey*, it will be remembered, starts near the end and then proceeds with a throw-back. Let us follow Homer in this. The final episode shows Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus, still ruling his rocky homeland of Ithaca after his years of enforced wandering through perilous adventures. But she is beset by unruly nobles who pester her to marry one of them and proclaim him ruler, giving Odysseus up as lost and disinheriting their adolescent son Telemachus.

Penelope can be understood as the rightly directed human state, Odysseus as the active side of it struggling through the many vicissitudes of the quest, and Telemachus as the new man emerging out of it. The suitors are the still unsubdued tendencies which try to capture it and turn it to their own use and enjoyment. Finally they set a term for Penelope; they will wait only till she finishes weaving the tapestry she is engaged on, but no longer. However, she circumvents them; each night she unravels what she had woven the previous day. The tapestry is Maya, woven during the daytime of activity, unravelled during the night of meditation. Then

Odysseus arrived. Having come safe through all the perils of the quest, he is ready to appear now as the bridegroom, the triumphant hero. He is ready to appear, but first the forces of disorder must be subjugated. He appears as a destitute wanderer. Penelope recognizes him but the suitors do not. Precautions have to be taken lest they slay him before he has established himself—as the rebellious generations slew the prophets, as the blindly orthodox slew Christ. He remains disguised until he is manoeuvred into a position where he can overcome them.

That is the essence of the story but there are many wayside adventures, just as there are in the life of the wayfarer. Also there are changes in symbolism, one aspect or another being depicted as required. Only a few salient features are pointed out here. The story of Helen and Paris and the Trojan War would be the subject of another no less complex symbolical story.

There is one episode, it will be recalled, where the sirens, treacherous nymphs singing with irresistible beauty, try to lure Odysseus and his men on to the rocks where their ship will be dashed to pieces and they themselves drowned. Odysseus foils their scheme by making his men plug their ears with wax before reaching their haunt. Only he himself kept his ears open but took the precaution of getting lashed to a mast and forbidding his men to release him till he was out of the danger zone. The songs of the sirens obviously represent the lures of the subtle world which have led so many spiritual wayfarers to perdition. Odysseus is one of the few hardy ones who can experience this dangerous beauty without getting destroyed by it.

Then there is the story of Circe. Some of the men go ashore on a beautiful isle to replenish their water supply and there encounter an enchantress who offers them food and wine. By partaking of it they give her power over them, and she uses it by dashing a cup of wine in their faces and turning them into swine. She represents Maya, and those who succumb to her allurements are turned into swine, forgetting their upright manhood.

A strange parallel is to be found in a story of Vishnu. He becomes infatuated with his own daughter—Divine Power with the beauty of creation. To make love to her would be incest, so he transforms both of them into swine, for whom there is no such ban. Thus transformed, he wallows happily until reminded of his true nature.

And how does Odysseus escape? While he is on his way to Circe's house Hermes, a youth represented in Greek mythology as the messenger of the gods, comes especially to warn him and teaches him a charm which will turn the tables on Circe, giving him power over her. The 'messenger of the gods' is divine intuition. Forewarned, the hero of mythology averts the snares of Maya, not only retaining his manhood but subjecting her to his will. As with the sirens, he is able to experience the allurements of the subtle world without becoming enslaved to them.

The story of Polyphemus is less obvious. The one-eyed giant who captures Odysseus and his men and shuts them up in his cave, intending to devour them, two a day, at first sight suggests the single eye of Shiva, destructive of duality. But actually it must be only a dark simulacrum of this, such as must come from one-pointed concentration of a harmful, not a sublime nature, for Polyphemus is a danger to survival and it is Odysseus who triumphs and lives by putting out his eye. It is Odysseus too, it will be remembered, who attains symbolically the Nameless state by telling Polyphemus when asked his name, that it is Noman, so that, when the blinded giant's companions ask who has done this to him he answers: "No man has done it", thus enabling Odysseus and his men to escape.

These symbolical stories are indeed a sort of code, a reminder to those who have the key to them. There is a wealth of them in ancient Greek, as in Hindu and Norse mythology—the Golden Fleece, the Labours of Hercules and many more that have lasted through the ages and can still serve as a reminder if read aright.



# Hermetic Symbolism

WITH DUE APOLOGIES, our editor is too much of a theoretician.<sup>1</sup> In India Tantrism may still be a living path that people can follow; but in the West Hermetism, its Western equivalent, is not. Therefore its study can have no more than an academic interest. It is certainly not one of the “paths available to seekers in the conditions of our modern world” which *The Mountain Path*, by its own announcement, professes to clarify.

Once a tradition dies it cannot be revived. Understanding its symbolism does not enable one to follow it as a path. For that there would have to be an unbroken transmission of its technique through a chain of gurus, and this is just what is lacking; in fact that is why it died. Alchemy as a spiritual science has long ceased to exist. Masonry is no longer an operative technique of building cathedrals and characters simultaneously. Some few astrologers delve into the symbolism of their science but the skill has long vanished that could use it as a technique of the quest. This is a time when more simple and direct techniques are needed. Therefore they are available; because Divine Providence always makes available what is needed.

Having said this, it may be interesting (though no more than interesting) to see how Hermetic symbolism was used in former times. There are a number of great Renaissance writers—Cervantes, Shakespeare and Rabelais among them—whose work contains symbolism of the Quest in one or another of its many forms. Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* is a veritable treasure-house of symbolism. It was natural that writers who had a precious lore which they knew to be vanishing should wish to leave a record

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<sup>1</sup> Rebuke merited.—Editor [Arthur Osborne, writing as 'Sagittarius', criticizing himself.]

of it; and just because it was vanishing few people would care to read a direct exposition of it. So it was wrapped up in symbols in works whose sheer literary excellence carried it through the ages until the time should come when men were again interested to seek and to recover records of past search. That time has now come. Granted that the masses, both of the ignorant and the learned, are more unenlightened spiritually than ever before, nevertheless a new impetus is driving small groups and isolated rebels to reject modern ignorance and seek the perennial philosophy that has been lost.

Moreover Hermetism is by its very nature symbolical and lends itself to symbolical treatment. With its roots in alchemy, astrology and masonry, it is or was an intricate science for the rectification and harmonisation of the experimenter, leading stage by stage through the lesser mysteries to the greater. It is interesting to note that, like Tantrism in India, it was not a science for the recluse or the celibate but was open to the laity, just as Tantrism was to non-Brahmins.

Another Christian development with a basic resemblance to Tantrism was the cult of the Madonna, the 'Mother of God'. Closely allied to this was the troubadour's adoration of his lady who, according to the rules of the art, was supposed to be humanly inaccessible to him. In fact the wife of some person of higher rank was often cast for the part. However that does not concern us here.

The masonry may have used much the same symbolism that Free Masonry does today, but it was also an operative science by which the building of the highly symbolical Gothic cathedrals was at the same time a technique of training for the builder. Not only the general form but all the proportions were rigidly determined by the laws of symbolism.

Spiritual alchemy was a science by which the baser elements in oneself were transmuted into pure gold. This was no poetic

fancy. Nor was it mere theory or philosophical speculation. It normally did involve actual experimentation with physical substances but, strange though that may appear, these symbolised microcosmic and macrocosmic forces and aimed at developing the stunted faculties and rectifying the warped impulses of the experimenter and conversion of his lower tendencies into higher. It was only the bogus alchemist and the quack who was impelled by greed of gain and whose object really was to make gold and grow rich quick. From this point of view, what comes nearest to alchemy in modern times is psychoanalysis; but alchemy was more complete and more scientific.

The central and most important difference is that the aspirant was guided towards higher states of spiritual equilibrium and even realization by guides who had themselves attained these states, whereas psychoanalysis knows nothing of any such attainment and has no guides to it. A psychologist may disbelieve in religion, like Freud, or believe in it, like Jung, but this is not a question of belief but of knowledge and attainment. The state of 'individuation' to which Jung's treatment is supposed to lead is merely the state of the ordinary mundane man bounded by sense experience and rational understanding, who may (or may not) be competent to begin the course of training for higher development which was the sole purpose of Hermetism. At least one modern psychologist, Dr. Hans Jacobs, has been percipient enough to see that Hindu sadhana (and one could say the same of Western Hermetism) begins where Western psychotherapy ends.<sup>2</sup>

A second important difference, resulting from the first, is that Hermetism insisted on moral purity. It is difficult to generalise about modern psychologists, since they are divided into so many schools, but it can be said on the whole that they reject the idea of sin and teach their victims not to feel guilt for wrong things done but to explain them away, while there are

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<sup>2</sup> See *Western Psycho-Therapy and Hindu Sadhana*, Allen and Unwin.

some who, in certain cases, advise the exorcising of harmful impulses by indulging them. In contrast to this, Hermetism insisted on purity and dedication before even beginning the Great Work. It had to be undertaken in a spirit of reverence and devotion. So far was it from being motivated by greed for gold that the experimenter was pledged to desirelessness and poverty. He was warned that without perfect purity his experiments could not succeed. This attitude was not merely an unthinking echo of a pious age but was rigorously scientific. It is egoism that warps a man's impulses and stunts his faculties, giving rise to anger, fear and desire and destroying his peace of mind. A valid training will, therefore, insist on the abandonment of all conscious egoism while hunting for the hidden roots of unconscious egoism. It is only when these are torn out that serenity and equilibrium will be attained. Any course of treatment which connives at egoism can at best change the nature of the disequilibrium but cannot cure it.

The love and purity that were demanded were not mere emotionalism, such as one finds too often in a modern religious revival, but were combined with knowledge, without which no solid achievement is likely to be made. Together with the symbolism of alchemy, that of astrology also was used. The use of astrology for prediction was a practical adaptation analogous to physical experimentation in alchemy. It might be very effective when properly handled, nevertheless the element of self-seeking in it brought it into contempt and was ultimately largely responsible for the condemnation of astrology as a whole. Its higher and purer use was as a Hermetic technique for the training of aspirants. Lest this seem a vague statement, a brief outline follows of some of its main features.

From the aspirant's horoscope were seen the various harmonising or conflicting qualities in him, indicating what particular course his training should take. Jacob Boehme, the great mystic philosopher of the Renaissance period who left an



explicit record of the vanishing science, declares quaintly that if a certain planet becomes too obstreperous it should be whipped and stood in a corner. In other words, if the tendency symbolised by a planet dominates too much, distorting the equilibrium of one's nature and finding expression in inadmissible ways, it must be disciplined and held in check.

The symbolism was both real and intricate. The sun in a person's horoscope is his deepest and most genuine nature (how he reveals himself in moments of sudden crisis or bare sincerity) and may be quite different from the impression he makes on others and on himself in day-to-day living. The moon, on the other hand, is his emotional, temperamental nature. So, for instance, one who has the sun in Aries and the moon in Taurus will be easy-going, conservative, restful in his daily life but when necessary will show a capability for enterprise and initiative which will surprise those who think they know him. On the other hand, one who has the sun in Taurus and the moon in Aries will be lively, alert and original in manner and speech, but one will gradually come to see that his initiative is in defence of security and established order, not in defiance of them. Furthermore, the sun and moon may be in harmonious or inharmonious relationship with one another; the solar nature may reinforce the lunar or clash with it. The Hermetist whose training was based on a study of his horoscope would be taught to make his solar nature dominate over his lunar when there was need for a decision. If the two clashed he would have to temper one with the other, see which impulses stemmed from one and which from the other and decide which were appropriate in the given circumstances.

