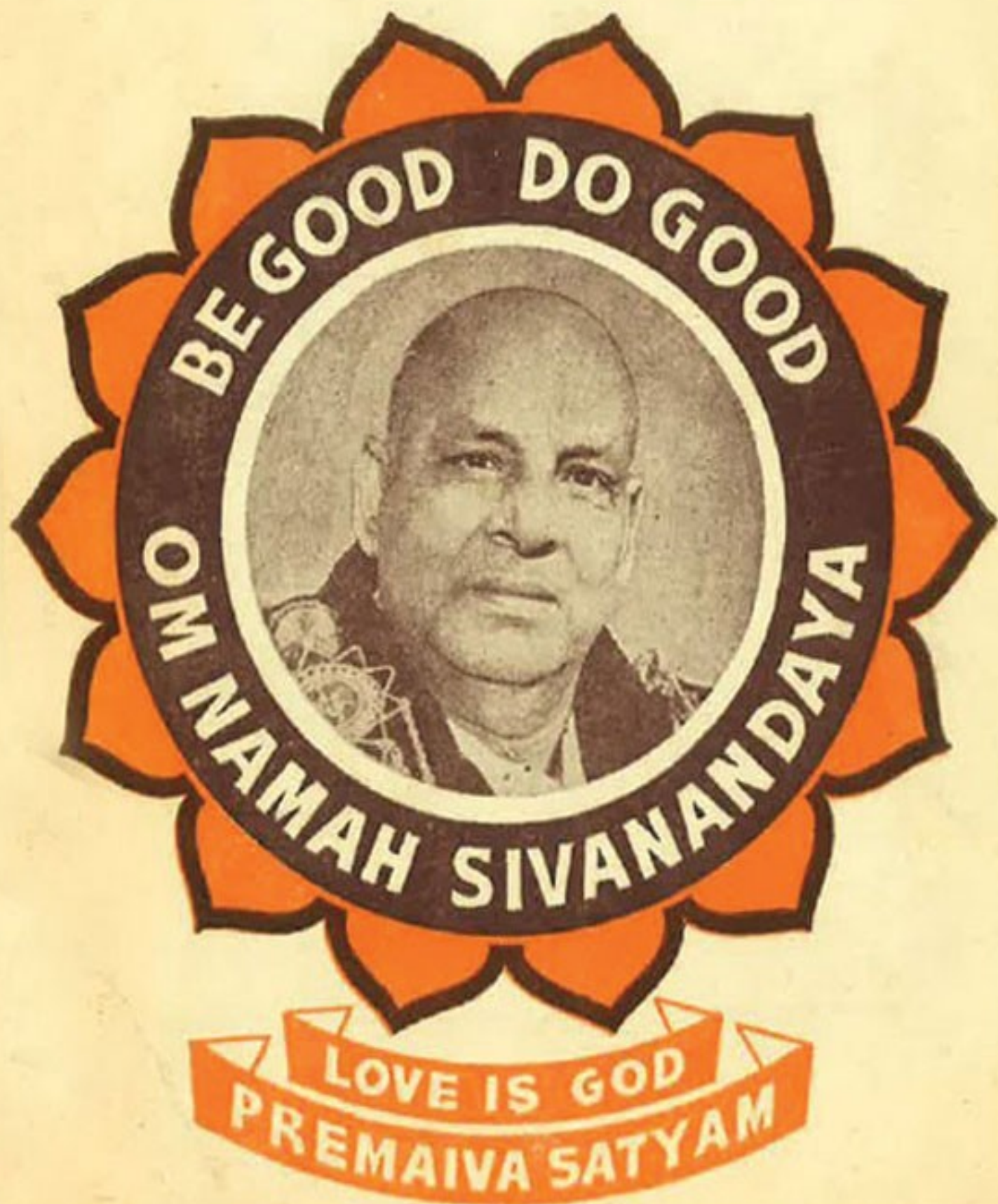


JNANA YOGA

By SWAMI VENKATESANANDA





Jnana Yoga

The Path of Self-realisation

First Edition 1965

Dedication

It is only Gurudev Sivananda's miraculous Grace that sends this booklet to the Press.

It completes the series undertaken at His command; and, as the subject-matter is not Vedanta philosophy but Jnana Yoga, I have not dealt with Gurudev's "Categories in Vedanta" in full but have drawn all the relevant thoughts from it.

I offer this flower, too at Gurudev's Omnipresent Feet.

Dust of Gurudev's Feet,

Venkatesananda

Mr B. K. Vadgama

It is very difficult and delicate to write about a humble devotee; it makes one feel that one is directly insulting that devotee. Yet, one cannot but admire a wonderful devotee like Sri B. K. Vadgama. He gives the lie to all sorts of foolish talk that so long as one is engaged in "worldly life", one cannot even attempt to lead a truly spiritual life, that unless one is prepared to live on the roof, one should not erect a roof at all.

In Sri Vadgama you see a sincere seeker who is humble enough to realise that even he is but a student, though he is more highly evolved than the "holy men". He works hard; and he works with his own hands, though he is the master of his factory. With his workers he is a brother worker, and hence he enjoys their full confidence. The work itself is Yoga for him.

A sincere and practising devotee and disciple of my divine Master, he is divine life personified. He starts the day with devout prayer and during the day engages himself in Sat-Vyavahar - righteous activities, and concludes the day with prayer, too. In the morning he reminds himself, by reciting inspiring hymns on vairagya or dispassion, that the world is a passing show and that the goal of life is Self realisation.

The Grace of God and Guru has manifested in his household as an equally devout wife and two children, Arun and Saroj. Our Master repeatedly declared: "The world is in dire need of such devotees".

It is Sri Vadgama's generosity that has made this publication possible. May God bless him and his family! May, by Gurudev's Grace, he and his family shine as saints, in this very birth!

Venkatesananda.

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1. THE BASIS

Vedanta is the basis of Jnana Yoga. Vedanta literally means "end of the Vedas" - end both in the sense of the concluding portion and also in the sense of the goal; Veda means knowledge and, though the orthodox Hindu might assert that it is the proper name of a particular scripture, all knowledge (scriptural and scientific) can be brought within its "covers". Truth is universal and all-embracing: and even on imperfect attempt at grasping that Truth is valid, though its claims to exclusiveness and completeness will be quickly dismissed. Rejection or scientific progress and discoveries by the orthodoxy has resulted in the scientist's contempt of orthodox religions; and the consequent split has promoted disintegration of the human personality. My master pointed out that, whereas the spiritual seeker started his quest from the soul or the self, the scientist started his from the physical or the material sphere. But both of them are looking for the Truth; and if they pursue their quest to its own logical conclusion, they are bound to discover the Truth sooner or later. What is urgently needed is a reconciliation between Vedanta and Science, a reconciliation which will make Vedanta progressive and science humbly receptive to the knowledge of the scriptures as "unproved science", yet to be verified. At present in their independent quests, science tends to become a blind Power, and Vedanta a lame headfull of misty (not exactly mystic) ideas.

Vedanta is the end of knowledge. Let us, therefore, not look down upon knowledge (except while studying a book) - any knowledge, scientific or speculative. If we do, then we shall mistake emptiness for fullness! The distinction here is as between an empty space and a house. In the booklet on Raja Yoga, I have quoted a Zen poem which reminds us that though we use bricks and cement to build a house, its value lies in the empty space in which we live. True : but that is the space which is the end or the goal of all construction work. If we foolishly argue: "Since we are going to live only in the space between the walls, why build them at all?", we shall be living in the open. People often quote the Shankara's famous couplet: "Sing the names of of God: intellectual knowledge will not save you". Forget not that these words were uttered by an intellectual giant. He does not want us to stifle the intellect, but he only reminds us that, while the intellect must be cultivated, only the Name of the Lord will save us. In other words, while we live in the empty space, it is the walls and the roof that give meaning to the house. Both are essential.

Vedanta is the goal of knowledge. Short of it, knowledge comes under the heavy hammer of the definition "Knowledge is Power; Power corrupts". Short of it, all knowledge is half-knowledge and half-knowledge is a dangerous thing. Knowledge is ignorance till the goal of knowledge is reached. The extensive and intricate wiring, the switches and the electric lamp are all

necessary; but it is the electric current that is of vital importance - that is the goal, the end of all this process of electrification.

But, Vedanta in orthodox parlance has a specific meaning: the end portion of the Vedas, called the Upanishads. Whilst I do not wish to suggest that all proper names should be commonised, I do feel that the common meaning of these proper names should not be forgotten. Upanishads were mostly dialogues between two people sitting close-by: the Guru and the disciple. These dialogues dealt with the end of all Knowledge, viz., Realisation. It was here, in the Forest Laboratories that these ages conducted the immortal experiments beyond the reach of the most powerful scientific instruments; beyond the reach of the most enlightened intellect: there these sages put themselves through a discipline that enabled them to burst open the floodgates of intuition and to swim in the ocean of direct realisation. They had reached the end of knowledge - Vedanta; and seekers endowed with robust spiritual constitutions approached them.

2. THE QUALIFICATION

The seeker who takes to this path is convinced that the universe of changing phenomena is not what it appears to be. He is a scientist in search of the Truth or the Reality, what is real cannot change. Perishable and changing objects are not real. But there must be some Reality which appears to be, which puts on these various appearances. There must surely be a real, imperishable and unchanging substratum for all these changing phenomena. We move about on solid unmoving (relatively speaking) ground; water flows, but the riverbed is constant. The unmoving space supports the numerous moving stars and planets. Subjectively, his own appearance (that of the physical body) is changing; but there is something within it, which is unchanging, to which each man points when he says "I". The the seeker aspires to know that Reality which is the substratum for the whole universe and also the "I" within himself, or which is his self.

How has he arrived at this stage? Obviously the the fruit of Yoga in all its different aspects practised in previous lives, as Lord Krishna mentions in the Bhagavad Gita (chapter VI). The sprout of the seeds sown in past births is watered in this birth by Satsang, one of the four friends of the seeker that sage Vasishtha exalts in his "Yoga Vasishtha". Satsanga is "company of the wise, of the devotees of the Lord, of the seekers of Truth". The ideal is to enjoy the company of sages and men of Self-realisation; but even the company of other devotees and aspirants is of great value. We are "reminded" of the Truth. From here and there we pick up great thoughts and ideas. A chance word ignites the fire of aspiration in us. If you study the lives of the greatest sages of the world you will often be amused and amazed at the strangeness of the incident that had proved the turning point of their lives. Lord Buddha "Learned" from a village girl the lesson of the Middle Path. It is not that the matchstick burnt the house down; the thatched hut was highly inflammable, but it needed just that spark of the matchstick to burn. This is often provided by Satsang or "holy company". When direct Satsang of the men-of God is not available, our Master used to advocate indirect Satsang, i. e., study of the writings of those great men. If we bear this in mind, we shall cease to moan the absence near at hand of yogis, saints and sages; if they themselves are not there, their teachings are - why don't you study them?

This Satsang, direct or indirect, kindles the lamp of discrimination (Viveka) in the seeker, and this is the first of the four foremost qualifications which every aspirant for Self-realisation must possess. Viveka is discrimination - the incising wisdom to distinguish the Real from the unreal.

Not as in Solomon's story: picking out the real flower amidst the artificial ones, for there both the real and the artificial ones have a certain type of reality. But in the sense of recognising a real lake in a desert full of mirage.

Nay, even more: the keenness of perception needed to perceive, as the show is in progress, the silver screen and the projection of each unmoving frame of film - which together create the optical illusion of the motion picture. This is not easy. Hence, even a deep-seated conviction of the truth that the pictures on the screen are not moving, that the screen forms the substratum on which is projected still shots of a scene, is called Viveka. The seeker has not yet "seen" the Reality; but the inner awakening brought about by the Satsanga compels him to doubt the reality of the appearance. He, knows that "Something" exists; but he doubts, if what appears to be, exists. He is not yet enlightened - that is why he is still a seeker, needing these qualifications, but he is not fast asleep. This path of Jnana Yoga is not for the one who is fast asleep, who hugs the illusion as the Reality. Let us here remind ourselves that though Enlightenment of the Soul means transcendence of the intellect, breaking down its logic barrier, realising that rationalisation is the feeble attempt of the finite intellect to grasp the Infinite, that though the Enlightened Sage rightly looks down with compassion at the childish intellect of the mighty rationalist, this stage is often arrived at through the proper cultivation of the intellect. (1) The intellect awakes to the illusoriness of phenomena, by reason, logic and argumentation. The intellect questions itself. (2) Suddenly it turns back upon itself and realises that it itself was an illusory mirror-reflection of Cosmic Consciousness, and withdraws from the scene in all humility. When we talk about Viveka, we are discussing the first and the first phase of the second stage.

The Viveka is not theorising, but real living wisdom. It is not the capitalist's thesis on socialism, not the chain-smoker's article on the evils of smoking, nor the alcoholic's sermon on prohibition. As we shall presently see, "shraddha" - whole souled faith and conviction, is the mainstay of the aspirant's life and he cannot afford to pay lip-service to his theories or viveka. He looks at the phenomena of the world from all angles and his discrimination tells him that it is an illusory appearance. He is not interested in it. He realises that it is waste of time hugging a shadow. He does not want to shoot it either, but turns away from it.

This is the second qualification. Vairagya which means "not being infatuated" or "dispassion". This should not be mistaken for hatred, contempt nor even for callous indifference. It is "neither a desire to possess, nor a desire to prevent - both ways it is desire, and vairagya is avoidance of the desire. Whether you wish to embrace your friend or to push him away, you touch him - vairagya is not touching him at all. Hence the difficulty of describing it in positive terms. It can be rightly understood only on the basis of a correct understanding of discrimination. He is as great a fool who shoots the shadow as he who falls in love with it. The person of discrimination understands the truth that the Substratum alone is Real and that the appearance is unreal - the unreality needs no shovel to remove it. The wise man's dispassion is hard to

detect by any outward signs or symptoms. It reveals itself when the inevitable farewell comes - he is unmoved.