We say that 'he' must undertake this adjustment, but who is this 'he'? Obviously the mind; and the mind is Mercury, that is Hermes, the presiding spirit of Hermetism, the intermediary, the messenger of the gods, the hermaphrodite, neither male nor female, neither aggressive nor receptive, whose function is to

inform and understand, even to manipulate, the planetary forces. His nature too is indicated by his position in the horoscope: it may show, for instance, the sympathetic understanding of water, the intellectual understanding of air, the passionate, ardent understanding of fire, or the sober, practical understanding of earth. Insofar as he is the manipulator he may be regarded as the most important planet in the horoscope, and yet he too can be dangerous and require discipline. Being a ruler of dual signs, he can be undecided; being neither male nor female, he can be sterile; governing air and earth, he can lack the sympathy of water and the ardour of fire. If not watched he can degenerate into the dry scholar or timid critic, afraid to act.

Next come Mars and Venus, male and female, aggression and conciliation, the only real opposites in the horoscope (for although Jupiter and Saturn are in some ways opposite, as will be shown below, it must be remembered that zodiacally they are not, Jupiter being opposite to Mercury, while Saturn is to the sun and moon). But the opposition can be harmonized into a wedding; and it is significant that in Graeco-Latin mythology they are indeed husband and wife.<sup>3</sup> An element of aggression, assertion, enterprise, is necessary in every one who takes the path; without it he would never venture and therefore never attain. But an element of harmony and conciliation is also necessary or he would rush headlong to ruin. A study of the horoscope will show of what nature each of these is and in what relation they stand to each other as well as to the other planetary forces, indicating how they need to be developed, co-related, disciplined, which needs to be strengthened and which toned down, and in what direction to watch out for dangers.

And finally the mighty couple of Jupiter and Saturn. The entire quest is a two-fold process of expansion and contraction, symbolised by these two planets, expanding a man's faculties

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<sup>3</sup> I am speaking here only of the symbolical basis of western Hermetism. In Hindu astrology Venus is male.

while at the same time crushing him to the point of self-naughting', as the mediaeval mystics put it. Christ said that a man must be poor enough to pass through the eye of a needle. He also said that when a man attains the kingdom of heaven all else shall be added to him. This represents two successive stages: first, contraction of the ego to nothingness, then infinite expansion. But in actual practice the two stages are seldom clearly divided. The adding and subtraction or expansion and squeezing go on side by side, and that is the trouble. An aspirant may go through alternate phases of expansion, when grace floods his heart and the quest is a lilt of joy, and contraction when he seems to have lost everything he had gained on the path and to be squeezed to the bones, when all is dryness and he is tempted to despond and can do nothing but grit his teeth and hold on with grim perseverance. In this sense, Jupiter is the benefic and Saturn the malefic; but there is also another sense in which Jupiter represents a grave danger to the aspirant from which only the stern discipline of Saturn can save him. That is when the process of expansion takes the form of new powers and perceptions on the subtle plane which may seduce him from his path, as Circe did the companions of Odysseus. Like Circe, they may also turn their victims into swine. A true guru will encourage no such things. Let them come after the kingdom of heaven has been attained, as Christ said. The Maharshi said that even when powers come unsought they should not be accepted. They are like a rope to tether a horse.

This outline may serve to show how vital and at the same time how intricate the symbolism was. However a concrete example carries more weight than generalisations, so let us trace Shakespeare's use of astrological symbolism in 'Twelfth Night'.

The Duke and Olivia are the sun and moon. The Duke is lovesick for Olivia, but a sickly, romantic love for a beauty he has never seen. This represents the man who pines nostalgically for the ideal state of a lost childhood or imagined perfection.

No such state can be recaptured. A person who retains the mind of a child when he grows up, thereby avoiding the 'fall' into adult sophistication, becomes a monstrosity. What was lovable in the child becomes offensive in one who should have outgrown it. The virtual or ideal perfection of childhood cannot be recovered; it must be actualised as the virtual perfection of the Earthly Paradise is to be actualised in the realized perfection of the Heavenly Jerusalem. This, to bring in another item of Mediaeval symbolism, was the 'squaring of the circle'. The circle represents the virtual perfection where no point strays further from the centre than any other. But a man is dragged out on one side by desire and pushed in on another by fear until all symmetry of form is lost. Then, when he takes up the Great Work, he sets himself not to recover the lost circle, which would be impossible, but to hammer the form foursquare.

Attainment of actualised perfection is brought about by the 'Hermetic marriage', that is by the interposition of Mercury (Hermes in Greek, whence the name 'Hermetism') between sun and moon. Mercury is the Messenger of the gods. He is equated with intellectual intuition and therefore more or less equivalent to the Hindu 'buddhi'. The ancient Greeks symbolised him also by the phallus, another instrument of union. It was a saying of the alchemists that Mercury is the true Christ, the Mediator between God and man. He is represented in mythology as hermaphrodite, as having both sexes or none. Astrologically he is the ruler of Virgo, the virgin sign, and Gemini, the heavenly twins. And this brings us back to 'Twelfth Night', where Mercury appears as the twin sister and brother, Viola and Sebastian, who intervene between sun and moon, Duke and Olivia.

Olivia, the 'moon', the human nature or temperament according to astrology, is the person needing treatment. Her household (horoscope) is in a terrible state of disarray. Sir Toby Belch is the very picture of a degenerate Jupiter—his

expansiveness degenerated into gluttony, his magnanimity into boastfulness, his grandeur into riotousness. He is in conjunction with Mars, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in Taurus (as he himself says). Taurus, it will be remembered, is the 'detriment' of Mars, where he is apt to be quarrelsome but cowardly, which is just what Sir Andrew was. Malvolio, a hypocritical Puritan, scheming and coldly ambitious, is just as much a caricature of Saturn as Sir Toby is of Jupiter or Sir Andrew of Mars in detriment. Olivia's pert, pretty, flirtatious maid is Venus. Although Mercury as a Divine Agent is represented as the twins, Viola and Sebastian, Mercury in a human sense, as an ingredient in Olivia's household or horoscope is the Fool: clever, pert and flippant.

With brilliant wit and technique the twins are introduced into this menage and restore order in it by accomplishing the 'Hermetic Marriage', the male twin wedding Olivia and the female the Duke, while the disordered 'planets' are disciplined and brought to order. Here is evidence enough that, humanist as he was, Shakespeare was more also. He had knowledge of the hidden Hermetic science which, even in his day, was being forgotten and abandoned. To some extent it is still possible to study it but not to relive it. To think otherwise would only be fooling oneself. And others.



# The Symbolism of Numbers

Although much nonsense has been talked in the name of numerology, that does not alter the fact that numbers have a natural and inherent symbolism. The series of numbers does not begin with one, but with zero, which represents the Void, the Unmanifest, the primal Non-Being out of which both being and non-being emerge. By a natural symbolism, the zero is figured by a circle. This represents the metaphysical circle whose centre is everywhere and its circumference nowhere.

The first crystalization of zero is into One. The very name means God—the One Being. He who alone is. All creatures are from God; all numbers are from the One. Every number is made up of ones. One is the substance of them as gold is of the jewellery made of it. It is a natural symbolism that we use a single straight line as the figure for one. The straight line is in itself an affirmation of oneness. The Sanskrit symbol for one is also interesting, however. It is a circle uncoiling and therefore represents the metaphysical zero of Non-Being opening out into the affirmation of Being.

But one is not in itself creative. First it polarises into the Divine Couple; the complementarism of two—the yang and yin in China, Purusha and Prakriti in India, the polarity of active and passive, male and female, positive and negative, day and night, creation and dissolution, being and non-being, manifested and unmanifested. But this is a lower unmanifested existing together with its counterpart, the manifested, within the primal, total Unmanifested of the Zero, as Sri Krishna explains in the *Gita*.

Nevertheless, it is not two which is the dynamic and creative number, but three. Three is two and their uniter or union. It is therefore the number of the Word or the Son, without whom, as St. John says, was not anything made of all that was made. Three is the number of the Hindu gunas, the stresses or tendencies which govern all creation.

Three is the number of creating, four of the created, of the world, of stabilisation. It is 'foursquare', the number of the square, which is the very picture of stability. In every way it has been taken to represent the stability of creation—the four seasons of the year, the four yugas of a human cycle; gold, silver, copper and iron, the four alchemical elements (fire, water, air, earth) and the qualities (hot, cold, moist, dry) which interlock with these as shown in the diagram, each of the elements partaking of the qualities on either side of it, the four ages of man (childhood, youth, maturity, age), the traditional four races of mankind (white, red, yellow, black), in India the four *Vedas*, the four yugas, the four ashramas, the four castes (priestly, military, economic, labouring).

However, if one characteristic of physical manifestation is stability, another and opposite one is incompleteness and constant reaching out. In the former regard, four is the number of the square, in the latter of the cross, its arms forever reaching out. Historically the cross is associated with Christianity, but symbolically its significance is more universal and more ancient. As creation reaching out, it symbolises both aspiration and suffering. It has been used, with a number of variations, of which the Swastika is one, in many ancient civilisations.

Although four is the number of creation, it is not the number of man, for man is more than the four elements; he is the four elements, with the quintessence (or essential fifth) in the centre. Therefore, five is his number, the number of substance with the spirit in the heart of it. The fifth point in the centre of the cross converts it from an image of blind reaching out to an image of balanced manifestation from the heart. The five-pointed star is a traditional symbol for man. In some hermetic drawings it is actually humanized, a man being depicted with his head at the apex, his arms extended to the two upper points, and his legs to the two lower.

Six is again a number of stabilisation, but more profound than four, since it contains the quintessential five. Whereas four depicts merely expansion into manifestation in the four directions of space, six brings in the further two directions of up and down, implying the possibility of rising to higher and sinking to lower worlds. Therefore six is represented by the cross of three dimensions.

Another form of it is the six-pointed star, depicting the union of heaven and earth, spirit and body, yang and yin, Purusha and Prakriti, man and woman. Woman is traditionally represented by a triangle with the apex downwards. This marks the points of her body physically, higher and lower than the male upright triangle, thus reflecting woman's twofold relationship to man. Above the male triangle it represents the descent of Divine Grace on man; below it represents woman bound to the body more than man is by her physical functions, and therefore inferior to man. The six-pointed star symbolises the union of the two where the lower triangle of aspiration moves upwards into the descending one of Grace. Thus it is used to depict the perfect man.

Just as five completes four by addition of the quintessence, so seven completes six, but six is the four directions of space plus the additional two of up and down, so seven is a more universal perfection than five. Five represents the completion of the human state, seven the total perfection of cosmic being. From one viewpoint, therefore, seven is the perfect number. Paintings of Christ and the apostles sometimes show the apostles in pairs, making six groups with Christ in the centre as the seventh.

Eight is a number of stabilised manifestation, like four. When the intermediary points are considered, it is the number of the directions of space. It is the combined number of elements and qualities. Nine is taken as the number of the circumference of the circle and is therefore, in its own way, a perfection. It is also the last single digit, which gives it finality. It has the peculiar



integrity that the digits in every multiple of it add up to itself (18, 27, 36, etc.). The digits of any number to which it is added add up to the same as before (e.g.  $24 = 2+4 = 6$ ;  $24+9 = 33 = 3+3 = 6$ ), so that the nine remains invisible.