I think God has created the banana fruit only to teach us what this dispassion is. Look at the fruit. The skin holds the fruit tight. It protects the fruit. Look at it: it is firmly attached to the fruit. Pull it away. It comes off neat, without disturbing itself, without disturbing the fruit either. Look at them now. You begin to wonder - were they ever attached to each other? Yes, there was a time when in accordance with the divine will, the fruit needed the protection of the skin - and the skin did not neglect the duty. Now the divine will demands that the skin should be peeled off. Off it comes, smoothly. What have I to do with the fruit? Once off, it stays off. That is precisely the attitude of the man of dispassion.

This is the attitude of a Karma Yogi, or the follower of the path of contemplative dynamism. He works, without selfish or profit motive. He is good, not for a reward nor for the pleasures of heaven. When he renounces or does charity, again he does so without the least tinge of egoism or selfishness. The skin and the fruit of the banana. Why does the skin cling to the banana? It does not, it stays where the divine will put it. Why does it come off so smoothly, is it disgusted with the fruit? No. It obeys the will of the Lord.

Dispassion is of various sorts depending on how it is born. Sometimes, quite often, dispassion is the direct result of a serious shock or set-back in life. In this case, there is bound to be a certain amount of disgust or contempt for worldly life, to begin with. Even this is not bad, provided the aspirant is wise enough to 'switch on' his discrimination or viveka.

The Second type of dispassion is born of defeatism or fear, inability or unwillingness to face the facts of life. It is an entirely negative, pessimistic attitude. Here, again, there is ample chance of converting it into viveka.

The third and the highest type of dispassion is born of a correct evaluation of life and the world and the consequent birth of wisdom. This vairagya is not running away from the world and life in it, but turning away from them, treating them as they are, viz., fleeting phenomena - it is not escapism as some call it, it is the most perfect realism. Only he is living in a fool's paradise who depends upon the world regarding it as a permanent reality and forgets the Self which is eternal. Vairagya is the opposite of raga or infatuation for the objects of sense-pleasure. It is not pushing them away, but not longing for them. The craving for the pleasures of this world and those of heaven is totally absent in him who knows that this world and heaven, too, are transient and illusory phenomena.

The scriptures tell us that this seeker has not turned away from the world without first examining its nature. This vairagya does not arise out of incompetence or lazy unwillingness to fulfill worldly or scriptural duties. It is born of an intelligent understanding of the nature of all phenomena and of the conviction that all worldly activities and even meritorious deeds which earn for one a ticket to heaven are running after the shadow.

To induce vairagya, and what is even more difficult and vital - to preserve vairagya, saints and scriptures bring the real nature of the world into rather sharp focus for the spiritual aspirant to see and beware of. It looks like exaggeration, like a lot of unhealthy magnification of the dark side of life alone. Here and there you find in the scriptures a grotesque description of women. It is unmistakably realistic in any case - for what is any human body except the composition of flesh, bone, blood, and all sorts of filthy stuff? Beauty, etc., is in "the eye of beholder". You may or may not agree, but that is certainly one way of looking at it. The sense-pleasure instinct is so powerful in man that in spite of all such descriptions, he still falls a prey to lust. What happens when these restraining forces are removed is evident in "modern" society which encourages idolisation of the flesh and then worries over moral degradation in society and population explosion. The sage had no misgiving that the world would be destroyed by the preaching and the exaltation of dispassion. He suffered under no illusion that young men and women, when reading those books, would shun sense-pleasure and become ascetics. He knew - and how right he always was - that such a ghastly picture of objects of sense-pleasure would remove all unnatural attraction for them and leave just what nature intended them to be - the instruments for the propagation of the race, for the survival of humankind and for the furtherance of evolution.

Vedanta does assert that Brahman alone is real and that the universe is unreal - i. e., an appearance. But if it stopped with that, it would have been the religion of a microscopic minority. On the contrary, even at the risk of being styled a philosophy of contradictions, Vedanta presents a world-view which can be understood at all levels of human evolution, leading one, step by step to the ultimate goal. By denying and affirming the world in the same breath, Vedanta only blends these two views of world-and-life-affirmation and world-and-life negation. This blend enjoys the privileges of the world-and-life-affirmation, as well as the inner freedom from attachment of the world-and-life negation. The dangers of self-centredness (which a wrong adoption of the negation view leads to) and worldliness (which a similar perversion of the affirmation view leads to) are both avoided.

What should not be forgotten, however, is that it is not wealth as such that is condemned, it is not woman that is condemned. It is body consciousness and it is the wrong notion that the world as it appears to be is a reality - that is sought to be removed. Unless this wrong notion is removed, it is not possible

to enter the Path to the Reality. The seeker who has achieved this preliminary success over primary illusion finds dispassion natural to him. He is not interested in an object like a human body (his own or a woman's) which is actually nothing more than the collection of bones, fat, skin, blood, etc., and of which only to the ignorant man appears to be an object of great value; he is, on the contrary interested in the Imperishable. The sages realised that lust was one of the most powerful urges in the human being and hence tackled it first, giving it a place of great importance. The Bhagavatham puts these words into the mouth of the Lord:

"Behold the might of My Maya in the shape of woman, who by the mere play of her eyebrows treads under foot even the conqueror of the four quarters (i, e., the whole world). He who aspires to reach the culmination of Yoga or who has realised his true nature by adoring Me, should never cultivate the fellowship of young women, whom the scriptures declare as a gate to hell for him.

And, what follows makes it clear that the seeker is not a woman hater and that the scripture aims at lust and not at woman as such.

"A woman, should, therefore, know that Maya as veritable death to her, in the form of a husband, progeny and house, etc., preordained by Fate, even as the song of a hunter is to the deer. "

A fact worth remembering here is that the above quotation is from the instructions of Lord Kapila (considered an incarnation of God) to his mother Devahuti. He warns her against getting attached to himself as her son! In similar vein, Rukmini the Consort of Lord Krishna tells the Lord:

"This human body, the interior of which contains flesh, bones, blood, worms, excreta, phlegm, bile and wind, is covered with skin, moustaches, nails and hair on the body and head, is a living corpse. That stupid woman alone serves such a body as a husband, who has never enjoyed the fragrance of honey in the lotus of your feet."

A word of caution is indicated here. It is not as though the man (or woman) of dispassion and discrimination has any hatred for the world and the human body. If this were the case, the scriptures would have demanded suicide; the contrary is the case and suicide is a sin. Nor does the scripture encourage the man or the woman to treat only another body with contempt; the seeker does not forget that the world includes (his physical being and that) his own body contains what the other body does. This prevents narcissistic self-adoration. While it guards against over-adulation of the physical being, it does not deny that the body is a vehicle for the soul to use in its progress towards Enlightenment. The aspirant is keen on maintaining it (the Upanishad

expressly commands the seeker to strive to live for a hundred years), but not on adorning it not pampering to its perverse cravings. If this incisive discrimination is absent, then dispassion may be mistaken for self-deception and callous indifference to the sufferings - but only - of others, and the seeker may swing from one extreme of indulgence to the other of neglect. Far from that is what is intended. The following words are put into the mouth of Hiranyakasipu in the Bhagavatham (VII. 2/60) - "Hence do not grieve for another nor even for yourselves. Apart from the preconceived notion distinguishing one's own self from another which is nothing but ignorance, what distinction is there between one's own self and another ?" As is obvious, this principle should be carefully handled, in order that may not pervert it.

The scriptural statements are only part of the shock treatment necessary to fortify the inner personality of Man and to disperse the cloud of ignorance through which the material world is seen as a pleasure-garden. Some kind of shock is inevitable to all human beings. Everyone experiences it at some time or other. The Yogi utilises it for achieving a shock-proof state of inner equilibrium. The earnest spiritual aspirant need experience shock only once in life; he is awake. Even here, the best aspirant induces the shock and administers it upon himself. Even when he is in the prime of youth surrounded by luxury, he realises that old age and death are inevitable, and that suffering may visit him without notice. He inwardly lives these conditions. It creates the shock of real experience of old age, death and suffering, within him. This is what has been violently and unjustly criticised by the materialist as the Indian's pessimism and completely unrealistic other-worldliness. It is not. Far from it. It is a necessary corollary to healthy optimism - which looks forward to a healthy life - shock-proof. This self-induced shock is like inoculation. It confers immunity on the seeker. Whereas the worldly man who does not so self-induce a shock croaks when he faces a real one, the seeker is calm even in the worst calamities. In the case of a self-induced shock, it is easier to introvert the mind - it is already so in order to be able to create "mental old age" while one is in the prime of youth. The mind must turn inwards. It must know the way, in order to be able to react in a healthy way. To every such shock, the inner answer should instantly be "Well, old age, death and suffering belong to the body, not to the Immortal Self that

I am". If the personality is not exercised by this self-induced shock treatment and if there is a real shock (death of a relative, loss of property, etc) then the mind, unable to go within and discover the only answer, and prevented from going outwards (which is what happens in shock), loses its balance.

We thus have three categories of men of dispassion:

(1) The wise man who induces the shock and learns the art of withdrawal of the mind, concentration and meditation - and who thus discovers the Immortal nature of the Self.

(2) The middling who tries to meditate when he is actually faced with a shock - and then through a painful process arrives at the truth about the Self and the world.

(3) The fool who, when he is faced with a shock, refuses to bend or to withdraw the mind and, unable to bear the shock, goes to the mental hospital.

We have often been told that the second category is ineffective, that he is only adopting an escapist attitude to life. People argue: "If a man gets a shock and renounces the world, is it not cowardice?" Yes: Sri Krishna seems to say so, too, in the Bhagavad Gita. But If you go to the zoo, poke your finger into a cage and a leopard bites it off, you are wise enough not to go near it the next time. Is that cowardice or wisdom? Again, if the shock caused bitterness in the man's heart, and he nourished and cherished this bitterness without transforming it into discrimination, he will discover that the dispassion does not last - which is what Krishna alluded to. But, if he is wise enough to utilise the shock to set the wheel of discrimination in motion within himself, then it will be as long lasting as the dispassion of the first category. The shock is energy and, like all other energy, can be used, abused and misused.

To sum up, dispassion is not a negative suppression, but a positive sublimation, and even some of the shocking approaches to this vital factor in Yoga are meant only to restore sanity, balance and robust realism which, though seeming to lean on a pessimistic view of life is intended only to correct the opposite lop-sided complacency and blind adoration of flesh and matter. Discrimination and dispassion are like the two eyes of a spiritual seeker - without them he will never be able to find his way in the uncharted sands of the vast desert that spiritual quest is, often in the beginning.

A seeker who has lighted the lamp of discrimination in his heart and placed the powerful guards of dispassion at the gateways of the senses, is full of divine virtues and possesses an abundance of the wealth of virtuous qualities. The truly dispassionate man will possess them; and he who purposefully cultivates them will grow in dispassion. It works both ways.

Six of these good qualities are mentioned in the scriptures - collectively they form the third qualification of the student pursuing the path of Jnana Yoga. Let us take them one by one:

(i) Sama or control of the mind which, ensures

(ii) Dama or control of senses.

There has been endless debate on the first. There is, no doubt, a fine and subtle distinction between the two; but a real spiritual aspirant will quickly discover that the two are really the two ends of the same stick, and pulling one in will bring in both. Superstition might demand that when you are at the threshold of a new house, you must place your right foot in first; but eventually you do find that the left foot follows, too. One without the other is self-deception. Perhaps in the matter of their cultivation, one can apply the subtle distinction with great effect. Control the mind by meditation; and control the senses by the practice of their withdrawal from the sense-objects - Pratyahara, described in the booklet on "Raja Yoga", and the application of dispassion to your daily life. One of the most effective method here is found in my Master's teachings and that is systematic eradication of evil qualities and cultivation of virtues by maintaining the spiritual diary. Prayer and meditation, feeling that the human will is not strong enough to overcome the tricks of the mind completely and that God, Who alone is Perfection, can help the seeker to control the mind fully - are ultimately the best and perhaps the only way of achieving control of the mind and the senses together.

(iii) The third virtue exalted by the student of Jnana Yoga particularly is Titiksha (endurance, forbearance, patience). Lord Krishna commands Arjuna to endure the "pairs of opposites". The pairs of opposites chase each other - heat and cold, censure and praise, pleasure and pain, success and failure, and it is foolish to perpetuate them. You cannot hang on to the day a moment after sunset; night follows day. You need not struggle to sweep the darkness of the night away ; day follows night inevitably. Even so with the others. The unwise man brings perpetual misery upon himself by struggling to keep pleasure in, and again by struggling to keep pain out! Whilst the scene outside changes constantly, his foolish struggling is unchanging; he has a continuous headache and fails to enjoy even the little pleasure that was offered him. The wise man on the contrary is neither unduly elated when pleasure seeks him (which, incidentally prevents a heartache when it leaves him) nor depressed when pain follows. He knows their, nature and adapts his conduct to their changing pattern. When the sun shines, work - when night arrives, sleep. Getting excited when the sun rises, and going about shouting in joy, and getting depressed when night arrive - are both sheer waste of time.

Endurance should not conjure up a sour-faced sufferance. Here again it is a positive virtue, not a negative state of repression. The student of Jnana Yoga recognises "the pairs of opposites" as the children of his own ignorance - they are the children of the unborn mother. He questions the reality of the world and his own body! What great credulity can he have towards the sensations of pleasure and pain which are but the reactions of the body to the stimulus of the worldly objects?

What is extraordinarily interesting is when you begin to analyse these sensations and experiences, these mental modifications and notions - such as praise and censure, honour and dishonour, you are pleasantly surprised that they vanish under the very searchlight of the analysis. This experiment is worth trying: first select mild sensation of pain, cold or heat, or censure - trace it down within you, find out where within you a nerve impulse is decoded as pain, where within you a word is interpreted as censure, where within you a light breeze is felt as cold. The "source" of pain, the offending word or the cool breeze might still be there; but within you a change would be produced, unmistakably neutralising the previous experience.

Yet, in our own unguarded moments the wrong notions smuggle into us - undue elation and unwarranted depression. We learn to endure them and then rationalise them out of our "inside". This exercise goes on and on till we reach a very important milestone, which Lord Krishna calls "samatwa ". Samatwam or sama sounds very much like the sama - this with the tongue clinging to the roof of the palate. Sama - the s pronounced with a hiss, is equanimity, "sameness" in all conditions. The letter sama (discussed earlier in' the series of the virtues) is control over the mind. Eventually, both are one, the two sides of the same coin. Equanimity is perfect control over the mind.

Now we realise how all these virtues that we are presently discussing are all tied up into one, viz., self-control. Endurance promotes control over the senses; endurance is born of control over the mind and the latter promotes endurance. Endurance deliberately practised leads in due course to equanimity or sameness in all conditions. Not that we are insensible and that our nerve endings do not react to heat and cold, that we do not remember the distinction between the two words "fool" and "good"; but they do not stir the ego to unrestrained and indiscriminate activity. The ego is not hurt nor affected adversely.

The difference between "endurance" and "sameness" is this. When there is a biting cold breeze outside and when you jump out of the house, and the shirt on your back gets torn, the cold you feel on your back but endure is "endurance" - felt or experienced but endured. But at the same time the cold that you do not feel on your face is "sameness" - the skin of the face has been trained to ignore the distinction between heat and cold, to a very great degree. Though we are only discussing "endurance" at this stage, it is good to remember that "sameness" is our goal. This is vital to the spiritual quest; for if all our physical and psychic energy is used up to fight back the ghosts of pleasure and pain, there will be nothing left to effect the most important break-through to Kingdom of Light.

(iv) Hence, the student of Jnana Yoga is asked to practise Uparati - which is the next important virtue. Uparati is cessation from worldly activity. It is possible to interpret this both literally and figuratively. In the latter sense, it would mean getting rid of worldliness while not necessarily ceasing to take part in the activities of the world. In practice, however, the sincere seeker soon discovers that it would not do to sail in two boats. Whilst it is possible to live in the world and not to be worldly, it is difficult especially in the initial stages of spiritual progress. It is possible (a) to deceive ourselves that though we are in the world, we are not of the world, and (b) to find the inner tension of keeping the head above water, to swim the turbulent currents of the world without being seriously effected, too much at times to endure.

Till we physically withdraw from the battle, it is difficult to assess our and the enemy's strength; the players of a game are not always in a position to know when they played foul; the cushion cannot be inserted so long as we continue sitting on the floor. Hence, in the very interests of inner unworldliness, it is essential that the spiritual aspirant should "bodily" withdraw himself from the world, and cease from any worldly activity.

Though it is indispensable to the student of Jnana Yoga, it is important to the followers of other paths too. Narada, in his Bhakti Sutras - a the text-book for Devotees of God, hints that Love of God means renunciation of the activities of the world and scripturally-enjoined activities.

A few months holiday from such activity will awaken us to a strange illusion under which we labour: a sense of responsibility. How often we feel that but for us the family, the society, the community, or the business would disintegrate; how often do we tell ourselves that for their

sake and not at all for any selfish end we have to remain in the world, carrying on our vicious worldly activities ! Give these up! "Am I not neglecting my duty" asks the holy, holy man. Will you ask the same question when death, instead of the call to renounce, knocks at the door? Will you be able to convince the angel or of death of the urgent need to postpone your departure from this world till your daughter is married? Again, when we slip out of the scene for a little while and return to find that things have been going on in spite of that absence - or, better because of it, we begin to wonder! Slowly, but surely, our whole outlook upon life and the world begin to undergo a change. A cord of illusion snaps within: our attachment to the world and the relations based on the passing phenomenon of our physical being lessens in intensity. And, what is surprising, though we then continue to live in the world, we are truly not of it. Till time wears the keenness of our discrimination out and the old attachment begins to grow again. My Master used to warn spiritual aspirants to get away from the world and live in seclusion for a while, living an inner

life. He called this process "recharging the inner battery". Only when this is actually done do we really appreciate its importance to our life.

There are those who misquote the Bodhisattva vow based on Buddha's own renunciation of the Bliss of Nirvana in favour of working for the salvation of all. Out of this concept a School of thought has emerged; and its pupils insist on "salvation of humanity" and declare that the "good and gain of the Self can come only from the gain and good of the Whole. According to them, it is absurd to seek one's own salvation. But there is a subtle snag in this theory. The Whole which is the substratum, the Reality, the Sat or Brahman, is Perfection, Bliss, Peace Itself. How then can an individual soul, however adept it may be, add a jot or tittle to that Perfection?' On the contrary, one who attains to that Perfection will instantly realise that the Whole has always been perfect and good - and rest there. The standpoint from which Buddha formulated the Bodhisattva vow is comprehensible only from His plane of consciousness; and it would be disastrous for unevolved souls to pretend to have reached it. It would ruin their own spiritual career and how can they work for the salvation of others, when they themselves are in the ditch of ignorance? From every consideration therefore it is clear that one should slip out of the field now and then to take a good look at the game from the correct perspective. This is uparati.

Arguments for and against have been advanced for everything in this world; but the practical man has no doubt and no need for arguments either. You have tried your best to practise meditation "While living in the world, yet not of it". Now get out for a while, live a life of renunciation without telling yourself 'this is only for a month', in spirit and in fact, and practise meditation - you will know the difference. After thus gaining practical experience in "unworldliness" for a few times, it is possible to dissociate the mind from the world even while living in it. The introvert mind will cease to be tempted by the colour and glamour of the world.

(v) All this is possible and all this will be successful only if we had faith. Faith in God or the Supreme Being, faith in the Master or the Guru, faith in ourselves or our Self. Without this faith, perhaps we will not even set our foot on the path. But, then, mere curiosity often lead one there. More than the wicked materialist, this curiosity-monger has marred the face of Yoga. When a vicious man attacks Yoga, people see the reason, why. But, when this is done by one who has "had personal experience", then it disturbs the faith of those who are on the fence, yet undecided about entering the path. The man of curiosity does not advertise his credentials; he pretends that he was a genuine and earnest seeker! And that is the snag.

It cuts, both ways! To what extent can we repose faith in the scriptures, in the words of the Master, in the as-yet-unexperienced existence of the Reality and

in the as-yet-unproved-ability of our self to realise that Reality. It is quite true to say that we should have faith, we should pursue the path till we find the goal. But it is also true that if at any stage we find out that we were mistaken, we should have the courage to retrace our steps, instead of blindly believing in a phantom which might have been created by self-seeking monsters - and not Masters, to exploit the credulous. Are we justified in our attitude to the Master? Are we qualified to judge him, and are we safe in blindly surrendering ourselves to him? Every argument has a counter-argument. Yet, it is not possible to swim without entering the pool. The risk has to be taken; and the wisdom of our sages has made it a calculated risk worth taking.

The student who enters the path of Jnana Yoga has a keen and analytical mind. He has equipped himself with keen discrimination. He has had Satsang or holy company. Perhaps he has met and conversed with many sages, scholars and students of Yoga. That is how he developed discrimination. But though he believes in their words, he has not yet arrived at the state of faith.

It is good to have a look at the concept of faith. Faith is different from belief. At first there is a kind of belief. "I believe that there is a big crater on the surface of the moon - because a scientist says so. This belief is not inviolable; it may have to be abandoned. "I have faith that the doctor's treatment will cure me of my ailment." This is stronger, for it inspires me to act upon it. Yet, there is a remote shadow of doubt somewhere in the back of my mind - may be or may not be. There is a further stage and that is conviction. " I am convinced that I am a man." No arguments are necessary, no proofs are asked for, not even a second thought wasted on it.

Satsang inspires belief. Discrimination coupled with the personal encounter with the Master engenders faith. Personal experience alone will give birth to conviction. Till then faith and doubt will naturally chase each other.

The Indian sage did not demand unquestioning blind acceptance of his words. No, no, a thousand times no. "Unquestioning" and "faith" - blind faith, are words which lend themselves to a lot of misunderstanding. The student has unquestioning faith in the wisdom of the Master; but the student does question the Master. The student does not doubt the Master's spiritual superiority and ability to enlighten him. But he does not surrender the spirit of enquiry or questioning. He does not question the Master's right to be a Master; but he does question the Master in order to learn. Hence, Lord Krishna, in the Bhagavad Gita, makes the relationship clear : "Know the Truth from the sages, by surrendering yourself to them, by questioning them, and by serving them". The questioning is not vain argumentation, but humble enquiry. The former is doubt; the latter is questioning.

Doubt has no place in the student's heart. Questioning and doubting are entirely different mental states. Whereas questioning is eager and receptive, doubting is a negative state of mind which rejects the truth. Hence, again, Lord Krishna declares that the doubting man will perish.

(vi) The last of the virtues is Samadhana which means "concentration or one-pointedness of mind ". The whole of Jnaja Yoga is condensed into this one part of the Four Means. As I have mentioned earlier, the mind whose rays are scattered all over the world, the mind that knows no discipline and therefore cannot hold on to a single line of thought for a long time is unfit for any branch of Yoga. The mind must be calm and concentrated. The mind which possesses keen discrimination and dispassion and is the abode of the other virtues already discussed will naturally be calm and concentrated, and the Light of Truth will be reflected only in such a mind. To the seeker such calm and collected mind is vital. He values peace of mind above all else, and will not let anything in the three worlds disturb it.

People often complain that their mind is disturbed and that they are unable to concentrate in spite of an my attempts. This is only self-deception. They have still not convinced themselves of the supreme importance of peace of mind. They have not begun to value this peace above all else. We are devoted to that which we value most. We shall certainly have that which we value most. An example is life. If anything endangers life, how almost instinctively we discard it! If we have peace of mind for a moment and then refuse to barter it for anything - literally anything, else, then we shall have it and no one will be able to take it away from us. The mind that is at peace is concentrated and is powerful.

Last but not the least, the seeker must possess mumukshutwa - intense longing for Liberation from the shackles of ignorance and falsity. He has, to use an oft-quoted expression, "burning aspiration for liberation - moksha." In common with many other expressions, the phrase " burning aspiration" has been misunderstood and mis-interpreted. It is not the way the primus stove burns when it is out of order - spasmodic and noisy. The ancient sages did not have such gadgets. This burning is of the nature of a lamp burning in a windless place - steadily keeping the flame ever bright and always pointing upwards. Light a fire and watch. It dispels darkness. It radiates warmth. It "goes upwards." It burns till it fulfils its mission of reducing everything into a uniform pure ash. That is the meaning. True spiritual aspiration is a fire that dispels the darkness of ignorance, that fills one's heart with the warmth of love, that leads the aspirant always upwards and onwards, and that will steadily continue to burn till it has achieved its ultimate object, viz., burning of all impurities and leaving only the pure knowledge of the self. In the light of this burning aspiration, the seeker finds the right path to the goal. This "burning aspiration" has often led spiritual aspirants to fret and fume, shout

and swear, making everyone around feel "Ah, here is a serious student of Yoga." The primus stove - specially when it is out of order, burns furiously, making its presence felt all round, and suddenly dies down! The aspirant who is filled with juvenile enthusiasm - (in the words of my Master, will be ever-changing and ever-steady.

Desire for Liberation must be based upon discrimination and dispassion; they in their turn depend entirely upon this desire for Liberation to maintain their true spirit. Desire for Liberation is not escapism; nor is it desire in the ordinary sense of the term.

In fact, the man of discrimination sees that all desire is for the Infinite Self alone. The ignorant mind is not aware of it. A stranger in the house sees a child crying. He feeds it with milk. It cries more. He gives it bread. It is worse. It had an ulcerated stomach and was crying of pain. The cry had been misunderstood with disastrous consequences! All desire is for God - i.e., the Infinite Self. But since, in the words of the Kathopanishad, the mind and the senses are capable of flowing only outwards and are incapable of "looking within ", the desire for the inner Self is transferred to the material objects outside, and then interpreted as a natural course of life. The fact that we are never satisfied with anything that we desire and acquire shows that the diagnosis itself was wrong. Only when the senses are restrained and the mind itself is turned within, and only when thus the meaning of desire - which is aspiration for the Infinite - is correctly discerned, does desire find its final fulfilment.

Desire for Liberation is not a desire in the ordinary sense of the term. It is like fire which burns everything else but does not need another agent to burn it; when it has done its work, it burns itself out. Desire for Liberation destroys all other desires and ultimately dissolves in Liberation.

"How can man live without desire at all? - asks the ignorant man. "Without desire, where is life'?" With desire, life is hell! The spiritual aspirant is aware of a great truth. You achieve nothing by desiring. You cannot desire for and die. You cannot digest bread at once by wishing for it. Even your own inner organs do not obey your desire, but obey only the Will of God. When you intensely desire to solve a mathematical problem, you cannot solve it. When you become desireless you 'live' and achieve a lot, because God's Will functions, unhindered your selfish desire. For example in sleep, when your selfish desire is absent, the Divine does a lot of repair and rejuvenating work! It is from this selfishness that the seeker after Truth desires liberation; when this liberation is attained, then even this pure and holy desire vanishes - gets merged in the Self.