Ten being the first double number, has a sort of primordality like one, and indeed its digits, 1 and 0, add up to one. It is complete as being the summation of the first four numbers,  $1+2+3+4$ , which are the basis of creation. It is for this reason that it is taken as the opening of a new series, nine being the last single digit.

This has been so among all peoples, but there have been some ancient peoples who have taken twelve instead of ten as their cyclic number. Twelve has indeed a peculiar complexity and completeness. Astrologically, each of the four elements (fire, water, air, earth) must be manifested according to each of the three modes (cardinal, fixed and mutable); and therefore there must be twelve signs of the zodiac, three for each element. In many other cases twelve has been the number of a complete cycle of manifestation or a complete symbolical group—the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve tables of the Law, the twelve apostles of Christ, the twelve knights of the Round Table, peers of Carlemagne, even months of the year.

It is partly for historical reasons that thirteen is considered an unlucky number: because there were thirteen at the last supper when Christ was betrayed. But in itself also it is inauspicious since it breaks the cyclic perfection of twelve.

Thus it will be seen that numbers have an inherent meaning and importance. It is because their symbolism is natural to them that it is found among many disconnected ancient peoples. It did not need to be invented but only recognised. Today it is largely forgotten.

# The Relations Between Religion and Art

DESPITE THE SECULAR spirit which swept over Europe at the Renaissance and has spread to the rest of the world in the present century, it would still be true to say that the greater part of the world's art and poetry has been religious in inspiration and origin. Why?

It has been suggested that the reason is simply that in past ages the churches have been the principal or only patrons; that, however, is a shallow explanation, looking at the past through modern spectacles. It does not explain why Hindu life and literature were dominated for centuries by the great religious epics (and let us remember that the Greeks also considered the Homeric poems the basis of their religion, although they show little of the profundity of the Hindu epics). It does not fit the Taoist painters, who were largely amateurs in no need of a patron, or the sculptors and painters of Buddhist cave temples, at Ajanta and elsewhere, who were world-renouncers. It would be laughed at by the Persian poet-saints who scandalised the orthodox. It does not even apply to the great temples of Mediaeval India or the gothic cathedrals of Christendom, in complying with whose intricate symbolism and shaping whose exquisite figures the builders were hammering out the lineaments of their own true nature.

Nor were lay patrons lacking—princes and feudal lords, not to mention royal courts, in India, in China, in Japan, in Christendom, in most parts of the world. Works of art were indeed created for them too and poems sung in their honour. To take but one example among many, there are the exquisite miniature-like paintings of Rajputana. But always the greatest output, greatest both in quality and quantity, was for religion. And indeed, how many of the Rajput paintings had the eternal symbolism of the love of Radha and Krishna for their theme!

Before attempting an answer, there is another question that interweaves with this. What is the attitude of religion to art? At their origin religions seem to agree in either ignoring or deprecating art. The *Koran* forbids representational art and speaks scornfully of poets. The *Tao-Te-King* declares that the five senses dull the mind and that the Sage, therefore, is not deluded by them but aims at what is of benefit. Both Christ and Buddha completely ignore art and poetry in their teaching, as do also their immediate followers. In fact all religions that have a known historical origin run the same course: from an austere, bare primitivism when art is deprecated or ignored to a gorgeous mediaevalism a few centuries later, when religion burgeons out into a luxurious glow of beauty, even though man's private life is still hard compared with the comforts and conveniences of our secular world.

Once again, the obvious answer—that the religions became untrue to their origins—is superficial and does not fit the case. The foremost purpose of a religion is to guide those who will adventure out of the apparent reality of this life to the clear-sighted bliss or ecstatic rapture of the Sage or Saint, through whom waves of Grace flow downwards and outwards to the less aspiring believers. So long as this continues to be done a religion is well rooted in its origins; so long as a tree bears good fruit it is a healthy tree. Religions which could produce a St. Francis and an Eckhart, an Abdul Qadir and an Ibn Arabi, a Shankara and a Ramanuja, an Ashvaghosha and a Hui Neng, were not untrue to their origins; the paths were still open and guides who had trodden them still available. Moreover, it was often the Masters themselves who created or encouraged art or poetry, a Dante and a Rumi, a Kabir and a Milarepa.

There is another explanation. In the incandescent white heat of the origin of a religion the energy of those who aspire, strengthened as by a springboard by their rejection of the degenerate world around them, shoots straight upwards. The

*sattva guna*, the upward tendency, dominates. Directing the energy outwards to forms, even beautiful forms, would be a weakness, almost a betrayal, for however beautiful forms may be, they limit and obscure the pure beauty of the Formless. As a poet saw intuitively long after the certainty of religion had been lost, even though life be a dome of many-coloured glass, it still “Stains the white radiance of eternity.”

If you are climbing a mountain path and it is a matter of life and death to reach the summit, if all your alertness is needed to avoid pitfalls and dangers, all your strength to strive upwards, you do not stop to pick flowers by the wayside, however beautiful they may be. One who has reached safety can do that. Even after art and poetry began to be honoured, it was usually assumed in India (and to a large extent in Buddhism and Islam also) that it is those who have attained Realization who should write poems. Indeed, their greatest poets are those, like Tukaram in Marathi or Tayumanavar in Tamil, who wrote from the fullness of spiritual knowledge. The Maharshi himself, although he did not write much, composed in the ‘Forty Verses’ one of the most profound metaphysical statements and in the first of the ‘Five Hymns to Sri Arunachala’ one of the most glowing symbolical love poems of all religions and all ages.<sup>1</sup>

To some extent this is anticipating. Coming now to the mediaeval epoch, we find that the incandescent white heat has cooled to a mellow golden glow. *Sattva* is combined now with *rajas*, the upward-tending with the outward-tending urge. Indirect paths to Realization begin to be followed: Tantrism in Hindu and Buddhist India, Hermetism in Christendom and indeed, with surprising similarity, in China and Islam also. It is found necessary first to harmonize a man, redirecting his lower tendencies and developing his finer qualities, before

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, Riders, London, and Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, sixth revised edition, 1996.

launching him on the final quest. Such rectification no longer happens automatically, as a by-product of the quest, as in the earlier stage, but needs to be planned and organized. Art is now deliberately encouraged and developed, it is not merely allowed as a concession to those who are not one-pointed enough to strive without it, still less is it indulged in as a luxury; it is used as a technique of discipline and development. A poem acquires the qualities of a mantra, a sacred incantation whose vibrations harmonize the mind; a drawing or architectural plan becomes a development of a yantra or a mandala, a shape of inherent power.<sup>2</sup>

In mediaeval religious art, whether poetry or the plastic arts, whether in Japan or Europe or anywhere between, gorgeous exuberance is combined with strict discipline of form and precise symbolism. The adaptation of art to symbolism in order to use it as a mode of worship or a technique of training does not in any way impair its value as art. Rather it enhances it, for art is form-giving and, even though one had the expertise of a Swinburne, the form-giving will remain trivial if there is nothing great to give form to. Therefore what might be termed in a broad generic sense 'mediaeval' religious art is on the one hand rigorously formal and on the other superbly sumptuous.

Exact form does not destroy freedom in art; it gives it wings. Poetry being formal and disciplined language as compared with prose, which is comparatively informal and undisciplined, there is no sense in making it formless; if it is not going to conform to the rules of poetry let it be prose. So-called 'free' or formless poetry is in fact half-baked poetry. Either the impulse behind it had not a high enough temperature to melt the words and make them flow into its mould, or the creative power flagged when the work was half done—that is when the idea was half-baked into a poem.

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala* by Prof. Giuseppe Tucci, Riders, London.

I know this from experience and I consider it important enough to justify an autobiographical aside. As a young man I aspired to be a poet—in fact I believed I was one. However, nothing came of it. Then came the time when neither prose nor verse had any value except as a vehicle for spiritual wisdom and a signpost on the way (which, indeed, is what poetry should be). Then, quite suddenly, poems began to come almost ready-made.

### SARAH

See how Grace is fallen on me!  
The sudden beauty of my rhymes—  
A sign made plain for all to see;  
As the Lord wrought in ancient times  
With that gaunt patriarch's aged wife,  
Sarah, who through all her life  
Had been a barren tree.

Had this power come in youthful years,  
A bastard brood my rhymes had been,  
Begotten of desires and fears,  
Or pompous words that little mean.  
That shameful wandering denied,  
I stayed perforce a faithful bride,  
Whose bridegroom now appears.

To turn my rhymes to worldly things  
Now would be a bitter shame,  
Like a worthless wife who brings  
Disgrace upon her husband's name.  
There is not even the desire;  
No lesser theme can him inspire  
Who of the highest sings.

The first four poems were almost formless (actually, one was a lyric though with only vaguely formed verses and one in blank verse, though I did not realize this at the time); it had not yet occurred to me that I was professional enough to attempt rhyme and metre. Then a poem came which, in intricacy and regularity of metre, was more like 17th than 20th century verse, and I discovered that if the impulse is sufficient the words will flow to the pattern. If not, better keep quiet. This was the poem:

### CONSOLATION

Disconsolate, to Him in grief I cried,  
And the Beloved  
From my own heart replied.  
No radiant form appeared;  
The subtle mist that cleared  
Nought new discovered,  
No splendid bridegroom, no expectant bride.

All pageants pass; whatever comes must go.  
Death hath a place  
For all the mind can know.  
Even the loftiest vision  
Time holdeth in derision;  
Divine embrace  
From vibrant joy to memory must grow.

He shed the jewelled robe for my delight,  
And I beheld  
A Void, no sound, no sight.  
Only What IS shall be—  
Him—Me—Eternity,  
All clouds dispelled,  
Seer and seen grown one in radiant sight.

According to Hindu doctrine there are three *gunas*: *sattva*, the upward tendency whose colour is white, *rajas*, the outward, whose colour is red, and *tamas*, the downward, whose colour is black. All things are held in being by their combined stress. After the epoch of *rajas* in the relations between religion and art comes that of *tamas*. That is when art has broken away from religion and sunk to utilitarian and ornamental patterns, worldly and human themes. Occasional flashes of intuition may still inspire the poet, but no steady glow of knowledge, no true understanding. Religion is again devoid of art and poetry, but below it now, not above it. Bad poetry wedded to bad music forms hymns that can have only a sentimental value. Holy pictures that cannot be dignified with the name of art are used to foster emotion. Except for rebels against the epoch, people no longer aspire. The paths are overgrown with weeds and blocked by rockfalls and there are no guides. The cycle comes round to where it started but in an inverted likeness. In the pure aspiration of the beginning men had no time for intricate techniques and paths; now again they have no time, but now because they have no aspiration at all.

Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “Whenever harmony (*dharma*) is obscured and disharmony (*adharma*) triumphs, I appear.”<sup>3</sup> Now, in this modern age, when circumstances make the elaborate disciplines of an indirect path once more unsuitable, if not impossible, God has appeared on earth incarnate as Ramana Maharshi and opened once more a direct path which, by his Grace, is accessible to those who turn to him and on which art and poetry, yantra and mantra, are again unnecessary. He did not encourage those who trod the direct path under his guidance to divert their energies to poetry or any of the arts. “All this is only activity of the mind. The more you exercise the mind and the more success you have in composing verses, the less peace you have. And what use is it to acquire such



accomplishments if you don't acquire peace. But if you tell such people this, it doesn't appeal to them; they can't keep quiet. They must be composing songs."