These are the Four Means: (i) viveka - discrimination, (ii) vairagya - dispassion), (iii) shadsampat - the sixfold virtue - viz., sama - control of mind, dama - control of the senses, titiksha - fortitude or endurance, uparati - cessation from worldly activity, shraddha - faith in God, the Master, the scriptures and the Self, and samadhana - concentration or one-pointedness of the mind - and (iv) mumukshutva - desire for Liberation.

Jnana Yoga rests on these four cornerstones. Equipped with these, the aspirant seeks the feet of the Master. Equipped with these, he is able to imbibe the Master's teachings. Without them, he would fail to profit by the contact of even the greatest of sages. J. Krishnamurthi in his "At the Feet of the Master" gives the following as the qualifications for initiation "": (1) Discrimination, (2) Desirelessness, (3) Six points of Conduct: self-control as to the mind, self-control as to action, tolerance, cheerfulness, one-pointedness, confidence, and (4) Love.

3. THE DIVINE MASTER

It sounds as though this itself is the goal! We are so far from these simple virtues that we have begun to feel that only the Men of Perfection will be able to possess them. We accord him the honours due to a sage of Self-realisation. One morning we were discussing the signs of a Self-realised sage with Gurudev Sivananda - peace, ever-cheerful temperament, contentment, etc. "Yes," replied Gurudev and added, "But that is not all! You should have cosmic consciousness".

The virtues described so far ought to be natural to the human being; if they are not, it only goes to show that we still have not fully matured as human beings!

Secondly, there are many who are sure and certain that once the man has these great virtues, and his heart pure, he will either be able to read a scripture and be enlightened or what is better still, the Self within will reveal Itself to him. True, to a very great extent. But if the aspirant is sincere, he will not so readily arrogate to himself the ability to understand the scripture or decode the inner voice. It is no use saying that there is everything in the house. You may be standing outside and starving if you do not have the key! God is in you: but the Guru is the key. There may be everything in the room, but if there is no light, you cannot make the proper use of them. Guru is the light.

Words and expressions change their meaning. Only direct experience is valid. For the scriptures themselves are the records of Someone's direct experience of the Truth. This direct experience of each successive sage of Self-realisation revalidates the scripture. The student depends upon the scripture; but the scripture itself depends upon the sage. The student, in order to understand the scripture, has to seek the feet of the sage-teacher, whom he regards as God Himself. To him the sage is not a man, nor even a mere spiritual hero - but God incarnate.

The 'free thinkers' rebel against this tradition. But what they fail to realise is that the seeker stands at the opposite pole from them! Whereas they value their own ego-centered personality and its opinions, the seeker realises that the ego is the greatest of all granite walls that stand between him and God. If one of the rationalists will show me another and simpler method of overcoming this ego-barrier, I shall follow him. If he cannot, then I shall humbly submit that it is his own ego that revolts against deification of the Guru - the very ego that we, frail human seekers, endeavour to subdue, with the only weapon we know, viz., total self-surrender to the Guru, regarding him as God. Incidentally those who follow the "free thinkers" are really not following them; for, is it not the teaching of the free thinkers that we should

not follow any one? The tragedy here is: when this perverse teaching enters the immature heart, it succeeds in assisting the arch-enemy of all spiritual aspiration viz., ego, thus defeating the lofty aim of the free thinkers themselves.

The seeker's path is regarded as "the razor's edge" and the Kathopanishad asks us to "arise, awake and, having resorted to the feet of the Guru, attain the knowledge of the Atman." Lord Krishna, too, asks the seeker to serve, fall at the feet of, and learn Self-knowledge from the Knowers of Truth.

Who are these Knowers of Truth? The Sruti declares: "Brahmavit Brahmaiva Bhavati" - the Knower of Truth becomes that. A simple analogy will make this clear. A few pieces of cold and black charcoal, thrown into fire, no longer cold and black, but glowing red and hot. The humanness of the human being who has "touched" God and is in union with Him is thus transmuted into the Divine. We do not worship man, but the Divine through the human medium.

Guru is the bridge that links the finite with the Infinite. It is as if the other bank of the river - God, stretches out His hand - Guru or the bridge, to help us to go over the dreadful river of nescience. He is not a wise man who would refuse to step on a bridge, saying; "I only want to get to the other bank and I shall not set my foot on the bridge."

God is the center and all of us are on the circumference - whether on the upper (virtuous) or the lower (vicious) semicircle. There is a way in which each of us can reach Him - "However sinful you are", in the words of Lord Krishna, immediately via the shortest geometrically straight line route. The Guru is the radius, the shortest line, and the straight path, to that Center which is God.

It is God Who, in His supreme love and compassion, reaches out to us, on the circumference, as the radius or Guru. It is "visible"

to the seeker on the circumference when he turns towards the Center -God. To that seeker the radius itself is Center right through, for it is nothing more than the extension of the Center. His faith - if it is real, will not let him rest half way in cheap hero-worship or personality cult, but lead him right through. However, he should not treat the radius as the path to the Center, thus making a distinction which is illogical in the context, and disastrous to him, in as much as this lukewarm faith might lead him away from the radius - the shortest route, looking for the Center.

When he adheres to the radius, devoutly regarding it as the Center itself, he will reach the Center, when he will certainly realise that the Center, the radius and the point on the circumference are one and the same.

The Holy Christian Fathers say in their inspiring scripture "Philokalia": "In the Name of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who said: I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me' - hear what we say and sincerely advise. First of all, choose for yourself, according to the Divine Word, complete and perfect and sincere obedience. To this end, spare no effort in trying to find a teacher and guide. Cleave to him with body and spirit, like a devoted son to his father, and from then onwards obey all his commands implicitly, accord

with him in everything, and see him not as a mere man, but as Christ Himself. If the devil, the enemy of all good suggests to you something contrary to this, flee from it as from lust or from fire, wisely admonishing yourself in opposition to the seducer who puts such thoughts into your head. Speak thus to yourself: 'It is not the guided who leads the guide; it is not I but he who is my judge.'" Equally stern is the admonition of Sri Ramanuja, one of the greatest spiritual leaders of India, who says: "Whoever looks upon the sacred images of God as mere stones, his own spiritual teacher as an ordinary human being, let him be considered as one fit to or dwell in the infernal regions." Do not argue that we should not worship a living man. Hanuman worshipped Rama. Vidura and many other worshipped Krishna.' And, Rama and Krishna were regarded as Men in their time. Similar stories are current in regard to Buddha and Jesus. On the other hand, if you argue: "But this man may not be like them", please remember that there were thousands who doubted the divinity of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus in their own time. Only posterity realised the truth, but it was too late for many.

The Biblical quotation above - that no one cometh unto the Father but by me - should not restrict our vision to the historical Jesus but should reveal the Father Who sent him and Whom he represented here, as he himself so often pointed out. To the devout Christian, the statement is literally true, though even he is authorised by the Holy Fathers to regard his immediate Preceptor as Christ Himself. The spirit behind it is that the path to God lies through the Manifest God i. e. Guru. God is not limited to the Guru, or the Avatara - incarnation, but the individual's approach is through Him.

He who argues, "Lord Jesus or Lord Rama or Lord Buddha was a man, so am I", is in the same ridiculous position as a warm boasting, "Man is a living creature so am I". In the Guru the animal nature has been completely burnt, the human sublimated and the Divine revealed. God has revealed Himself in him - the Guru. It is that God in the Guru that we really deify. The body is His temple. Since we have no direct spiritual access to that God, except through

that body, we are permitted by our scriptures to worship that Body itself, so long as it is indwelt by manifest divinity. Therefore, the Upanishads say: "He who wants prosperity should worship the Knower of the Self." Says Swami Vivekananda: "We cannot see God, except through them. We cannot help worshipping them; and indeed they are the only ones whom we are bound to worship. Two kinds of men do not worship God as man - the human brute who has no religion and the Paramahansa who has risen beyond all the weaknesses of humanity and has transcended the limits of his own human nature."

There is a comic tragedy behind this revolt against adoration of sages and Gurus. Great men are not recognised by the people of their generation, not because the later are stupid! They are not clever. They can today glorify, deify and worship an incarnation of God or a great saint of the past; they need not practise His teaching. But people ignore the saints of today, the living incarnation of God, because of the irksome necessity of a duty to follow their teaching. Posthumous adoration is the wicked plan by which the clever man makes use of the saints. It suits him.

Bhagavadvandanam svadyam guruvandanapurvakam

Kshiram sarkaraya yuktam svadate hi visesatah

Adoration of God is more 'tasteful' or 'blissful' when done after the adoration of the Guru. Milk, though naturally sweet, is sweet, is sweeter still when sugar is added to it.

Says Sri Vedanta Desika in his Stotra Ratna Bhasya. Neglect of this fundamental precept is directly responsible for our lack of spiritual progress. We have only one enemy in this world, viz., the ego. We have, therefore only one true friend in the world, viz., the Guru, who alone can remove that ego. Often we hear people say that they themselves can analyse their own self, eradicate the ego and realise God. Little do they realise that this enquiry and this eradication is but a play of their own ego, which fools them!

The Self is transcendental, beyond the reach of the mind and speech. As sage Yajnavalkya pertinently asks:

Vijnataramar kena vijaniyat

By what can the Self Who is the knower, be known.

It is common knowledge that the ego often feeds even such wholesome spiritual practices as Japa and meditation, selfless service and austerity!

Imperceptibly, the spiritual vanity grows, whereas spirituality should grow! The aspirant who does not enjoy the protection of the Guru often mistakes Tamas - inertia for Satva - spiritual light, and believes that he has attained a very high spiritual state. One such man once wrote to our divine Master: "Swamiji, I have attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi; now, please tell me what I should do." What a pitiable state of ignorance! Only the Guru can remove that ignorance, not unaided self-effort.

Because the Guru removes the darkness of spiritual ignorance, he is called the Guru -

'Gu' karasca andhakarasca 'ruakrasannirodhakah

Andhakaravinasitvat gururityabhidhiyate.

The syllable Gu means darkness; the syllable ru means one who removes that darkness. Because he removes the darkness of ignorance, he is called Guru.

The darkness is of spiritual ignorance. It can be removed only by Self-knowledge, the divine Light. The Guru is that Light which removes the darkness. The logical inference is clear as daylight: Guru is God, being the Light of God. The acceptance of this truth acts as the most effective weapon to slay our spiritual foe - egoism. The ego is handed over to the Guru, and he, being an enlightened witness, knows how best to deal with it. He has trodden the path, he knows the pitfalls. He actually sees where our shoe pinches and gives the correct corrective treatment. Moreover, if our surrender to the Guru has been complete and unreserved, if we accept divinity, we have already achieved the greatest victory over the ego and have opened ourselves for the descent of his grace, the light of Self-knowledge. The ego has been given over to him. In return for it, he has given us His Light, which is the Light of Self-knowledge. In that moment of surrender to the divinity of our Guru is our only opportunity for gaining Perfection. The devil itself creates a doubt: "But, is he not a mere man; how can we surrender ourselves to a man?" This evil must be slain without a second thought. Well, let us ask ourselves: "Even if he is a man, if we do not want to accept his guidance, where shall we find God? Definitely not by submitting to our own animal instincts! Is it better then to accept this man who has attained perfection, or, shall we be slaves to the animal within? The answer is clear. The Guru is the only way.

Hence, the saints have boldly proclaimed:

Dhyanamulam gurormurtih pujaamulam gurohpadam

Mantramulam gurorvakyam mokshamulam guror krpa.

The Guru's form should be meditated upon; the Guru's feet should be worshipped; the Guru's words should be regarded as gospel truth; and the Grace of the Guru will lead us to Liberation.

We always chant these hymns in praise of the Guru before commencing our spiritual practices and meditation. We commence our meditation with a period of meditation on the form of the Guru himself. It is a very great help in meditation. Those who ignore it find it difficult to steady the mind. The mind is still unable to visualise the favorite form of God we have chosen as a living presence. To us that form is still a picture or an image. The mind craves for a live entity. Hence, it strays to living persons, e.g., friends and relatives; and we are unable to fix it! If only we start with meditation on the Guru, and let the form of the Guru itself lead us on to the form of God - after all, it was he who initiated us into the Mantra and into the secret of meditation on God, then we shall find the mind coming under our control very easily.

The Guru's Feet should be worshipped. He is the living God. We can understand the feeling of worshipping God only when we have learned to generate that feeling while worshipping the Guru's Feet. Modern man's mind revolts against this; but, our business is just to slay this mind! Unless we become humbler than the blade of grass, we might as well forget the goal of life - God-realisation, and Yoga. When we place the Guru's Feet on the crown of our head, we receive His Grace. The Feet are transmission centres and our head the reception centre of spiritual power.

The water in which the Feet have been bathed is holy water. It has come into contact with the source of spiritual power. There have been several instances when people have attained spiritual knowledge and inspiration from such objects as the leavings on the Guru's lunch plate, the water in which His Feet have been washed, the cloth He has worn, etc. It is well known to Buddhists and Christians that even the relics associated with Lord Buddha and the Christian saints are considered holy. Again, it is our own little ego that rebels. Let us never forget that it is our enemy.

These are vital external practices of an inward attitude of discipleship. We have accepted our own inability to reach God. We have tacitly accepted that the Guru is our light; and, therefore, we have surrendered ourselves to Him. Now, if we are sincere - if we are not, the loss will only be ours, not the Guru's, we should accept every word of His as the supreme Truth. We should implicitly obey everything that He says. We should be beware of false counselors who try to disturb our faith and proclaim that our Guru's teachings are defective or that someone else's is better. They are the messengers of the devil. In our eyes, the Guru should be the very embodiment of all that is perfect. If our eyes should perceive any defect in Him, we should

chastise them and say to ourselves: "That defect is obviously in me and my own vicious mind is superimposing it on the Guru, who is perfection itself."

Then, Guru's Grace will enable us to attain Liberation here and now.