It is significant that when some one asked him about a technique for developing the various virtues and combating the vices in oneself, he replied that such techniques may be useful on an indirect path but on the direct path of Self-enquiry all this happens automatically. The two go together: encouragement of art and indirect methods of training. Conditions in the world today are suitable for neither.



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<sup>3</sup> Ch. IV, v.7.

# Shakespeare's Mortality Plays

IT IS REMARKABLE for how short a period Renaissance drama flourished in England. Its rise, climax and decline all fall within Shakespeare's lifetime. In his youth Mediaeval morality plays were still being acted, while by the end of his life Renaissance drama was decadent already and the theatres were soon to be closed by the Puritans. Shakespeare, in fact, was himself the chief architect of English Renaissance drama. What is seldom realized is that he was, at the same time, the perpetuator of Mediaeval drama, or perhaps it would be better to say its last and supreme exponent.

Let us take a look at the two types of drama.

A morality play was the drama of a man's inner spiritual warfare, leading to his victory or defeat. The characters on the stage quite explicitly represented the warring ingredients in him—greed, pride, humility, fortitude and so forth, with the intervention of angels on one side and devils on the other. That is to say that attention was focussed on what is, for each man, the essential problem of his life, whether he knows it or not: not on any question of social adjustment, but on the use or misuse of his human life, the development or waste of his faculties, the order or chaos of his inner economy, leading to harmonisation or corruption.

Renaissance drama, on the other hand, dealt with purely mundane topics, that is with questions of social adjustment, of the relations between men and women, friends and foes, superiors and inferiors, and so on. This tradition, sometimes called 'humanistic', has been continued ever since. In literature, as in every other department of life, the Renaissance was a turning away from a God-centred to a world-centred attitude to life. In drama, therefore, it was henceforth a man's human relationships and worldly position that interested people, no

longer his inner state. There have been a few exceptions among the greatest poets or dramatists, but very few—Ibsen in his *Peer Gynt*, Goethe in his *Faust*, Tagore in his *King of the Dark Chamber*. There is no doubt that the Mediaeval drama is more profound, but for modern man it is less interesting. In fact it is only acceptable to him if it is disguised under the form of humanistic drama. That is what Shakespeare did.

Shakespeare was in a unique position. He was captivated by the brilliance of the Renaissance, as every writer is by the spirit of his age. He helped to mould the new age, as every great writer does. And yet at the same time he was imbued with the high seriousness which animated the Mediaeval mind and its interest in the ultimate question, the only ultimate question, of what a man makes of his life. Subject to this dual current of influence, he wrote Mediaeval plays in the Renaissance style, morality plays with real live individuals as the characters in them instead of the conventional types of Mediaeval drama, but morality plays none the less. In doing this, it must be remembered, he was not attempting to revive an abandoned style (no such attempt ever has real life in it, ever really succeeds) but continuing a type of drama which was still current, only clothing it in the style of the new age. And the measure of his success is that, even though deprived of their true profundity by ignorance of symbolism among critics, readers and audiences from his age down to ours, his plays have still remained great.

Actually, they go beyond the ordinary morality plays current in his youth. These deal with the battle of life which every man must willy-nilly fight in himself, whereas Shakespeare is dealing with the great spiritual warfare deliberately entered upon by those who take up the Quest. The tragedies are dramas of failure in the Quest, the comedies of success.

Some Shakespearean critics have opined that in the period when he was writing the great tragedies Shakespeare was so oppressed with the thought of human inner failure and tragedy

that it brought him close to madness. This is probably a great exaggeration, especially as some of his comedies also were written at the same time. Nevertheless, the symbolical interpretation of the tragedies does show how they must have weighed on him. Very few of those who take up the Quest bring it to a successful conclusion. Christ said that many are called but few are chosen. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that out of thousands perhaps one is called and out of thousands who are called perhaps one is chosen. That is not even one in a million. Symbolical stories of the Quest such as Mallory's *Morte d'Arthur* show many defeated or captured along the way or abandoning the Quest and very few reaching the goal. To a young man setting forth as one of a fellowship of aspirants in courage and high hope, as Shakespeare must have done, how can it not be depressing to see so many failures along the way, so few holding firmly to the path? But no one with the flame still burning in his heart can allow himself to be discouraged. Shakespeare did not. He perceived the radiance of the goal and his later comedies wrote again of its achievement.

Such statements must be illustrated by examples. Actually, a good deal has been written already about Shakespearean symbolism in *The Mountain Path*. Since some readers may not have the back numbers to hand, I may be forgiven for quoting. In the July 1966 issue there is a beautiful analysis of the symbolism of Hamlet by Sir George Trevelyan, "The Hero of Mythology".

"Let us look briefly at the tragedy of Hamlet as the hero who failed.... He is a highly self-conscious intellectual summoned to undertake the path of regeneration. His task is to take over a kingdom occupied by a usurping monarch and thereby revenge his father and free his mother from domination by the usurper. Seen allegorically, the kingdom is himself. 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark'—in himself. The false, unaspiring aspect of the personality rules, wedded to his mother, that is to the instinctual nature which is debased and calls for regeneration. In interpreting a myth we must see the whole setting as the

personality and all the characters as themes or aspects of it. The temptations and trials reflect the flaws of character to be overcome. Hamlet, a university intellectual, is summoned by an exalted being from the other world. His noble father's spirit in arms (that is, his earlier untutored spiritual intuition that was once wedded to his instinctual life before he fell into sophistication) tells him of his warrior task to avenge the murder and redeem his debased mother."

In the following issue, Sir George returns with a profound study of *The Merchant of Venice*. "In *The Merchant* we see the rich city of Venice representing the mundane level and the 'beautiful mountain' of Belmont representing the higher plane of awareness where the princess Portia lives. The personality, Bassanio, has to journey there to win and unite with the higher being in himself symbolised by Portia." Particularly telling is the comment on Portia's parting remark after she has played the judge in the lawsuit. "Portia, in disguise, departs with the words: 'I pray you know me when we meet again.' Thus speaks the higher Self to each one of us."

Symbolism varies. There is no hard and fast rule. In Hamlet the higher faculty of love and intuition is symbolised by Ophelia (and Sir George Trevelyan reminds us that her very name in Greek means 'aid'); in Lear it is symbolised by Cornelia, rejected by Lear, as Ophelia was by Hamlet. In the October 1966 editorial<sup>1</sup> I alluded briefly to this tragedy. "But the quest is not always successful. A man may banish the simple truth of intuition, preferring instead the diversity and flattery of the mind—the two sisters. Then the mind itself turns against him, but he finds that intuition has perished and cannot be revived. Then grief and madness drive him to his death. That is the tragedy of Lear."

Further back, (having been fortunate enough to acquire the back numbers) I found a fine account of the astrological

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<sup>1</sup>*The Mountain Path*, Vol. 3, No. 4, "Tales of Meaning", p. 307.

symbolism of *Twelfth Night* by Sagittarius in April 1965<sup>2</sup>. “The Duke and Olivia are the sun and moon. The Duke is lovesick for Olivia, but a sickly, romantic love for a beauty he has never seen. This represents the man who pines nostalgically for the ideal state of a lost childhood or imagined perfection. No such state can be recaptured. The virtual or ideal perfection of childhood cannot be recovered; it must be actualised.... Attainment of actualised perfection is brought about by the ‘Hermetic marriage’, that is by the interposition of Mercury .... between sun and moon. Mercury is the Messenger of the gods. He is equated with intellectual intuition.... Mercury appears as the twin sister and brother, Viola and Sebastian, who intervene between sun and moon, Duke and Olivia. Olivia, the ‘moon’, the human nature or temperament according to astrology, is the person needing treatment. Her household (horoscope) is in a terrible state of disarray. Sir Toby Belch is the very picture of a degenerate Jupiter—his expansiveness degenerated into gluttony, his magnanimity into boastfulness, his grandeur into riotousness. He is in conjunction with Mars, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, in Taurus (as he himself says). Taurus, it will be remembered, is the ‘detriment’ of Mars, where he is apt to be quarrelsome but cowardly, which is just what Sir Andrew was. Malvolio, a hypocritical Puritan, scheming and coldly ambitious, is just as much a caricature of Saturn as Sir Toby is of Jupiter or Sir Andrew of Mars.... With brilliant wit and technique the twins are introduced into this menage and restore order into it by accomplishing the ‘Hermetic Marriage’, the male twin wedding Olivia and the female the Duke, while the disordered ‘planets’ are disciplined and brought to order.”

Let us now look at another of Shakespeare’s plays, *Julius Caesar*. Rome itself must be regarded as the person being studied. It has fallen into a state of confusion. Caesar takes over control, but he represents rather the overweening ego than the enlightened soul.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Hermetic Symbolism*, p. 392 of this book.

This is made clear at the very beginning when he laments his childlessness. The son is the natural symbol of the regenerate self; but it is only the purified soul that has a son in this sense, not the ego. Furthermore Caesar, before his assassination, shows himself easily swayed, first one way by his wife and then the other by a flatterer; and yet at the same time he boasts of being as immovable as the pole star (as the true Self would be).

I could be well moved if I were as you;  
If I could pray to move, prayers would move  
me;  
But I am constant as the northern star,  
Of whose true fix'd and resting quality  
There is no fellow in the firmament.  
The skies are painted with unnumber'd  
sparks,  
They are all fire and every one doth shine,  
But there's but one in all doth hold his place:  
So in the world; 'tis furnished well with men,  
And men are flesh and blood, and  
apprehensive;  
Yet in the number I do know but one  
That unassailable holds on his rank,  
Unshak'd of motion: and that I am he.

This is the worst tyranny: the ego claiming to be the Self. A man's faculties revolt against it, reject the discipline unjustifiably imposed upon them—assassinate Caesar.

Brutus is the rational mind, honest but easily duped. Caesar has two main dependants—Antony, the roisterous, passionate, self-indulgent nature, and Brutus, the rational mind; and when the artificial rigour of the ego is rejected it is Antony who wins. Brutus speaks to the people in prose and makes no impression; Antony inflames them against him.

Had Caesar been the true ruler, not a usurper, Brutus would have served him and all been well; but the mind cannot stand alone. Having disapproved of Caesar, Brutus lets himself be swayed by the jealous, malicious, resentful tendency that is Cassius. Thus he loses his integrity. Although he refuses to acquire funds by dishonest means, he has to acquiesce in Cassius doing so, since otherwise the army could not be held together. The mind may disapprove of the ego but cannot rule without it, cannot replace it. The failure of Brutus is summed up in a wise saying which is unwise because untimely:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

When Brutus spoke so wisely he had already missed the tide. That, the point of high tide, was when he addressed the Romans after Caesar's death and allowed Antony to capture them from him. Caesar could not stand without him, the rebels could not rebel without him, but neither could he stand alone. The mind must be grounded in intuition.

At the end of the play, in place of the grandiose Caesar and the honourable idealistic Brutus we have the self-indulgent Antony allied with the cold, scheming Octavius—a descent from aspiring though unenlightened youth to caution but egoistic middle age. When the young man who thought he could shake the world and did not know he was an egoist renounces his ambitions, the next casualty is his idealism and mental integrity.



# The Death-Wish

EVERY CREATURE has an instinct to evade danger and preserve its life. If men sometimes risk or even sacrifice their lives, that is because conscious purpose, shown in devotion to some cause or aim, overrides the instinct of self-preservation. However, Freud taught that man has also an opposite impulse, the death-wish, an attraction away from life towards death. In most cases this remains dormant in the subconscious, but it may drive a man to logically inexplicable destructive activity, harmful to himself or others. Or it may give rise to moods of morbid melancholy. In rare cases it may come to the surface with disastrous results.

This Freudian postulate is a misrepresentation of a truth inherent in all sacred traditions. The truth is that man has an intuition of the unreality of his unsatisfactory state as a separate individual being and therefore an urge to break its bounds and emerge into universal being, which is at the same time pure consciousness and undiluted happiness. Doing so would, of course, involve the death of the ego (using the word not in its Freudian sense but to mean the illusory individual being). This is indicated in Christ's saying that to attain the kingdom of heaven a man must die and be born again of the Spirit; by Mohammed's saying "Die before you die"; by the basic Buddhist doctrine of anatta, 'no-ego'; and by the myth of the phoenix, the fabulous bird which builds its own funeral pyre and immolates itself and then rises anew from the ashes of its dead self.

Some one who had neither spiritual intuition nor instruction and who mistook the illusory individual for his self might well mistake this urge, as Freud did, for innate hostility to oneself or aversion to life. Actually, the proper treatment for it would be not to deny its existence or to try to explain it away, but to investigate the truth of one's being by self-enquiry and find out what it is that has to be sacrificed, surrendered or destroyed and what remains after its destruction.

Why, then, it may be asked, do so many accept the false postulate of a death-wish and so few the true tradition referred to above of a chrysalis which has to be broken in order that the butterfly may emerge?

In the first place, such a postulate could only find credence in a world like that of today where spiritual teaching has been lost, except to a few, and counterfeits can unashamedly walk abroad. There are very few who have even heard of the possibility of Self-realization, whether through a Christian, Vedantic, Buddhist or any other path (though many have seen the term 'Self-realization' misused by psychologists).

In the second place, it is easier. A death-wish may be interesting to talk about and pledges one to nothing. On the contrary, it invites self-pity and relieves one of any feeling of guilt for one's destructive moods or actions. The true teaching, on the other had, while opening the door on a vista of illimitable beauty, also indicates the effort that has to be made and the discipline to be undergone. Understanding it carries the obligation of acting upon it, and not doing so leaves a feeling of guilt, for "from him to whom much is given much shall be demanded." It is no small obligation that is demanded, but the Great Enterprise. And even in a more spiritual age than ours it was said that: "Out of thousands, perhaps one seeks perfection; out of thousands who seek perfection, perhaps one knows Me as I am."<sup>1</sup> However, lest this quotation seem too bleak, it should be matched by another where Arjuna asks of the fate of those who take the path but do not bring it to a successful end and is told:

"Having attained to the world of the righteous and dwelt there for many years, the man who fell away from yoga is reborn in a pure and prosperous family or in a family of seekers endowed with wisdom; for such a birth is even more difficult to obtain in this world. There he regains the impressions he had developed in his former life and, starting from there, he again strives for Perfection."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, VII, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 41-42.

# POEMS

# A Testament

## INTRODUCTION

I was writing a record of my quest for Reality, which I called *The Mountain Path*, but the time came in December 1961, that being my 55<sup>th</sup> year, when it ceased to flow in prose, changing instead into a series of poems. I give below the last prose entry of the record to show how the transition came about.

“At this stage I had a sudden impulse to be afraid and draw back. This is a temptation which must be unhesitatingly cast aside or it may vitiate a lifetime’s striving. It is as though a man were to toil through dense forest and craggy mountain, in hardship and frequent danger, seeking the Heavenly City, and then, when its outer ramparts at least loom up, separated from him only by a narrow chasm, were to turn aside, fearing to jump. Henceforth he sits listlessly by the wayside or wanders without aim, unable to return to the state of spiritual ignorance from which he started but without initiative to press forward.

There is a tide in the affairs of men  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

“In order to safeguard against this I began to practise dying—that is, being in readiness to lay down life or the mind completely. There must be no stipulation that perception of a body and the world should be restored again after thus dying, because that would be bargaining, not surrender. If they are restored and life on earth continues, all right; if not, all right. You are not ready to wake up from a dream if you stipulate that you should

still watch its course, like a cinema, after waking: if you do, all right; if it vanishes into wakefulness, all right.

“Also the readiness to die must not be because life is sour or oppressive. That—the suicide’s attitude—carries with it the obverse: if conditions were changed and made attractive you would cling to life. That is not surrender but rebellious rejection of the terms of life offered to you.

“I had the feeling: ‘I am ready to give up my life but it is not accepted. What am I to do now?’ The whole day it continued, and so poignant that the thought kept coming: ‘This is a theme for a poem. What a pity I’m not a poet or don’t know one to whom I could tell it, so that he could make a poem of it.’ The next day too the same feeling continued and the same thought about a poem. In the evening I suddenly decided: ‘Anyway, I’ll write it down even if it’s not a poem.’ I did and found to my surprise that it was.

“From then on the book continued in the form of poems. I never knew in advance what they would be about; nevertheless they continued, though in an indirect way, to be a record of the quest, and therefore, although each one is a separate poem and can be read by itself, if read together it should be consecutively—for instance, it would not make sense to read the first after the second or either of them after the third.”

This about reading them serially applies, of course, only to those in *The Mountain Path* series. A few miscellaneous poems also were written and then the *Testament*. After some consideration I decided to suppress *The Mountain Path* and publish only the poems, putting them all together into one book.

# A Testament

## POEM

This believe: I tell you what I know  
From own experience; nothing of hearsay;  
What I have tried and proved and found it so,  
Following a guide, a Master of the Way.

## SECTION ONE

But first what sense-perception tells us all.  
The world in endless vista trails away  
Into a past remote beyond recall.  
Endlessly too the future looms ahead.  
Between the two your pin-point life-days fall,  
From the being born up to the being dead.  
And then the ripples that you caused subside;  
Another holds your office, sleeps in your bed,  
While Life moves on with unperturbed stride,  
As though you had not been. Even while you are,  
Nothing is there secure, little for pride.  
Health is on loan from time; frustrations mar  
Ambition and achievement; friendships end  
In death or forgetting. From afar  
Old age creeps on, filching the zest you lend  
To work and pleasure, chilling the vital power,  
Still narrowing the circle you defend  
Of life's attachments, till the final hour  
When thoughts, drawn in from schemes for  
which you fought,  
From work you lived for, office held or power,  
From wife and friend, from child, things sold  
and bought,

Converge on one point only, your next breath;  
Stripped of attachment, to naked being brought,  
To be squeezed out through the narrow womb of death.

## SECTION TWO

So far goes sight; so far men agree;  
But probing into what comes after death  
Their views diverge. Varied but mainly three  
The stands they take.

Some there are who hold  
Death is the end: nothing again to be,  
Nothing to know; for all your tale is told,  
And that poor thing that rots in the dark ground  
Is all that is of the once manifold  
Lover of fair faces and sweet sound  
That trod the earth and thought that he was you.  
Others there are who see life girdled round  
With brighter spheres of forms forever new,  
As much more vivid than the earth-forms here  
As peacock's throat than sparrow's dingy hue.  
There (a spaceless 'there' as dreams appear)  
Forces bred up on earth but out of sight—  
Courage that goes straight on in spite of fear,  
Or twisted guilt submerged from the clear light  
Of conscious mind—rise and surround a man  
In outer forms of terror or delight;  
His own brood, hidden for the earth-life span,  
Now torturing his disembodied soul  
Eternally if evil; but for who ran  
Life's race on earth to the appointed goal  
Peace everlasting, bliss past words to tell.

Others declare that this is not the whole.  
One season's harvest can't forever sell,  
Or one life's balance, whether good or bad,  
Consign eternally to heaven or hell.  
Man's inner life materialises, clad  
In incorporeal forms, they too admit;  
But thus the reckoning, whether glad or sad,  
Is closed, books balanced: there's an end of it.  
Thence he returns once more to life on earth,  
At that same level he himself made fit  
By use or misuse of his former birth:  
Free once again to rise, or free to sink,  
The architect again of his own worth.  
Again the bell tolls; again the brink  
Of death is crossed to living more intense,  
More heaven or hell, than earth-bound mind can think.  
Thus a man's life brings on its recompense,  
Rising before him. Inexorably the Wheel  
Swings round from growth to harvest, from the dense  
Earth-life that builds to regions that reveal  
What there he built. And thus from life to life  
Can man increase in stature, till he feel  
A brimming joy in what before was strife  
And no more yearn to earth-ways, no more cling  
To memory or desire, as with a knife  
Cut off all craving. Nothing again can bring  
Rebirth or grief or death to such a one,  
Free as the stars, free as the winds that sing  
His glory on the hill-tops, beyond the sun,  
In his own radiance gloriously bedight,  
Absorbed unending in the Unbegun,  
Beyond the parting of the day and night,  
Changeless, he sees the changing world aright.



### SECTION THREE

Not equally at fault these views. The first  
Alone is wholly wrong. The next contains  
All that man needs of truth to be well versed  
In his own interest, and from petty gains  
Followed by great loss to turn and seek  
His heritage of bliss, purchased by pains  
Prepaid but transient, in prospect bleak,  
Like Muslim's dower for his unseen bride,  
In retrospect nothing of which to speak.  
The third view also can as well provide  
Incentive and a way—all that men need.

Yet these three views of man, however wide  
They move apart, all spring from the same seed  
Of error, for they all alike declare  
You are that sentient body whence proceed  
Cravings like roots, like branches in the air  
Thoughts and ideals; hedged by necessity.  
Mere fantasy! No such thing is there!  
You are pure Consciousness, Eternity,  
Wherein birth, death and world are but such stuff  
As dreams are made on. No hyperbole!  
Just as a night-time dream seems real enough,  
So long as it lasts, within your mortal mind,  
So your life's journey, whether smooth or  
rough—  
Between deep hedgerows fragrantly entwined  
With honeysuckle, all the air athrob  
With singing of the birds, your steps combined  
With those of loved companion, such as rob  
Exhaustion of its pain, night of its fears,  
Or over arid crags, where not to sob

For weariness were hard when the sun sears  
And only thorn-trees cast a stunted shade,  
While all ahead the naked shale appears—  
All that same dream-stuff out of which is made  
You mortal self. All that is known or seen,  
With you in it, a pageant is, displayed  
Harmless in you, like pictures on a screen.

Awake! For dawn has set the sky aflame!  
Awake from dreaming what has never been  
To find the universe entire a game  
Forever changed, you evermore the same.

#### SECTION FOUR

This does not mean there are two selves in you,  
One universal and the other bound  
By name and form, a transient being who  
From birth to death treads out his little round.  
Rather amnesia. One born rich and great,  
Pre-eminent over all around,  
Forgets his own identity, so fate  
Leads him to some factory that is his,  
Did he but know, to queue up at the gate,  
Imploring work. Only one self he is,  
Yet twofold: so long as he forgets—  
A life of labour and indignities;  
Remember, and fate instantly resets  
Life as it was before misfortune's drag.  
Or that poor knight who, fallen in folly's nets  
Travelled Spain's dusty roads on a lean nag,  
Windmills for foes, delusion for a flag.