Be careful in choosing a Guru. After choosing the Guru, do not see any evil in Him. If, after choosing a Guru, you suddenly feel that the Guru is unworthy in His conduct, then think within yourself: since my mind sees evil in Him, I am not a good disciple. There something wrong in me. So, I have to get away from his discipleship and purify myself before being worthy of his discipleship again." Do not blame him - blame yourself for becoming his disciple hastily.

There is a reasonable argument, however. Can we recognise a sage? Is it safe to assume one to be a sage and follow him? Supposing he is a charlatan. The famous Ekalavya-story in the Mahabharata teaches us a great lesson: we do not have to look in to the Guru's qualifications, for, if we are sincere and zealous, even mud idol will teach us. The process is internal, but in the case of most people, the switch is outside. It is not how big a Guru is, but how pure the disciple is that matters. Even the big sun cannot be reflected on a rock, but a small candle will be effected in a mirror. Again: Guru is like an opening on the bund of a big reservoir - i. e., Knowledge of God, through which the water flows to a tank, the seeker. If the tank is big, it will be filled, no matter how small the opening is. What the disciple receives, therefore, depends on his capacity and not on that of the Guru.

Taking the most pessimistic view. One has to follow someone: that is inevitable in the very nature of creation. Otherwise, i. e., even if we regard ourselves independent free thinkers who have somehow disowned the free thinkers who taught us to be so, there is the mischievous ego which will enslave us. To depend upon oneself when one is not yet ready to distinguish Self from the self is to court spiritual disaster. To follow a charlatan may be unsatisfactory, but more safe! He helps us to crush our ego, for his own ends! What follows may be a deliberate overstatement, but it is often more fruitful to follow the selfish man: he will make us selfless, for his own sake. It is often better to follow the Charlatan; because we shall be awake all the time. In other words, the Guru is God, whatever and whoever he may be; and this attitude leads us to the Light we seek. Our faith and sincerity, zeal and devotion, will surely lead us to the feet of a real sage. Doubt on the contrary, may blur our vision of even a real one.

The sage is an undoubted authority on religion and philosophy, for to him it is unambiguous, incontrovertible, intuitive and direct revelation. It is one of the incongruities of modern thinking that we call him an authority who quotes others as his authority, just as we call him a brilliant doctor who depends on the greatest number of instruments and gadgets. Absurd. If he is brilliant, he

would use his own brilliance! The sage is the Light of Truth Itself. His words are the bases of philosophy and religion.

A word about the seeker's duty towards such a sage. When we enter His presence, we should leave our own knowledge - or our ignorance, at the door. We should be receptive. He is a bad host who invites you to his house, shuts the door on your face and asks you to enter. He learns nothing who approaches a Guru, then closes his heart with vanity and thinks he knows better. Secondly, we often hear people say that sages and saints differ in the degree of perfection. May be true. If you keep your eyes glued to the perfection in sage and saints, you will soon discover the One whom you should follow. But people rarely do this. They only look for the degree of Imperfection, in order to permit themselves of that imperfection. The loss is not the sage's, but the seeker's. The sage, too, has enough humanity left in him to be able to breathe and to teach philosophy and religion. The sincere seeker will be intent on following the sage, not judging him.

Though it is true to say that the Guru is indispensable for the seeker after Truth, whatever path he might tread, it is all the more so for the seeker who has chosen to lead the path of Jnana Yoga. It is the Guru that serves as the lamp or right knowledge to the seeker, for the latter does not even understand the landmarks or the path. Without his help the seeker might land himself in a void of impenetrable darkness from which he would be unable to extricate himself. The Guru has trodden the path before the disciple, and he knows the way, the pitfalls, and the rest houses, etc.

Does the Guru show the path or does he also reveal God to the disciple? I believe an illustration is good. You ask a guest to come into the

house. You show him the way. And just when he approaches the entrance, you open the door; he enters perhaps never realising that the door was closed moments before. Similarly, the Guru guides, and when we have sufficiently advanced, he reveals the God in us in a most mysterious manner. We shall not know if it was through our own effort we entered or through Guru's Grace. Perhaps it would be true to say: the two are essentially one - self-effort winning grace, and grace manifesting as self-effort.

The scriptures tell us that the disciple who has examined the nature of the world and come to the right conclusion that no work done here would bestow the light of Self-knowledge upon him, seeks a Guru and approaches a knower of Brahman who is also well-versed in the scriptures, carrying a bundle of samit-wood in his hand. This samit - a certain type of wood, is very useful and helps the Guru in his daily rituals. It might mean something more, too. We have a parallel among the ancient Romans. It is said that the officials of ancient Rome were made to carry bundles of rods - fasces, before the rulers -

as a mark of recognition of the latter's authority. Probably it is this custom that flourishes in its modified form today as the guard of honor.

As we have seen in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna prescribes three conditions for achieving the rapport between the Guru and the disciple: (i) prostration, symbolising total surrender, (ii) eager questioning in a spirit of enquiry, and (iii) service which establishes the inner contact for the flow of the spiritual current. The Bhagavatham goes as far as to declare: "The wise speak of service rendered to exalted souls as an open gate to liberate and the fellowship of those who are fond of women as the door opening into hell." (V.5.2) The same scripture contains the following inspiring words uttered by Lord Krishna to Sudama (X. 80/32-34) : "Lastly comes the teacher who imparts the knowledge of the Self to men of all classes and orders and helps one in the realisation of God. He is identical with Me ... I am the Universal Self. I am not so pleased with the performance of daily obligatory sacrifices by the householder, nor with investiture with the sacred thread and study of the scriptures, which is the duty of a celibate, nor with the penance of the ascetic, nor again with the quietism of the recluse, as I am with services rendered by a disciple to the preceptor." Devotion without service is self-deception; if not hypocrisy.

The disciple - let us not forget that he is of very keen intelligence - approaches the Guru in all humility, eager to serve Him and to imbibe the knowledge at the Guru's pleasure and leisure. The disciple's mind that questioned the world does not doubt the Guru's ability to enlighten it. The intellect that questioned everything in this world is silent now; it is eager to receive, having exhausted its own resources. All preconceived ideas are left at the Guru's doorstep before entering His presence. This path is not for the dullard who may be capable of blind faith - but it is only for the extremely intelligent man whose intelligence is wise enough to laugh at its own vanity! The reception of the Light of Knowledge from the Guru is not passive acceptance, but active participation.

4. THE STEPS

The transmission of Knowledge begins with a dialogue between the Guru and the disciple. This is the first step - Sravana, and is quickly and invariably followed by the two steps Manana and Nidhidhyasana.

Sravana means hearing. It is the spiritual initiation, if we do not forget the simple meaning of the word: to commence a procedure or activity. In this and in other paths, too, the disciple tends to regard initiation as the culmination, whereas it is just the opposite, the commencement of the spiritual journey. The Guru initiates; and it is for the disciple to continue the journey to the goal.

Sravana means hearing. The Guru might often be inspired to communicate his words of wisdom, spontaneously without being provoked by the disciple to do so. But our Upanishads contain countless instances of "questioning" by the disciple which sparks off the Guru's battery of the highest wisdom. The former is as vital to this process as the latter. Hence the Bhagavad Gita exalts Arjuna the seeker; but for him the milk of wisdom would not flow from the Lord Sri Krishna. Every preacher is aware of this. It is when the audience is receptive, eager and efficient that the fountain source of wisdom within him is tapped.

Sravana is hearing. The disciple asks the appropriate question. The Guru exposes the Truth. Now the disciple hears with rapt attention. Now is the time to receive, not to accept nor to reject, or to argue or weight the pros and cons, but merely to hear, to receive. If the mind's limited capacity is overtaxed by making it receive and digest at the same time, it might bog down; and, even if it does not go to sleep, will certainly miss vital truths imparted by the Guru. If the Guru introduces terminology and ideas that are foreign to the disciple, he is permitted to ask supplementary questions, to ensure accurate reception. But, argument at this stage defeats the purpose. The sacred truth is heard from the lips of of the Guru. When the Guru speaks, the disciple is vocally and mentally silent and receptive. He absorbs everything like a sponge.

The time for thrashing out what is heard comes later, and that is called "manana". Manana is "reflection" - intellection. Some authorities include "discussion" in this. Either alone or in the company of other seekers, the aspirant analyses what he or they heard from the Guru. Now is the time for the pros and cons. The earnest aspirant, however, does not question nor doubt the teaching of the Guru, that would endanger the whole structure. If a defect appears in the teaching, the student takes it upon himself: "I have not understood properly", or "I am not yet fit for this teaching". He does not blame the Guru. Doubts are axed away with faith. The disciple often approaches the Guru again for clarification. In one of the Upanishads a rather

stiff procedure is outlined for this clarification. Each time the disciple returns to the Guru, betraying his incapacity to assimilate the Guru's Words, the disciple is asked to "serve the Guru" for a long period. This may sound unreasonable at first; but a little reflection is bound to dispel any such wrong notion. Non-comprehension of Truth is often the fault of neither the Guru nor the disciple. It is not that the Guru is unable to impart the wisdom nor that the disciple - except in rare cases, is totally unsuited to its reception, but it only shows that the disciple's "heart" has not yet arrived at maturity. The Guru alone is the judge whether this means that he should present the truth in a different way or that the disciple should undergo further disciplinary training - disciple is embodied discipline, which the Guru alone can correctly decide for the disciple. The latter can serve anyone to remove rusted egotism or selfishness; but such "social" service might often prove to be remedy worse than disease! A different type of vanity and some sort of unhealthy attachment might creep in. Hence, even at the risk of seeming to be an exploiter, the Guru commands the disciple to serve him! There is an advantage here in that, by such service, the disciple not only purifies his heart, but also draws spiritually closer to the Guru and grows more familiar with the "language of the Master".

Thus hearing and reflection go on a pace, till in sudden flashes of intuition the Truth is unveiled to disciple. This is called Nidhidhyasana, the counterpart in Jnana Yoga of what in Raja Yoga was described as Samyama - combined practice of concentration - meditation - super-conscious experience. Here, however, the disciple need not necessarily sit with closed eyes nor practise Pranayama, etc. He may sit anywhere, with eyes open or closed, with or without any repetition of a Mantra; he may by the mere force of reflection enter into deep contemplation of the Truth until it becomes part of his consciousness, till he becomes one with the Truth. It is interesting to note here that the great Shankaracharya, one of the greatest exponents of Jnana, gives metaphysical definitions of even Asana, Pranayama and other Raja Yoga practices!

The great truth which had emerged from what he had heard from the lips of the Guru is held cherished and assimilated, with the result that the truth becomes part and parcel of the disciple. It is no more an intellectual concept or speculation, but a Reality. "Hearing" is like having a piece of bread on the table, served by the Guru. "Reflection" is like chewing that bread. "Contemplation" is like the process of digestion which leads to assimilation when the bread becomes part of the person, no longer a foreign substance.

It is realised nowadays that even food does not give us life, but serves as a material home for the life within us to live in. In Jnana Yoga, too, it is soon realised that the Guru's gift is a powerful spark that brought out the latent fire in our heart, a mighty storm that blows away all the ashes that have

accumulated over the fire of wisdom within. Without the Guru's gift, the Consciousness within could have remained hidden for aeons; with it this Consciousness was revealed -unveiled quickly. With his own inner eye of intuition opened by the deep contemplation which was made possible by the Guru's gift, the disciple sees the Truth as his own Self. This inner vision of "knowledge of the Self" is different from knowledge as we know. Because we are accustomed too much to knowing through the senses and the mind, we refuse to believe that knowledge is really independent of these aids. In fact, the word "aid" or " means" shows that knowledge is independent of them - as hearing is independent of the hearing aid! The senses and the mental modifications help you to know. But when you really 'know', these aids are no longer necessary. You 'know', you are that Knowledge itself, which is Absolute.

5. COSMOLOGY

The Guru's instruction usually leads to the understanding of Brahman or Atman. The word "Brahman" has been interpreted variously by various scholars and religious leaders. It has been identified with the mantras (hymns) of the Vedas, the source books of the Hindus. It has been identified with power latent in all these rituals and chants. It has been identified with the power of the highest wisdom. But, when we remember that in one of the Upanishads it has been said, "The individual soul is none other than Brahman", the intention of the scripture is clear: it means the infinite, the Absolute, the Cosmic Being.

This Cosmic Being alone 'is'. You cannot question this statement. That which 'is' is Being - just as liquidity is the characteristic of water, and water is called so because it is liquid, 'is'-ness is the characteristic of Being, it is Being because it 'is'.

In regard to what 'is', scholars and philosophers have argued endlessly from the beginning of time. Whereas they are ready to concede that truth is truth even if we are unable to perceive or even to conceive of it just yet - we cannot perceive infra-red and ultra-violet rays, only a small fraction of the spectrum is visible to us, they insist that what is must have always been and must always be in the future. The Being is real because, if it is now, it must have been in the past and will ever be in the future. Not the form, as it appears to be, but the Is-ness. Relatively speaking, we can explain it with the analogy of water. You cannot destroy water. If you heat it, it becomes vapor and if you freeze it, it turns into ice: but the reality is still H₂O. The appearance changes, but the substance does not.

What is the relation between appearance and substance? Here, again, there has been a lot of controversy. Three possibilities have been discussed:

(i) The Reality alone is: the appearance is an illusion. The example given here is; in darkness to a frightened man a rope appears as a snake. The rope does undergo any change at all, but it only appears to be snake on account of subjective condition.

(ii) The Reality has undergone a temporary change of quality - as in the water-vapor-ice illustration given above. It can resume the original state easily.

(iii) A portion at least of the reality has undergone a complete. change, by an irreversible process. The example given here is that of milk turning into curd.