## SECTION FIVE

How, from pure Consciousness quite unalloyed,  
Unfettered being, unimpeded Bliss,  
Was that high equilibrium destroyed  
and your eternal state brought down to this?  
And why? Such questions not at all contribute  
To man's awaking. Nought that is amiss  
Can they set right. Every such dispute  
Is useless, but not harmless; it misleads,  
Lending this seeming world the attribute  
Of real being, of something that proceeds  
In course of time from that eternal state  
That was before. Thus ignorantly it pleads  
The cause of ignorance. In truth time's spate  
Of endless forms is no more than a dream,  
While That-which-was remains. Early and late,  
Time and the world, are shadow shows that seem  
True being only to the clouded mind.

One question only is a worthy theme:  
How to dissolve the subtle mists that blind,  
What the entangled aspirant can do  
To break the Lilliputian threads that bind.  
Therefore I write to point a pathway through  
The maze of fancied being to the true.

## SECTION SIX

First, understanding—not philosophy,  
For truth is simple; thought like a playful cat  
With skein of wool tangles it wilfully—  
Simply that Being is and you are That.  
Therefore to know the essential self of you

Is to know all; but not by gazing at,  
As one can know another, for Not-Two  
The Ultimate. Knowing in that high sense  
Is simple being. Being alone is true.

If understanding fails or can dispense  
Only a murky glow, as from a lamp  
That smokes and flickers in the wind, defence  
From weakness, fortitude alone to tramp  
The pilgrim way, can come from faith—not blind  
But bearing deep experience's stamp.  
For sometimes in life's daily round—behind,  
Or rather breaking through, the drab routine  
Of work and pleasure, comes into the mind  
A stillness and a power, a force unseen,  
Bearing conviction man is something more  
Than thought can demonstrate or eyes have seen.  
To hold to this even when the muffled roar  
Of distant thunder is no longer heard  
Through tinkling of the tinsel bells galore  
Is faith.

If faith too limps, there is a third  
Platform for man's take-off to beyond space—  
That of the intrepid gambler who averred:  
“This life has not so ravishing a face  
That when adventure calls I still should cling.  
For many causes men have risked her grace—  
To climb a mountain or unthroned a king,  
For art or science: I for the Supreme.  
And if I lose it is a little thing,  
But winning I win all. Give me the scheme,  
The discipline! Count me with those who try!”

Similar but less noble will he seem  
Who finds life bitter and, prepared to die,  
Takes this last hope of joy worth living by.

## SECTION SEVEN

The next demand a wise austerity.  
There is a seeming self, an evil ghost,  
That covers up your true integrity,  
Which to destroy is the last winning post,  
Whatever path a man may travel by.  
To understand even to the uttermost  
But not accomplish this, or even try,  
Were like an arctic traveller who sits  
In armchair by the fire, and warm and dry,  
A rug across his knees, in fancy flits  
Through howling blizzard and wild snowy waste.

Not easily the ego-self submits,  
But, like guerrilla warfare, if displaced  
From one position rises up elsewhere,  
And with shrewd strategy he must be faced.

No need for savage measures—better be fair;  
Let him have all the body needs, no less—  
Also no more. Watch out too for care  
What others think of him, vindictiveness,  
Grievance or emulation. If there is pride  
In learning, deem its damage in excess  
Over its value; lay your books aside.  
If hope of visions or the healing touch,  
Forswear it; if desire to be a guide  
To others on the path, know that all such  
Are cravings of the ego and abjure.

And do not let the phantom ego clutch  
At dream-worlds to surround him and allure  
With fancied being, thus to compensate  
For life's restrictions and to reassure.

All this is not the path, only the state  
From which the prudent wayfarer sets out.  
To start without it folly were as great  
As try to run up Everest without  
Equipment, just in tennis shoes and shirt—  
Folly and danger both. Ever about  
To turn and turn, build in a sudden spurt,  
Demolish in another, forsake your plan  
To dance the ego's tune, can cause grave hurt.  
The mind, pulled both ways, can betray a man  
And leave him far worse off than he began.

## SECTION EIGHT

And now the path itself. Many the ways  
That men have trod in their eternal quest  
For That-which-is. Most suited to our days  
A path lived in the world, like others dressed,  
Working like others, with no rites or forms.

Turn to look inward and, with mind at rest,  
All thought suspended, seek who, what, informs  
The living self of you, wherein abides  
The pure I-am-ness; probe beyond thought-forms,  
Knowing that reason no reply provides;  
Nothing for words, only experience;  
Not thought but being, being that resides  
Rather in heart than head, and issues thence.

Effort is needed. As easy it were to train  
A pack of monkeys as the mind. Immense  
Persistence. You dispose to calm; again  
Thoughts rise insidiously, until once more  
The sky is clouded over, and again  
You banish, they return. Yet the still core  
Of silence can be reached beyond the sound  
Of strident thoughts and clamorous uproar.  
In silence then, a treasure newly found,  
Vibrant awareness rises in the heart,  
Like the first crocus daring to break ground  
Where lately lay the snow. Brief at the start,  
Later spontaneous and pervading all,  
Body-sensed, mind-known, and yet from both apart,  
Remembrancer, whatever may befall,  
More precious than all joys of former days.

Remembrancer, yet powerless to forestall  
Resurgent ego; powerless too to raise  
That state in you that is not won of right  
But may unearned illumine all your ways:  
As on some lesser Himalayan height  
Facing the mighty Kanchenjunga veiled  
In clouds. Sudden the haze parts. Bright  
With dazzling whiteness the vast range is hailed  
With cries of wonder, while the risen sun  
Smites it with reds and golds. Briefly unveiled,  
And then the haze drifts back, the splendour done.

Even such a glimpse of the eternal state  
Is no assurance that the race is run,  
No guarantee a man will not stagnate,  
Or that the ego, temporarily dispersed,  
Will not return, again to dominate,

A man's last state no better than his first.  
Unflagging dedication to the goal  
Is needed still, incessant strife to burst  
Delusion's bonds, shrewdness to control  
The ego's stratagems; not to conceive  
Of something to attain, but know the whole  
Is now, let but that ego-self take leave  
Who seeks to attain, the better to deceive.

## SECTION NINE

Should this way prove too arduous, suppose  
The ego-self exists. Such as it is,  
And if it is, let it then dispose  
Itself to worship, let its litanies  
Ascend like incense-smoke about the feet  
Of God in Whom the whirling galaxies  
And a wild rose, the sum of things complete,  
Is a vast harmony to which He said  
"Be!" and it is. He Whose Mercy-Seat  
Is the incorporeal world about us spread.  
Whichever way you turn, behold His Face!  
His signs are in the pathways that you tread,  
And in the skies; yet in the secret place  
Of silence in your heart is His abode.  
His power is love. He draws you with His grace,  
And with His grace, when needs, as with a goad,  
Sharply He thrusts you back from the cliff's edge,  
Where folly leads or craving, to a road  
Shielded from dangers, though with thorns for hedge.

Your constant prayer be that His will be done,  
And to submit by your undying pledge;  
Yet know that, prayer or no, it will be done,



Being no whim or caprice but the law  
Of the Unending and the Unbegun,  
The harmony the ancient sages saw  
Whereto the heavenly spheres in concord dance,  
Which to resist were like a piece of straw  
Blown in the wind, but which leads on past trance  
To mystic union's unimagined stance.

## SECTION TEN

Some intuition of the butterfly  
Impels the caterpillar to undergo  
The rigorous chrysalis, gladly to die  
To his own state for one he does not know.  
How can he know in terms of nibbling leaf?  
How dream of flight, being content to grow,  
Not live? How will you bring to his belief  
Twinkling wings that flit above a flower,  
Gay as a lady's wind-inspired kerchief?

What is enjoyment but an ivory tower?  
But if life satisfies you, well and good;  
Stay on your leaf and nibble. If some power—  
Sense of eternity not understood—  
Beckons, then follow; never count the cost  
(It will cost all). Step forth as a beggar should  
To claim a throne, counting his rags well lost;  
And never look back, once the threshold crossed.

# The Guru

To feel, to know, to be the Christ within—  
Can there then be love for Christ on earth,  
Walking as man, seen as a man is seen?  
Seek not to argue; love has greater worth.  
Love makes man kin

With the Beloved. Such have I known,  
Him of the lustrous eyes, Him whose sole look  
Pierced to the heart, wherein the seed was sown  
Of wisdom deeper than in holy book,  
Of Truth alone

Not to be learned but lived, Truth in its hour  
To sprout within the heart's dark wintry earth  
And grow a vibrant thing, then, come to power,  
To slay the seeming self that gave it birth,  
Or to devour.

Heart of my being, seen outwardly as one  
In human form, to draw my human love,  
Lord Ramana, Guru, the risen Sun,  
Self Manifest, the Guide for all who rove  
Lost and alone

In tangled thoughts and vain imaginings,  
Back to pure Being, which Your radiant smile,  
Full of compassion for my wanderings,  
Tells me always was, though lost this while  
In a world of things.



# To Arunachala

Arunachala!

Thy silence calls me

More powerful than a thousand voices

O Hill of wonder!

The way is so long, it seemed so near

Whispering shadows, rocks come alive,

Arunachala, Thou calledst me,

Now free me of fear!

O Hill of Fire!

Burn my desires to ashes,

But that one desire

To know.

Shadow-desires

A thousandfold bride,

O Hill of Love!

In thy Grace

Let me abide.

Sweet flame within my heart

Spread over the universe,

What does it mean?

Hill of Wisdom!

Doubts assail me,

I dare not believe.

Motionless dancing boundless waves

Rose within my mind,

All-engulfing dark waters

On the surface in letters of flame

“ I AM ”

. . . . .  
Like a hawk whose wings  
darkened the sky  
Thou pouncest on me—a worm in dust—  
And carried me off  
Into limitless all-knowing radiance.  
Lost in freedom-Resplendence-Bliss  
Hitherto unknown, undreamt of,  
I found Myself

. . . . .  
I lost Myself.

Beloved! Whither shall I seek thee?  
In the abyss of thought,  
In the tempest of feeling  
I find Thee not.

Plains, rivers, mountains, caves!  
Tell me I pray,  
Do you hide Him?  
Did He pass your way?

. . . . .

In vain I spent my days,  
In vain I wept at night.  
Cool moon and stars!  
Lend me your light  
To find Him that is hidden  
In my burning heart.  
Aruanchala—Bhagavan!  
Hill of Water!  
Sea of Grace!  
Quench my thirst,  
Have mercy!



# To Bhagavan

A prayer from and inspired by  
*The Five Hymns to Arunachala—*

Like the beating of a heart  
One cannot read for tears  
Who wrote those words?  
Bhagavan—the innermost  
Of oneself.

. . . . .

Immersed in the dark well  
Of the dream of life  
Greatly am I held  
And greatly I strive  
    To come out to wake into Light.  
But I find it so deep  
And forsaken I weep  
    Though I know  
    It is only a dream.  
Unless Thou extend Thy hand of Grace  
In mercy, I am lost O Bhagavan!

Immersed in the dark well  
Of the dream of life—  
How is the lotus of my heart to blossom  
Without sight of the sun?  
    Thou art the Sun of suns,  
    Dispel my darkness,  
    Grant me wisdom, I beseech Thee,  
So that I may not pine for love of Thee,  
In ignorance, O Bhagavan.

Seeking thee within but weakly  
I came back, and in sorrow  
I pour out my heart. Aid me Bhagavan!

There is naught else but Thee. How is it then  
That I alone stand separate from Thee?  
Shake me out of this torpor  
I beseech Thee, Bhagavan.

If spurned by Thee, what rests for me  
But the torment of my dream?  
What hope is left for me?

Could I but gather the suffering of mankind,  
Of creation, in my heart, in my hands,  
Their pain my pain—one heart.

There is naught else but Thee.  
Who is it that suffers?  
Bhagavan!  
I come to knock for release—  
It is enough . . . .  
in my dream.

A mother will surely wake her child crying out in sleep  
So am I crying out in my cauchemar-dream.  
Thou Awakened One, kinder far and nearer than  
one's own mother,  
Is this then Thy all-kindness, Bhagavan,  
To leave me thus struggling in deep waters,  
—I have lost my moorings—struggling to wake?

Reveal Thyself! Do not continue to deceive and prove  
me,  
Thou only art Reality!

A prey to my unsteady mind  
I lack patience, I lack constancy, I lack purity.

Forgive the grievous wrongs of that poor self,  
And do as Thou wilt, Thou who knowest best.  
But grant me only ever increasing love  
For Thy Feet.

Thou who art Kindness—Love itself,  
Smile with Grace and not with scorn,  
On me who knows nothing,  
Who comes for refuge to Thee.



## Brief Eternity

Suddenly I was not. Seeing remained,  
Not any one who saw. Thoughts still appeared...  
No one to think. And all this was not new,  
No change of state, for I not only was not  
But never had been; only through some spell—  
Ignorance—suffering—sin—what name you will—<sup>1</sup>  
Imagined that I was.

Or just as well  
It could be said that suddenly I was,  
For Being, Self, whatever name you give,  
Just was, and I was That, no other self.

It is a simple thing—no mystery.  
The wisdom of the Sages all comes down  
To simple being.

Again this state was lost.  
Sisyphus-like, the heavy stone rolled down.  
Again was need to tear my love from others,  
Alone through the night, with much toil to strive  
To the lost homeland, to the Self I am.

Though a world appear, yet will I not cling to it;  
Though thoughts arise, yet will I cherish them not.  
More deep the mischief of the imposter me  
That sees himself and them—or thinks he sees,  
He who complains he has not yet achieved.  
Who is it that achieves? Or who aspires?  
What is there to achieve, when being is  
And nothing else beside, no second self?

---

<sup>1</sup> Ignorance in the Hindu interpretation, suffering in the Buddhist, original sin in the Christian.



# The Tiger

All right, let him aspire, the evil ghost—  
Better a tiger yoked than a tiger wild.  
Let him aspire, but do not be beguiled:  
Though he take arms against the rebel host  
    Of turbulent desires  
        His own lust sires,  
    Yet will he never slay  
Himself, their leader. All is but a play.

Though he has caught a dim, breeze-wafted strain  
Of heavenly music, and from lesser gain  
    Turns to the great,  
    Yet it is not his fate  
    To enter through that gate.  
His role in the grand drama is to be  
The victim at the altar finally.



# The Indweller-II

There is no one here.  
Life now is an empty boat  
Governed by remote control,  
The lunatic helmsman gone.  
Waves rise up...  
People and things to do...  
He, the Invisible, steers.  
There is no one else here.

# The Initiatic Death

No other thought my mind can hold:  
Night and day on you I cry,  
Lord of Mystery manifold,  
Death through whom I long to die!

Narrow and dark the passage-way?  
Denuded let me enter then;  
With both hands will I cast away  
All clinging to the world of men.

Like new-wed husband to his bride,  
Importunate to you I yearn.  
My love, I will not be denied:  
How long my pleading will you spurn?

Night and day on you I cry,  
All things abandon for your sake.  
Now from this dream-life let me die,  
At last in Being to awake!

Lord of Mystery manifold,  
Grim gateway to Eternal Youth,  
Through you alone can man behold  
The immortal lineaments of Truth.

Death through whom I long to die,  
There is no joy beneath the sky  
Were worth a moment's living by  
Till you the knot of self untie.  
Night and day on you I cry!

# The Dark Night

In the soul's dark night  
I knew the taste of tears unshed,  
The hopeless seeming fight,  
Pain for my daily bread.

The hammer blows of God  
Sculptured from the living flesh,  
As from a lifeless clod,  
The new man made afresh.

The only one escape  
Was such my mind could not come by,  
Could not even shape—  
To curse God and die.

Yet through it all I knew  
The mind flagellant and a fake,  
Clinging to the untrue.  
Self-tortured for desire's sake.

The fake, the evil ghost, the impostor me,  
The camel straining at the needle's eye,  
Craving and he who craves, must cease to be—  
Simply give up and be content to die,  
Since there's no other way, better cut quick,  
Slay and have done, than make an endless tale,  
Flogging then coddling, caring for when sick.  
Then sentencing to hunger when he's hale.

Ruthless Compassion! Most compassionate  
When most unmoved by anguish of the cry  
Of that false self who stands within the gate  
That shutters out the radiance of the sky.

# Desolation

You bade me lay down my life for your sake, Lord Christ,  
I have laid it here at your feet.  
Is it nothing but a soiled rag  
That you do not deign to accept it,  
That you do not stoop down and raise it?  
What now am I to do, despised and rejected of you, Lord  
Christ?

He who lays down his life for your sake  
Shall find it, you said.  
I have not bargained,  
I have not come as a merchant, Lord Christ,  
I have not asked to find.  
Only I have laid down my life.  
What now am I to do, despised and rejected of you, Lord  
Christ?

You bade me come as your bride, Lord Christ.  
I tore my love from others,  
I came alone through the night,  
With much toil I am here,  
And you have let me stand  
Loveless and unloved before you.  
What now am I to do, despised and rejected of you, Lord  
Christ?



# The Lady of Shallot

Where the mighty river flows  
A bleak, grey prison-castle rose  
Wherein a lady dwelt, they say,  
On whom a lifelong curse there lay:  
Not to look out, not to go free,  
Only a shadow world to see,  
Reflected in a glass.

Daylong a tapestry she wove,  
With fantasy but without love.  
Thus did the wise ones typify  
The life of man, whose days flow by  
In a shadow world of mundane things,  
Weaving his vain imaginings,  
Watching the shadows pass.

Until she saw her love ride by...  
Daring to look though she should die,  
She rose, cast from her the pretence,  
Leapt towards truth, with no defence  
But love. The mirror cracked. A shiver  
Split the grey walls. The broad river,  
Sweeping all things along,

Now bore her on to her true lot  
In many-towered Camelot,  
To meet the loved one face to face  
And, dead to self in mute embrace,  
To find the two grown one through love  
Beyond all joy for which she strove.  
This was the ancient song.

The years flowed down upon the river,  
And wisdom and all high endeavour,  
Leaving a slum in Camelot.  
A poet came and found the plot  
And made a pretty tale of it.  
Yet still the wisdom and the wit  
Of the old sages shines in it.



## Complete Your Work!

Bhagavan, was it not you  
Who gave these rhymes to me—  
My mind the lens they filtered through,  
Beautiful to see?

And shall they now stay hid  
To lighten no man's way,  
A lamp beneath an iron lid,  
A prayer with none to pray?

Complete your work, Bhagavan!  
Let them shine forth clear,  
A light held high for every man,  
To guide men to you here.



# The Sleeping Beauty

A pretty children's tale is found  
Of how a lady slept spell-bound  
Through time's long night, till for her sake  
A daring rescuer should break  
Through many perils and with a kiss  
Wake her to endless bliss.

In each man's heart she sleeps, her dower  
The lost domain of man's true power.  
The same she is  
As that coiled serpent of the East  
Who, when released,  
Strikes up from stage to higher stage  
Till, breaking through the mental cage  
Blaze the white-shining ecstasies.

First the wise man gave the knight  
The sword of concentration, bright,  
Invulnerable; for defence  
A cloak, invisible to sense,  
Of pure detachment. Yet alone  
The hero fought and won.

Where many fell along the way  
To visions, learning, pride, display;  
To harlots claiming to be her  
Whose waking wakes her rescuer;  
Or taverns where the weaklings rest  
Called but not chosen for the quest.

Blest now the land!  
Humbled the tyrant mind!  
Freedom erect to stand  
For all mankind!

Now, ever after...  
Joy, serene laughter!  
Fallen the prison wall  
Roofree and rafter!  
Never to be built again  
Life's house of pain,  
Never hereafter!



## Anatta

I was walking along the road when I met  
A fool talking fool talk.  
“There isn’t one, there isn’t one! How happy  
I am that there isn’t one!”  
He said, as if it were a song he was singing.  
“Isn’t one what?” I asked.  
“Isn’t one me,” he said foolishly.  
And he walked on looking quite happy.





# The Two Windows

Two windows are there: one looks on to space,  
The other on the world, both blurred by thought  
Of I and mine. This stopped; now not a trace  
Through that first window still was seen of ought,  
And none to see, no seeker and no sought.

And yet no blankness this,  
But unimagined bliss,  
It's gateway not through terror but through  
Grace.

“The world and dissolution, day and night,  
Both are, eternally.” “All things join hands  
In cosmic dance,” all things now seen aright:  
The gnarled and sombre northern pine-trees stand,  
And star-shaped jasmine of this sun-baked land;  
Through the breached ego-wall  
Pure love flows out to all,  
Even a stray dog draws love as a child might.

Is and Is not, both at once are true,  
“Although to sight they seem to alternate.”  
Life, death, pass over, but they are not you;  
Fate fashions life, while you, immaculate,  
Remain unchanged beyond life, death and fate.  
You feel love outward flow  
Towards others, while you know  
All otherness a dream, the Truth not-two.



## To Whom?

Why fumble about blindfold  
In the box of things  
The future may hold?  
They will take to their wings  
In whatever form time brings,  
Never as told.

Give them no chance  
To lodge in your mind,  
Or soon you will find  
A true devil's dance  
Going on without cease,  
No respite, no peace.

Let the mind be still,  
Like a clear lake  
Where no waves break.  
Then, come what will,  
The thoughts that fly over  
Have no cause to hover,  
No place to nest  
In a mind at rest.

If still they come,  
Never follow them home;  
Ask only to whom  
The thoughts come.



# The World

The world's an extension of you—  
Nothing outside.  
Let what will betide;  
Only ensue  
The inner self of you,  
For this is true.

For a day you wear  
The garb of earth and air,  
Knowledge confined  
To mortal mind:  
Only a spell to break,  
A dream from which to wake.

So long it lasts,  
Don't think you originate  
The play of fate  
Its shadow casts.  
Be a glass polished bright  
To reflect the Light.

But Hui Neng said  
There is no glass.  
Let the ego-self be dead,  
This will come to pass.  
Then all fate's teeth are drawn  
In that glad dawn.



# The World-II

The world's a state you are in;  
It's worth is not  
Your sad or happy lot,  
Whether you lose or win,  
But how you shape,  
How nearer grow to angel or to ape.

And when its pageant ends?  
Why speculate  
On the ensuing state?  
On you its form depends.  
What plant can grow  
But from the seeds that in your life you sow?