All are agreed that the Reality 'is', and can only be one. To that One sages give various names". If the Reality alone has been transformed into or appears to

be all these, what has caused this apparent or real transformation and how has all this come about? Please remember that they who ask this believe (a) that the physical universe is more or less real and (b) that it has been created either as objects in a dream or as objects in a waking state. But even they who believe in the Eternal Reality of the two - Spirit and Matter, or of the three - God, World and the Soul, are convinced that they are not conflicting truths but complementary ideals.

I shall briefly - if imperfectly, summarise the Vedantic theory of Creation. There are numerous texts on it; and our own Master often openly discouraged brooding over these origins of creation theories, adding that what really mattered was not so much how we got here but how we can get out of here!

The Cosmic Being is called Para Brahman (Supreme Brahman), the adjective "Supreme" warning us against any conjectures concerning Him. He or it is unconnected with any other category that we are going to enumerate below, for from His viewpoint - all expressions are imperfect, aren't they - there is none other. Mysterious inherent in Him is Avyaktam or Mulaprakriti - Unmanifested or Root-Nature. It is Avyaktam because even this category is subtler than our intelligence; it is Mulaprakriti because it is Nature and the root of all the other categories. Nature of what? Obviously of Brahman, though the philosopher will not concede this association of Brahman with anything else, a repugnance shared in the Holy Bible and in the Holy Quran.

Its - Nature's experience is accepted by all schools of thought. In our empirical experience, we had two types of "Nature":

(i) Nature which is real and which can be experienced - like the heat of fire.

(ii) Nature which is unreal and which is only an appearance - like mirage in a desert.

Philosophers differ only in their view as to whether the Nature of Brahman (world) is real or unreal, only appearing to be real. Even when philosophers assert that that Nature is dependent, they only imply that it can be "visualised" independent of the objects of the world and the sense organs. No-one suggests that Nature does or can exist or function independent of Brahman.

Though this Nature is of Brahman, it veils Brahman and its effects are of contrary nature. Nature seems to have its own nature, too! Even this is possible. The sun's nature is to emit rays; and it is the rays' nature (nature of Nature) to illumine objects. It can have an opposite effect. The nature of clay is soft; but the nature of something made of that clay may be coarse.

From here on, the three "Qualities of Nature," begin to play. Like the three basic colours when they are mixed and mixed again produce infinite shades, these three primary Qualities of Nature when they mix with one another in various proportions "create" the infinite variety of objects of the universe.

These three qualities are: Satva, Rajas and Tamas. Satva is Light, Purity, the very quality of Truth or Existence. It is regarded as "Goodness" - but that is too tame a word! Rajas is dynamism, passion, desire-prompted activity, will-fuelled energy - it is life. Tamas is the opposite of both these! It is dull, inertia, stupidity and total unwisdom. These three are like the three aspects of fire - viz., light - Satva, heat - Rajas, and smoke - Tamas. Scientifically minded orientalisks have equated these three to different categories of modern science, like energy, motion and inertia, or spirit, energy and matter, etc. I have often wondered if they cannot readily be equated to neutrons - Satva, protons - Rajas, and electrons - Tamas. The more I study what the scientists say about the three fundamental building materials of the universe, the more I am convinced of their similarity to these metaphysical categories.

"In the beginning of the beginning" that we are talking about, these three which were in a state of equilibrium before the beginning of the beginning, are disturbed. It is still simple motion and not commotion which it would later develop into. The three Qualities which were quiescently co-existent before creation begin to operate on their own at the beginning. They vibrate independently. If Mulaprakriti can be likened to the light of the sun, the Qualities are like the spectral colours which were all there in the sunlight but which became manifest when the sunlight was disturbed by the prism. The "prism" here in Creation is regarded as the will of the Supreme Being.

In the primary manifestation, the three qualities "emerge" in their pure forms. Satya at this stage is Shudha Satya - Satva in its pristine purity, which is also known as Maya. To put it very crudely and in the most unphilosophical language, Maya is the mirror in which the Transcendental Being - Brahman, is reflected as the Cosmic Deity - Ishvara. The Impersonal becomes Personal. Maya it is that links the universe with the Supreme Being. If Maya veils the Reality, it also serves as a channel for the descent of the

Divine. Only Ishvara or God-as-a-Person can understand Maya: for Maya is His causal body.

Illustrating the difficulty of explaining Maya, Ernest Holmes says in his "Science of Mind":

"There is Spirit - or this Invisible Cause - and nothing, out of which all things are to be made. Now, Spirit plus nothing leaves Spirit only. Hence, there is One Original Cause and nothing, out of which we are made. In other words,

we are made from this Thing. That is why we are called the Son of God. We now know that this is what we are - because we could not be anything else - but we do not know how much of this we are."

The last clause is slippery. If the Spirit alone exists, how can it be even conceived of as a limited Thing? What is that Limiting agent? If nothing existed except the Spirit, is this limiting agent something or nothing? If nothing limits the Spirit, then what is the significance of enquiring "how much of this we are"? Yet, inwardly and a-logically we understand and realise the meaning of Earnest Holmes' words.

Let us get back to the story of evolution.

This Shudda Satva mixes with the three Qualities again in the second stage. The consequence is the manifestation of the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra. The Satvic portion of the Shuddha Satva manifests as Vishnu the Protector, the Rajasic portion as Brahma the Creator, and the Tamasic portion as Rudra the redeemer. Once again let us remind ourselves that they are all participants in pure Satva, not to be confused with the inferior forms of the manifestation of the three Qualities which we shall detail below. Because they are all of Shuddha Satva, spiritual aspirants adore them, as the nearest they call get to the Supreme Being.

Back to the first step! The pure Rajas of Mula Prakriti is also known as Malina Satva - un-pure Satva, in contrast to Shuddha Satva - pure Satya. Malina Satva is also known as Avidya or ignorance. Whereas Maya relates to the cosmos, Avidya is individualistic. Maya veils - Avidya limits. Maya causes the manifestation of the Supreme Personal God. Avidya causes individuality. It is the causal body of the Jiva or the individual soul. Incidentally, if the Jiva is able to shake off Avidya, it will identify itself with the Ishvara or Personal God, who understands what Maya is - and hence will realise Brahman.

The individual soul is afflicted by Avidya - ignorance, whereas Ishvara has Maya. Avidya is like the limitation of our eye-sight. We cannot see anything except the gross externals. It is a defect - a limitation. It is due to Tamas and Rajas. A man of Satvic vision will perceive that which is close to Truth - something like an X-ray or the microscopic sight, which perceives the World as vibrant atoms.

Maya is pure Satva - Shuddha Satya. There it is illusion like the blueness of the sky. There is no defect or limitation implied here. The Supreme Being has the manifestability of His Nature inherent in Him. It is latent like salt in seawater. Salt is the nature of seawater. It is not an addition but is natural. When this salt is isolated - made manifest, preserved and dissolved, again it is like creation, preservation and destruction - functions involving the nature of

salt water - hence touched by Maya. That is the Trinity - Creator Brahma, Preserver Vishnu, and a Redeemer Siva. The only distinction is that this takes place in Him, unlike salt which, when manufactured, is different from sea water and outside it.

If Brahman can be compared to the clear sky with water-vapour latent in it, Ishvara is like the cloud caused by certain atmospheric disturbances - equal to maya, and the droplet of water that is ready to fall caused by condensation of molecules of water - equal to Avidya, is Jiva or the individual soul.

It is because both Ishvara and Jiva are the first evolutes - one from the Satvic and the other from the Rajasic stream, of the Root-Nature - of Brahman, that often the individual soul is eulogised as Ishvara. Rajas is denser than Satva, and opaque. Satva is clear and transparent. Hence it is said that Ishvara, though within the cosmic transparent veil of Maya, is not subject to it, Jiva is prevented from true vision by the thick veil of dense Rajasic Avidya. It is also worth remembering that Jiva is not Tamasic at all: it is never inert, stupid or lifeless. It is ever dynamic Jiving soul. Even the Avidya does not affect its essential nature which is, of course, the main saving feature in our philosophy as otherwise, any attempt at liberating ourselves from bondage would be meaningless.

Tamas is the dark side of the Divine Nature. It is comparable to the smoke in the fire-analogy. Smoke is apparently born of fire and yet is very different in its nature and is able to hide the light of fire. Tamas is the dark stream of the Root Nature of Brahman. It has two "powers". It veils - Avarana-shakti. It disturbs - Vikshepa shakti. The former (veiling power) is the mischief-maker. On account of it, man fails to perceive the Self within and busies himself with the external world of physical matter. The latter (disturbing power) is responsible for the creation of the world of physical matter.

In the divine Root-Nature, even the root elements have not begun to manifest themselves. All matter is in its primary state - we might presume that it was one cosmic mass of hydrogen atoms. It is Tamas that disturbs this quiescent state of affairs. Under the pressure of this disturbance the hydrogen atoms collide with one another, forming the heavier elements plus energy - Prana.

Our philosophers have described this process elaborately and scientifically. The first evolute of the Tamasic part is akasha - space. Whether there is an element called "ether" or space is only a mental concept is not important to our present discussion. There is something which is able to contain the physical universe, in which the other elements function - we call it space. This was the first evolute. When the first atoms stirred in it, this movement was called "air". When in this motion, the primary atoms collided to make more and more complex atoms fire was produced; hydrogen and oxygen combined

to form water at the same time releasing a lot of energy. The forces of attraction and repulsion brought the different molecules together and the earth-element was formed. Thus were born the four elements - air, fire, water and earth, after space was conceived of.

These elements in their turn were acted upon by the three Qualities of Nature. Out of the Satvic part of these elements were fashioned the five organs of knowledge: ear - from space, skin or the sense of touch - from air, sight - from fire, the sense of taste - from water, and the sense of smell - from the earth.

Visualise these elements as a square. Divide this square vertically into five; these are the five elements individually. Now divide them into three horizontally. Now you have the three Qualities. You have the individual senses of knowledge on the top row. Each one represents a particular sense: Hearing - space, touch - air, sight - fire, taste - water, and smell - earth. If you can now ignore the vertical lines in that top row, the sum-total of the whole lot constitutes what is known as the antahkarana - the inner instrument, which is composed of the manas - mind, chitta - unconscious, buddhi - intellect, and ahamkara - egoity.

The next set of five in the middle row represents the Rajasic part of the five elements. Out of them are fashioned the five organs of action: the organ of speech - space, hands - air, feet - fire, generative organ - water, and anus - earth. If here again you ignore the vertical lines and take the second group together, the collective totality of the Rajasic part gives rise to Prana.

The last group - the third horizontal section, are the five elements themselves which now undergo a series of modifications by mixing with others and form the earth, water, fire and air that we know of - which are not pure but contain a proportion of the other elements.

It is because the sense-organs and the elements that constitute the universe are born of the same original category that they react upon each other.

The Bhagavatham puts these inspiring words into the mouth of Lord Krishna: "Time, the Self, the Scripture, the world, nature and Dharma, are the various names by which I am called when the equilibrium of the three qualities is disturbed or they are agitated." (XI. 10/34)

Thus we are again and again reminded by our sages and saints that One alone is real and that it is the ignorant ego that veils the Reality. Says the Bhagavatham (XII. 4/32): "Just as a cloud, though born of the sun and revealed by the sun, prevents the eye, which is a part of the sun, from beholding the sun, so does the ego which had its source in Brahman and is

illuminated by Brahman, stand in the way of the Jiva, a particle of Brahman,
realising Brahman which is the same as the Jiva,

6. DIRECT EXPERIENCE

There are people who are satisfied with that much. They have arrived at the rational conclusion that Brahman is infinite and that the Jiva is Brahman. The sage of Self-realisation however, reminds them that such intellectual assent is next to nothing. One of the Krishna Lilas - playful pranks of the boy Krishna, illustrates this. It is the story that Krishna, when he was young, liked to steal butter.

Everyone knows that butter is in every drop of milk. But that is not like having an ounce of butter! Glibly saying "Brahman is all this ' is useless. The seeker must come into touch with a man of practical wisdom - just as curd is added to the milk. Now the milk is curdled. The disciple hears the truth from the lips of the master. This truth activates the consciousness of the Self within the heart of the disciple. The milk turns into curd - not so fluid and nebulous, but still not butter. Curdling is like reflection over the truth heard from the Guru's lips. The truth is not so nebulous now, but still it is not actual direct realisation. The disciple now goes into deep contemplation, Nidhidhyasana. The curd has to be churned nicely. Nidhidhyasana leads to

Self-realisation. The churning brings out the butter which floats on the curd. This is what is most pleasing to the Lord. And, now there is wisdom and humour in the story: the Lord does not wait for this seeker to come to Him, but "steals" the disciple's heart. In other words, He comes to the seeker. This butter of Self knowledge is not an intellectual affair nor a belief nor faith, but direct, immediate experience.

The process by which this experience is attained is known as Atma-Vichara or Brahma Vichara. Vichara is akin to contemplation which follows deep reflection over the Guru's words. This eventually leads the disciple to the direct apprehension of Brahman or the Ultimate Reality. His mind is controlled and intellect transcended not so much by the Raja Yogic processes of Asana, Pranayama, etc., but by a keen analysis by which he discards all illusions and delusions, and seeks, finds and holds on to the Reality - Brahman. At this stage - which is a very very high one, the mind itself is transformed (so to say) into Brahman and there prevails in him the Brahmakaravritti, All other thought-waves are overwhelmed by the one thought-wave of Brahman. But it ceases to be a wave. It is the ocean itself. It would be true to say that his mind and his whole being is transformed into Brahman. He rests in the Absolute.

On the surface it looks as though the seeker adopts the process of elimination - "of negating the not-Self and holding on to the Self" - which has given rise to all sorts of misunderstandings and unmerited criticisms. Indian philosophy has thus come to be regarded as a world-and-life negating one! What is

negated is not the substance, but the appearance. It is the appearance that tantalises and enslaves. The Truth shall make us free!