Rigorous are its laws.  
Inexorably  
To the last split penny  
Effect must follow cause,  
So long you hold  
Yourself a creature that its clasp can mold.

Till in yourself you know  
What self you are:  
Nothing to make or mar,  
Nothing to change or grow,  
From all set free:  
The world in you, not you in it to see.

# The Shakti

I only know she set my heart aflame  
In youth when tempest tossed;  
In youth, all bearings lost,  
Her grace my anchorage, her love my aim.

That was the first; then through the middle years  
Companion on life's ways  
Wedded in hopes and not weighed down by fears,  
Solace in sombre days.

And now the third age dawns, the Shakti now,  
Through whom to those who seek  
His wisdom flows, His grace confirms the vow  
To assail the sacred peak.



## Ergo Non Sum

“I think, therefore I am,” Descartes  
Was shrewd enough to say;  
Whereby unwittingly he showed the way  
How not to be.  
Let the mind be free  
From every thought,  
Yet conscious still, alert,  
And you will see:  
Awareness is—no one to be aware;  
Being remains, and yet you are not there.

# The Dream-Self

You dreamed you were a postman, say, last night:  
And do you ask today if he still is—  
The postman-you who never really was  
    But only seemed to be?  
    It is so plain to see.

What was he then? Had he a self? A soul?  
Or was he just a mask you took? And was  
The dream with all the dream-folk he found real  
    A world no further true  
    Than in the mind of you?

Why cling in vain to such a phantom self  
Within the brief horizons of a dream?  
An intuition of eternity?  
    Right—but whose? The dream's?  
    What is, or what just seems?



## Others-II

If there's I there are others.  
The ego-thought makes blind,  
The ego-love smothers.  
    Turn then the mind  
Not to 'I do' but 'doing',  
Not to 'I am' but 'being'.  
In Consciousness all is; all things join hand  
    In cosmic dance,  
    All circumstance,  
Past and to come, linked in a rhythmic band,  
    Is now.  
    Things flow as they will flow.  
Be then the screen on which the shades are cast,  
The Void wherein the rhythmic band flows past;  
    Be that eternity  
    Wherein moves destiny,  
    Just BE.

*ॐ*

# The Expanse

That consciousness am I, that Vast Expanse  
Of pure serene, that One without a form—  
Not even One but Am-ness undefined.  
No questions there, no doctrine and no doubt,  
Knowledge not known but lived, the clamorous  
mind  
Grown still at last, beyond the stir of time.

From that untroubled state, funnelled below,  
Far down, less real, a pseudo-world of forms  
Seen or imagined, like a waking dream.

In truth change is not; all in essence IS.  
The bubbles on the Ocean do not change  
The depths profound. Far off the tinkling notes  
Of weal and woe float by upon the breeze,  
Heard but not heeded in the Calm supreme  
Of Bliss ineffable, pure causeless Bliss  
Wherein the worlds have birth. And That I am.





# Fantastic Things

Let's say fantastic things,  
Let's say that pigs have wings;  
But never let us say  
This living lump of clay,  
This song the Singer sings,  
Is author of the play.

The play's an accident,  
Nobody wrote it;  
It just happened so,  
No use to quote it—  
So they say.

You just happen to be  
Because X met Y;  
For awhile you are free  
To reason why,  
And then you die—  
So they say.

But who is that ME in you?  
Turn and look steadily.  
Who is it that asks who?  
Thoughts skip about readily;  
Stop them a bit,  
Ask who is it  
Abides when they quit.  
Who are you?

## To Christians

You who follow Christ, my advice to you  
Is: Put away your clever maps of heaven;  
Give up your proofs that only you are right,  
All others wrong; stop arguing; turn  
To your Christ instead, who did not ask for proofs  
But for your life. Give up your life for him,  
All your self-will, your I-ness utterly.  
He will not compromise, will not accept  
Half measures from you. Either he lives or you—  
Not both. Step down; make way for him to live  
Instead of you; and you will find through him  
Obedience follows then to that great word  
He laid upon you: to be perfect too,  
As God is perfect. Can you not trust in him?



## What Remains?

You can't give; you can only refrain from stealing,  
Like a servant who says: "All right, I'll let you keep  
Your change from marketing, your soap and cheese."  
Nothing is yours to give, what 'thing', what 'you'?  
You imagine a person, then you think he owns  
A cluster of electrons that you call a wife,  
A house, a car, children, suits of clothes.  
First find out if he exists at all.  
In a world where things break down into a cloud  
Of whirling atoms with no taste or smell,  
No shape or colour, just a grey—what?  
Energy? Mass? Not thingness anyway,  
And thoughts about it—whirling, never still,  
What is it you call 'you'?  
This minute's body-shaped bag of atoms?  
This minute's thoughts? A you that has the thoughts?  
What underlies them? What constant is there,  
If anything? You'll not find out by thinking  
Because that's thoughts. Nor by arguing.  
There's only one way: that's to try and see—  
Stop thoughts and see if anything remains.



# The Song

There isn't one, there isn't one!  
How happy I am that there isn't one!  
Isn't one what?  
Isn't one me.  
How happy I am that there isn't one!

If there was one he would be  
Mortgaged to age,  
A wizened me,  
Sickness-ridden years to spend,  
Wrung by regret of vanished days,  
And in the end,  
With choking breath,  
Devoured by death.

Free from him who never was,  
Free from him and free from care,  
Free to work or stand and stare,  
Free from fear and from desire,  
Incombustible to lust's fierce fire,  
Free to tread the cosmic dance,  
No longer slave of circumstance!

Beyond our selves and destinies  
Only boundless Being is,  
And That I am; no other me,  
No birth, no death, no destiny.  
All that is born shall come to die,  
But not the unborn, deathless I.

# This Dream

At the gates of my heart  
I stand—a beggar  
In the howling wind  
Clad in rags of thought

Open my love, my King  
Open the golden gate  
Let Thy splendour stream forth  
And flood with light

This shadow-world of sorrow  
This face bereft of sight  
These shadows of tomorrow  
This dream

Mad dogs are at my throat  
Shall I perish  
A beggar at the gate  
Of the King of Grace and Mercy  
Is this to be my fate  
This dream?



# The Poet

I cry the truth of Man  
And the thunderous Silence of God  
In an old, tired world  
Where the poets write about dirt and drains  
In poems that sound like prose.

Afraid of joy they are!  
Afraid to be glad!  
Afraid to shout and sing,  
Afraid of youth and love!  
They have grown old and grey,  
With ditchwater blood and sophisticate  
minds.

Rise up!  
The singing season dawns again  
And rhyme makes glad the hearts of men.  
Heaven is so close to earth today  
You need but twitch a veil away  
And all is wonder undefined  
In the clear sky of a cloudless mind.



# Day and Night

World and dissolution, day and night,  
Both are eternally, although to sight  
They seem to alternate. Life and death  
Are the twin phases of a single breath  
Of That-which-is, That which underlies  
The self that lives and then reluctant dies,  
Not knowing whence or whither. To out-turned gaze  
World with its intricate inweaving maze  
Of ever-varied forms forever is.  
Turn inward and its woven harmonies  
Are gone with him that saw them. Nought remains  
That eye can see or thought, though it contains  
All things, can comprehend. Only the Void  
Unknowable whereon the worlds float past  
Like foam-flakes on the Ocean. How shall mind  
Pierce to what was before it, or how find  
The womb that gave it birth? No aggregate  
Of thoughts and feelings, no conglomerate  
Of forms, endures; and yet, though figments pass,  
“Life like a dome of many-coloured glass  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,”\*  
And all things are and are not endlessly.



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\*Shelly, *Adonais*

# The Waning Moon

Oh never think the moon compulsive wanes:  
Fate is compulsion only to the fool  
Who flees eternity to seek time's gains  
And, frog-like, finds his ocean in a pool.

Man and the moon have choice, yet it is not  
Whether to go or stay; immutable  
Their path and phases of their path; their lot  
Written in light, most ineluctable.

Their choice is whether, clinging to their place,  
To stumble on, flogged by fate's iron whip,  
Or, as the bride flees to their lord's embrace,  
Set sail with love for breeze and faith for ship.





# The Elixir of Youth

The frosty years have in their grip  
This ailing body that at last  
Into Death's refuse-bin must slip.

Then let it go,  
Quick be it or slow,  
Like autumn flower in wintry blast.

For I have drunk youth's elixir,  
His joy made firm, his follies fled.  
Life like a May-day chorister

Throbs into song.  
The heart, grown strong,  
Dances and sings where grief lies dead.

This world and body are not me.  
They are a dream from which to wake.  
Whatever in their fate may be

Cannot destroy  
The vibrant joy  
Or turn to night the bright daybreak.

When even imperfect sight can bring  
such joyful certitude as this,  
Who to the seeming self would cling,  
In a barren land where no birds sing,  
Lost to Awareness, Being, Bliss?

# Otherness

Save me, O Lord, from otherness! And yet  
There is no other nor no me to save;  
Thou only art, in countless forms declared;  
Thou wert and nothing else before the worlds,  
And Thou art now as then.  
All change and pass, only Thy Face endures.  
What then is man? Other he cannot be:  
There is no other. He who is One, Alone,  
Unchangeably, illimitably IS,  
Yet, without ceasing from His Changelessness,  
Speaks all the tale of laws and flowing lives,  
All seeming strife within the womb of Peace.  
Thou art His spoken word; yet listen well  
And all the universe is spoken through thee;  
Thou art the lens through which the rays divine  
Pass to spread out in this wide pageantry.  
Give up thy self and no self can remain  
But That which IS; if thou give up or not  
Yet at the end must all return to Him  
As dream-forms melt in waking; at the end  
He IS and otherness has never been  
And all thy strife was needless and the course  
Of that which thou calledst thee is before time  
And but unrolled as pictures on a screen.  
Why wilt thou cling to that which never was?  
What refuge is there from the Eternal Now,  
The Truth that changes not? In ignorance awhile  
A seeming self a seeming refuge finds  
From peace in strife, from bliss in famished quest

Of joys still fleeting, in frustrated life  
That mocks and swings its still ungathered fruit  
Just beyond reach and then, receding far,  
Leaves hunger and a memoried regret,  
And the few gathered fruits taste sour at last  
And all ungathered, fair yet far, still mock  
With might-have-been. Yet all that hides

Truth's Self

And lures, delusive-fair, then breaks and mocks,  
Leaving the embittered traveller unappeased  
Like one who sought relief in a mirage  
And finds the pitiless sun and the wide sand,  
All that disguises Truth's white radiance  
Under prismatic myriad-gleaming points,  
Gleaming and ending, flashing from the dark,  
In phantom forms, then melting into dark,  
Dreams insubstantial, form ephemeral,  
All is the Face of Truth for who can see,  
All is the Word blown forth in waves of song,  
All threads in thy life's tapestry declare  
The Truth behind Thee. Men shall not escape  
From That which is to that which fancy builds,  
Frail as the builder.  
Listen! In all things is the Voice of God.  
Turn where ye will, there is the Face of God.



## Appendix

Alphabetical list of articles in this volume by Arthur Osborne, with pseudonyms and sources:

- A Christian View of Reincarnation**, (Arrows From A Christian Bow–XI by Sagittarius), *The Mountain Path*, vol. 3, no. 3, July 1966, p. 265.
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