One of the greatest sages of India - Yajnavalkya, gives us the formula - neti-neti - not this, not this. It is wise not to forget that this formula was evolved by one of the greatest intellectuals of the time who enjoyed great fame in the court of King Janaka and hence had great wealth, too. He had two wives. All this should not be misinterpreted as allusion to his worldliness. The sage who adopted this neti-neti formula did not starve himself to death; the body was an infallible instrument with which to find the Truth. While any affirmative statement concerning the supreme Truth might land us in another department of untruth, this illusion or appearance-negating approach must lead us to the Truth - sooner or later. We have no business to halt at a wayside station. It has to be firmly and resolutely negated with the same formula.

With the help of the neti-neti doctrine we can also find the subtle middle path in our life, though that is not its main purpose. The pleasure seeking nature of the mind can be effectively curbed by enquiring into the validity of the pleasure-experience: "The pleasure does not lie in the object, but in the subjective experience ... " and the resulting self-awareness will remove the mental excitement, though the object may yet be allowed to play its part in our physical life. When the martyr-complex manifests itself and there is a desire to shine as an ascetic - the other extreme where the ego lies in wait, the same axe of the neti-neti may be applied: "Salvation does not lie in feeding the ego with the rejection of this piece of unreality! The rejecting ego is unreal ... " Thus this two-pronged attack will eventually corner the ego; and it is significant that the doctrine is not the neti doctrine, but the neti-neti doctrine, the word not - this being repeated twice, to indicate that it should not lead us from one extreme to the other. Whereas one will prevent indulgence, the other will save us from dry asceticism. Since there is no "positive" concept to rest on, the quest for Truth will be eternal and will find its fulfilment only in the Truth.

But let us not forget that the main purpose of this great formula is to lead us to the direct experience of the Reality, not to help us in our domestic or psychological problems. The biased critic will do well to remember that the sage who boldly asserted that the Self alone existed was however teaching his wife, Maitreyi. The sage combines many paradoxes in his life. He is about to renounce the world and take to the homeless, penniless, mendicant life. Yet, he addresses his wife in very fond terms, "O my dear" , "O my beloved". But he does not let her forget that, "It is not for the sake of the husband, my beloved, that the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self". And what is the Self? " ... but when for the illumined soul the all is dissolved in the Self, who is there to be seen by whom, who is there to be smelt by whom, who is there to be heard by whom, who is there to be spoken to by whom, who is there to be

thought of by whom, who is there to be known by whom? Ah, Maitreyi, my beloved, the Intelligence which reveals all - by what shall it be revealed? By whom shall the Knower be known? The Self is described as "not this, not this".

You are welcome to use this for self disciplining. A similar method was prescribed by Ramana Maharshi - that of enquiring "Who am I?" and thus tracing all desires, emotions, sinful tendencies, cravings and doubts to their own fountain-source, viz., ignorance "In whom do these arise? Who am I?" But it is sheer ignorance to read a world - and life-negating philosophy in this formula. The great Ramana Maharshi himself set an example by lending a helping hand in the most commonplace activities in the Ashram-kitchen.

The invariable sequel to this not-this-not method is that it leads our consciousness inward. There have been philosophers in India who have compared the human personality - physical, vital and mental, to a universe-in-miniature - microcosm, in every detail similar to the universe - macrocosm. They believe therefore that an analysis of this microcosm will reveal the truth about the macrocosm, too. Science today supports this view. There have been others who have declared that the external reality is but a projection of one's own personality; these subjective idealists go to the extent of suggesting that the world "outside" exists in the Mind, within oneself! In any case, the objects of the external universe are inert and neutral, and each one gives them some kind of value in accordance with the desires, needs and fears in oneself. If not wholly, at least to a great extent the external universe is a projection of the inner Self. Psychology supports this view in no small measure.

The seeker, therefore, turns the searchlight of analysis within himself, with the key question "Who am I" which is the same as "What is the Self" or "What is Truth?" For, within oneself, this "I" has continued to be the unchanging reality through changing periods of existence and changing states of mind and awareness. Its analysis and understanding should eventually lead us to the direct experience of the Unchanging Reality, which is either the Cosmic "I" or something which is within it as its own substratum.

It is here that the neti-neti doctrine is of invaluable help. I have seen several seekers adopting this path who are quite satisfied with the results they have achieved! They have studied Vedantic books. The answers to their questions are given there, ready-made. Their own intellect provides the answers. Immediately they raise the question "Who am I?" "I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am not the causal body, etc., etc. I am the Immortal Self." This is a set of words. Whereas the same seeker would not be satisfied with the word sugar written on a piece of paper to sweeten his tea, he expects this word to satisfy his spiritual thirst! No. The answer might not (should not) come from

within in the form of a set of words, but it should be actually experienced as a revelation.

There is this difference between the scientist and spiritual seeker. The former gropes in the dark and, by trial and error, discovers the truth. His successors in the field do not even have to repeat the procedure, but directly build on his conclusions. The spiritual seeker walks a chartered path - the Yoga, under the guidance of a Master who has trodden that path, but has to repeat the same procedure as the Guru before him. The Master has discovered the answer to the question "Who am I" and recorded his discoveries in a book. These discoveries might occupy less than a printed page and might take less than three minutes to read; but the printed page serves no better than a map or a nautical chart. Reading it, is in no way equal to the actual voyage which is the most important adventure in the life of the seeker. He should conduct the same experiments within himself, he should impose on himself the same disciplines, he should rediscover the truth for himself. The chart will guide him here and the Master will assist him. But they should never substitute direct immediate and intimate inner experience.

7. SELF-ANALYSIS

In what follows, the "seeds of analysis" are planted in the disciple by the Guru or the Master. Two methods are found in the Upanishads. In the first, the Master provides the clue, a positive concept, leaving it to the disciple to experience it. In the second, which is even more remarkable for its validity, the Master simply prods the disciple to go deeper and deeper into meditation, to purify his heart and mind by "tapas" - asceticism, austerity, self-purification, burning of impurities. The Master repeatedly proclaims "tapo brahma" - this Tapas is Brahman. The student returning to the Master for "verification" was obviously intended to prevent him from going completely astray. About this later.

When the Master commands the disciple to meditate on the Self, the "raw" recruit immediately begins to enquire "Who am I". The first thing that stands out in his mind is the "solid reality" of the physical body. He analyses the physical body. It is composed of the five elements: earth - chemicals, water, fire - heat, air, and space - in as much as it exists in space. It has seven primary essences - Saptadhatu, viz., chyle, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow and the procreative factor. None of these can obviously be regarded as the Self. All these components of the physical body are inert in themselves and are apparently factors needed merely for the maintenance of the physical body. "I am certainly not the physical body", concludes the aspirant, "but I merely dwell in it and identify myself with it during my tenancy. If my hands and legs are cut off, I will not undergo any diminution thereby. I take the blood or other organ to be part of me only so long as they are in the body with which I identify myself. The moment they are cast out, I turn my face away in disgust from them and I do not even like to touch them."

Moreover, the body undergoes various changes, six of which are important, viz., birth, existence, growth, change, decay and death or decomposition. "I am obviously distinct from these, for, as pointed out in the previous paragraph, I am distinct and different from the body."

The Guru or the Master then explains to the disciple the "seven links of the chain of world experience", which in the words of Gurudev Sivananda (Vedanta for Beginners) are:

From ignorance - ajnana, non-discrimination - aviveka is born. From non-discrimination between the Real and the unreal, egoism - ahamkara is born. From egoism, likes and dislikes - raga-dvesha are born, from "likes and dislikes" action - karma arises. And, karma gives rise to the body.

The Master proceeds: "This physical body of yours is the result of your own past actions and is the seat of your enjoyment of pleasure and pain. If you

want to free yourself from the pain of birth and death, destroy ignorance, the root cause of this samsara - world-experience, through the attainment of the Knowledge of the Self."

The disciple now enters the second stage of Self-enquiry - Atma-vichara. No longer does he sit and repeat an empty formula "I am not the body", but it is a living experience with him now. He goes deeper and deeper within; he comes face to face with the subtle body. This subtle body is composed of nineteen principles, viz., the five organs of knowledge, the five organs of action, the five vital airs, the mind, the intellect, the unconscious, and the ego. He realises that it is these subtle principles that were using the physical body, and that it is the subtle body that really experienced pleasure and pain.

Yet, he realises that he is not anyone of these nineteen principles, for the Self pervades them all. Whereas the sense of sight is confined to the faculty of seeing, the Self is the common substratum for all the others, too. He discovers that the one unmistakable factor is that, unlike the components of the physical body (which are inert and insentient), sentience is the characteristic of all the components of the subtle body. There is an intelligent organisation. That intelligence is one, hence such perfect co-ordination. And a yet that intelligence seems to be divided into so many different fragments. The one seems to be divided into the nineteen factors and yet, by virtue of the fact that it is able to superintend them, has not undergone any real transformation.

The disciple returns to the Master with this analysis. He admits "I do not know what is the cause of this apparent diversity." The Master explains: "The cause is hidden in the three words you uttered, viz - do not know". This beginningless ignorance is the cause and hence it is said to be the causal body. Its existence can only be inferred from the state of deep sleep when you are unaware of the gross and the subtle bodies and when you rest in the causal body. You then identify yourself with the causal body and say "I did not know anything; I slept soundly. So long as this ignorance lasts it will continue to feed the subtle body and keep it alive and the subtle body it is that transmigrates., making and breaking one physical body after another."

The next step is a very hard one: that of crossing this void of ignorance. It is possible only by the Grace of God and Guru. It involves "being awake in deep sleep." If this puzzles you, it is meant to. And, it is as difficult as that. Yet it is not impossible. Persistent effort and dispassion and other virtues will enable us to cross this void too, and realise that the Self is always like a king - distinct from the body, organs, vital breaths, mind, intellect, ego and Nature, - the Witness of their attributes."

8. THE FIVE SHEATHS

Even in this Self-enquiry many methods are suggested. This is the characteristic of the Indian sage, which again and again asserts itself in India philosophy and religion. Many methods are suggested and even within those methods several variations are known: It is the Indian sage alone who has clearly realised that ultimately each seeker has to find his own private path which is suited to his temperament and endowment.

Again, the earnest seeker - especially if he devotes all his time to the spiritual quest - is vexed with a sort of inertia overcoming his spiritual effort very often in his Yoga-practice. The mind, accustomed to sense-pleasure and to a slavish obedience to sense-cravings, which it mistakes to be freedom to do what it likes - though it amounts to what the sense-organ likes, rebels against any restraint imposed upon it. At the least suggestion of an obstacle it "gives up" and wails: "Oh, this is impossible". Since in the initial stages, the seeker needs the active help of the mind, he finds that it is impossible to proceed any further. It is then that an alternative method comes in extremely handy.

The "Path of the Five Sheaths" is given in the Taittiriya Upanishad. It is thus graphically portrayed in the Upanishad.

Bhrigu approaches Varuna and humbly asks: "Sir, teach me Brahman." Varuna gives a rather descriptive answer: "He from whom all being are born, in whom they live being born, and to whom at death they return - seek to know him. He is Brahman." The method suggested was tapas and meditation. .

Bhrigu led an austere life, practised Tapas and meditation. When the heart was thus purified and the mind steadied, he felt the answer within him: "Food is Brahman. For all beings are born of food. Once born, they survive by consuming food. And into food they enter after death." The last sentence is clever and it is a statement of scientific truth. The whole para refers to the physical body. All the elements of the physical body are drawn from the earth; and where did the earth get it from? - from the carcasses that were returned to the earth! It is an extraordinarily scientific thought discovered without the use of laboratory methods by a mystic student. But he was not satisfied with it. Matter - food, by itself is inert. Someone or something composes it into a body and enters into that body, and later leaves the body so that it decomposes and returns to its own source. The body is not Brahman, but something within, perhaps. And so he returns to the Master with the same prayer: "Sir, teach me Brahman."

A hidden teaching here should not escape our notice. The student is never disheartened and never blames the Guru for not properly instructing him.

But the second time, the Master does not directly instruct him at all. He merely replies: "Know Brahman by askesis and meditation. Tapas - austerity and/or meditation, is Brahman." This is a puzzling statement. It is the same neti-neti doctrine worded differently. Tapas is like fire. This fire itself is Brahman or the Supreme Self. It will burn down the forest of ignorance. Having done that, it will disappear! Of course, Tapas is not Brahman. But when it is practised sincerely, Brahman will be revealed. Tapas here performs the function of the neti-neti formula in the previous method. If one does not grasp this truth, one might indulge in all sorts of monstrous practices in the name of Tapas and proceed no further than that.

Bhrigu practised Tapas, meditated, and it appeared to him that Prana - the life-force, was Brahman, the Truth. Matter had been sublimated into energy. This young student again forestalled modern science and discovered that matter and energy are interchangeable factors. According to Bhrigu at that stage, a being could be said to be born only when there is life in it, it exists on account of the life-force, and naturally returns to the life-force - for, scientifically, energy is indestructible. This energy itself brings the molecules of matter - food, together; this energy extracts fresh energy from the food that is eaten and at death this energy returns to its own source.

Bhrigu here refers to the Pranamaya Kosha - the vital sheath. It is comprised of the life-force and the five organs of action. The life-force itself is called by ten different names in accordance with the functions it performs. Just as the same electric power performs different - often contradictory, functions, the same life-force performs different functions in our organism; and the same Prana is called by different names. There are ten such names: Prana, apana, vyana, udana, samana, naga, kurma, krikara, devadatta and dhananjaya - the first five are called chief pranas and the latter five are called sub-pranas. Inhalation and exhalation are the functions of prana. Excretion is the function of apana. Circulation of blood is the function of vyana. Deglutition is the function of udana: it takes the soul to rest in Brahman (though veiled by ignorance) during deep sleep; it separates the subtle body from the physical body at the time of death. Digestion of food is the function of samana. Belching, hiccough, eructation and vomiting are the functions of naga. Closing and opening of the eyelids are the functions of kurma. Causing of hunger is the function of krikara. Yawning is the function of devadatta. Nourishing the body, decomposition of the body after death and ejection of the child out of the womb in women are the functions of dhananjaya. According to another classification: prana, when it is gross, performs physiological functions - and when it is subtle, generates thought. Prana is the link between physiology and psychology.

What a brilliant, clear-cut and precise description of the physiological functions! And yet how uncharitable the "modern world" rejected its own scientific ancestors! Yes, the Indian sage was unscientific for two reasons: (a) his conclusions, far from being invalid, have yet to be proved by modern science, and (b) he did not find it necessary to adopt the elementary methods of laboratory-experimentation and arbitrary "proving" on which modern science relies. With regard to (b), let me quote here what Dr. Einstein is reported to have said: "Physics is a logical system of thought in a state of evolution. Its basis cannot be obtained by experiment and experience. Its progress depends on free invention. I haven't the faintest doubt that I am right." His own famous theory of relativity was not laboratory-born. And, what he calls "free invention" here is intuition in terms of Yoga.

To return to Bhrigu. He approached Varuna again with the same question: "Sir, teach me Brahman". He was obviously not quite satisfied with his discovery. All these various functions of energy or life-force, implied some sort of a co-ordinating and controlling intelligence apart from them. The Master quietly repeated his old commandment: 'Practice tapas. Tapa is Brahman.' And so, back to service of the preceptor and meditation.

"Ah, mind is the intelligence that co-ordinates and controls the Prana and all its manifold functions. Mind is Brahman." - came the answer. The statement "from mind all beings are born, by mind are they sustained, and into mind all beings enter" can be interpreted in different ways. Thought is at the back of these three processes. And, these three events exist in our thought only. Here Bhrigu refers to the Manomaya Kosha (the mind sheath) which consists of the mind which presides over the sensory and motor functions of the body and chitta or the unconscious with the five sense organs of knowledge. Still he is not satisfied. The thoughts may be floating around, but where is the Self in all this confusion? Bhrigu returns to the Master with the same old question and surprisingly receives the same answer. Wonderful is the disciple's obedient perseverance. He continues his quest. Deeper within, closer to the core of Truth is "the intelligence sheath." Mind itself is its servant. What the Buddhi or the discriminating intelligence decides is followed by the mind. "This intelligence - Vijnana, is obviously Brahman, the Supreme Self,' decides the young seeker Bhrigu. The Vijnanamaya Kosha or the intelligence sheath consists of the intellect and the ego working with the help of the five jnana-indriyas or the sense-organs of knowledge. There is yet a shadow of doubt! The ego is, after all, a finite being. The finite being exists in something else which includes all such finite beings within its omnipresence.

When in doubt, return to the Master. Armed with the latest discovery, Bhrigu returns to the Master and the same dialogue is repeated, as it turns out to be, for the last time. Bhrigu returns to his Tapas and meditation. The ego slips into its own creator-primordial ignorance. He experienced something akin to

the deep sleep state, but with a ray of self-awareness which made him say: "Bliss is Brahman. From bliss are all beings born, by bliss they are sustained, and into that bliss they enter after death." This is the Anandamaya Kosha - the bliss sheath, which is a modification of cosmic Nature in which there is only the vritti of indefinable ignorance which is yet homogeneous. It is on account of identification with this vritti or mental modification that the individuals experience bliss - absence of all anxieties and pains, during deep sleep, and at the time of experiencing the effect of a pious deed.

The path of Self-enquiry is chartered only up to this landmark. Beyond this, as we saw in the previous lesson, is the realm of the Atman where expressions have no admission.

The Upanishad which gives us this path, is generous enough to provide a few positive crutches to use in our meditations! But, obviously, it would be idle to lean too heavily on them for then we would have completely neglected the fundamental principle of the enquiry, and the Master will have sternly to remind us that "tapas is Brahman, give up everything and meditate". Yet if we bear this caution in mind, the following thought-forms will be of great help: Brahman is to be meditated upon as the 'Source of all thought and life and action. He is the splendor in wealth, he is the light in the stars. He is all things. Let a man meditate upon Brahman as support, and he will be supported. Let him meditate upon Brahman as greatness, and he will be endowed with intellectual power. Let him meditate upon Brahman as adoration, and he will be adored. Let him worship Brahman as Brahman, and he will become Brahman.'

Tapas which implies 'burning of all impurities within', when coupled with this positive meditation will take the aspirant beyond the void of Anandamaya Kosha or the bliss sheath, and he will shine as the sage of Self-realisation.

We should beware of trying to ascend this ladder with the help of the intellect. It is futile; it may at best give rise to intellectual perversion. It is easy, with the help of logic and reason; to assert "I am not the body"; but it is difficult to experience this state. Who cannot utter the great philosophical truth, comfortably, seated in an arm-chair, But, in a situation in which the greatest Indian sage Jada Bharata (after whom India is named "Bharat") found himself, will such philosophy guide us? While this great sage was roaming the country, he came across a king being carried in a palanquin. The bearers needed assistance and so asked the sage to join them. When the compassionate sage (who readily did so) tried again and again to avoid trampling to insects, the palanquin (with its royal contents) shook uncomfortably. The angry monarch scolded the sage who politely reminded him that the Self is not the body!

However, if the enquiry is pursued deligently and with the invariable help of ascesis and meditation, it will yield a rich harvest of wisdom and understanding of the nature of the five sheaths and their interrelation with the Qualities of Nature - Guna. The physical body is characterised by Tamas - inertia, grossness. The vital sheath is characterised by Rajas - activity. The mind sheath is characterised by a mixture of Satva - light and Tamas. The intelligence sheath is characterised by Satva mixed with Rajas. The bliss sheath is full of Satva which, however, is not pure but of the second-grade - malina satva.

Again, during the course of this enquiry, you discover that all the things with which you have habitually identified yourself, have really nothing to do with you. When you realise "I am not the body", you rise above its various states, viz.; birth, existence, growth, decay, change and death. If you had really and truly practised the Yoga of the Upanishad, you will actually stand as a witness to the events pertaining to the physical body. If you feel "This house is mine, and I break it", you will be hurt. If you sell it, and then I break it, you will perhaps be amused. The same feeling you must have when something happens to this body! You must feel towards it as you feel towards the wall of this house - when it is demolished, you do not feel any pain at all. Then you realise that hunger and thirst as also the experience of heat and cold pertain to the vital sheath and not to the Self; they will not torment you. You will realise that faculties of thinking and doubting, anger, lust, exhilaration, depression, and delusion are the modes of the mind, and have nothing to do with the Self. All these will come under your control and you will not be swayed by them. You will realise that discrimination and decision as also the ideas "I do " and "I enjoy or suffer" belong to the intelligence sheath and not to the Self. You will be able to overcome them.

At the same time an inner Awareness grows. Stage by stage, the body, the vital force, the mind, and the intelligence, becomes objects of our consiousness, and we become aware of them. The advantage is immeasurable, for this awareness bring them under our effective control. None of the functions of these five sheaths may at once stop; but their oppression will disappear.

The "Who am I?" enquiry generally stops with the anandamaya kosha - the bliss sheath, for after this there is no one to question! The individualised, circumscribed intelligence and the ego have been transcended, and there is only a thin veil of ignorance covering the Reality. The individual - the individuality rather, which is a product of this ignorance is lost in this sheath; but if Tapas and meditation had been practised with diligence and God's Grace earned, the Reality will reveal itself at this stage.

There is this element of risk in this path: if one does not have a proper guide and if one is not sincere, one may arrive at the dead-end of nihilism. The

insincerity merited no better reward! So, do not blame the technique. I have seen at least one person, lost in the labyrinth of negation, without the aid of an enlightened teacher or a positive ideal. Now it is almost impossible to show him that he is in a void, in a state of foolish complacency and delusion.

The supreme Truth can be approached either way - positively or negatively. The Truth can be realised by all-inclusive expansion or appearance negating contraction. Therefore, the sage in the Mandukya Upanished, after describing the Self through a formidable series of negations - to emphasise that the Self is not the waking, dreaming or deep-sleep ego, adds a few positive concepts, in order to prevent us from slipping into abysmal void.

When you take a cosmic view, there is unity. When you trace everything down to the minutest sub-atom, there is unity again. It is only in between that there is this illusion of diversity. Look at the pyramid from a great distance - it is one mass. Analyse it very minutely - it is all a mass of mud. It is only when you look at it with the binoculars - Maya, or from nearly that you see the bricks and the steps.

We see this diversity during our waking state. The objects are real to us then. But are they? For, in another state of consciousness, viz., the dreaming state, we experience the same objects in a different way and it is common knowledge that the dream-objects are unreal creations of our mind. During the course of the dream, however, those objects are real; and though the objects - like tiger, thief, etc. are unreal, they are capable of producing real consequences - like perspiration and palpitation of the heart. In deep sleep there is neither a world outside - as in the waking state, nor a world inside - as in the dream state, but there is a homogeneity - i.e., complete absence of diversity.

Which one is real? When am I close to the Reality - when I am awake and experience a world outside, when I am dreaming a world within, or when I am asleep in the couch of homogeneous ignorance? The sage discerns that underneath these three there is an unmodified Awareness which exists even during deep sleep, though veiled, and which enables you to say "I slept soundly, I was peaceful and happy." None of the three states is real, but the underlying Awareness which is experienced in and as Itself in the Fourth State - Turiya, Super-consciousness of Samadhi, is alone real.

The realisation of That is Liberation or Moksha, the end of all knowledge - Vedanta, the goal of all evolution.

9. REALISATION

This realisation is embodied in the four Great Utterances - Mabavakhyas. The first one, viz., Prajnanam Brahma, gives the widest definition (if it could be called a definition) of the Absolute that it is Consciousness Absolute, Consciousness Itself, undifferentiated by qualities and attributes. The second one, viz., Tat Tvam Asi - That thou art, is regarded as Upadesa-Vakya - Instruction. The Master indicates that the Self of the disciple is the Truth and declares "That thou art", and hence distinct from the three bodies, five sheaths, etc., discussed in the preceding pages. The third one, viz., Aham Brahma Asmi - I am Brahman, is the disciple's response, an affirmation of his realisation - not intellectual apprehension. The fourth Utterance is Ayam Atma Brahma - this Self is Brahman.

These great utterances are wholly incomprehensible to an unpurified understanding. That is one of the reasons why they were kept a closed secret to be transmitted by an enlightened Master to a qualified aspirant. When the student affirms "I am Brahman", it is not the common ego that says this, but some other "I". J. Krishnamurthi defines the "I" as the inner urge to continuity for permanency. It is the 'I' that continues in all the three states of consciousness, through all the stages of life. Even the expression "I may die any movement" is similar to "The King of England is dead, long live the King". If it is possible for us to say "I am dead", it will only mean that "I am here now". What happens when this I-consciousness is annihilated, as we are told will happen when we realise Brahman, the Supreme Self? The 'urge' for immortality vanishes. And, why not? For, immortality has been attained. Therefore, while the "I" is the inner urge to immortality, its "destruction" is the attainment of immortality.

Words and words! And we are trying to "measure the immeasurable in words" - which Lord Buddha forbade. The "I" is not destroyed but fulfilled. The 'I' realises that it is Brahman. Not that it was not so before! The scales of ignorance which led the "I" to identify itself with the little personality drop away. The Shell is broken. But nothing is lost. Immortality is gained because mortality was ever illusory. Consciousness is gained because ignorance had no real existence. Time, space and causality or materiality are transcended because they were only imaginary. Moksha - liberation is attained because its opposite bondage was never true.

We merely wake up from a long dream of a mixture of good and bad experiences, none of which are true now, but which once haunted us. Limited life continues on account of the past momentum. The sage or Self-realisation does not provide any further motive-power. He is desireless, egoless and free from delusion. He is a Jivanmukta - liberated, though yet living. The liberation is not from the need to feed the body on or from the privilege to

think a thought. Hunger and thirst are the characteristics of prana; well, there is food and drink - prana may feed on them. Thinking is the dharma (nature or characteristics) of the mind; let thoughts arise in it. But the sage is no more involved in their activities. How does one distinguish the sage from the layman, then? Lord Krishna provides the answer in the Bhagavad Gita: there is this vital difference between the two - the worldly man is intensely attached to the action and their fruits, whereas the sage is unattached, though he might also perform the same sort of actions. The motor-car careers down a slope without a drop of petrol in the tank. The past momentum and the slope help it for a time, but soon it comes to a standstill. The body reaches the stage when it is time for the elements to be decomposed! The end is thus beautifully described in the wonderful book "The Gospel of the Holy Twelve" - a revolutionary translation of the New Testament: "From the Eternal they flow, to the Eternal they return. The spirit to Spirit, soul to Soul, mind to Mind, sense to Sense, life to Life, form to Form, dust to Dust". All the capitalised words are aspects of the divine which is the Reality, the individualised aspects are (or were) only the ignorance-born phantasms which merge, disappear into, become one with (all imperfect expressions!) the Absolute. The Indian scriptures declare: "He does not depart from here - his vital airs are absorbed here itself." There is no "he" any more to depart and to enter some other realm or body. Only He - the Lord remains as the sole Reality. The sage has attained to Videhamukti - liberation in a disembodied state, because the embodiment has come to an end.

Self-realisation or Moksha - liberation is possible - let us never forget, only by the Grace of God. This fact is emphasised in the Katha Upanishad. We should negate all that is not Self and wait. If there is anxiety in our heart even for Self-realisation, if 'I' am (is) restlessly eager to realise God, then obviously there is something wrong somewhere and I am not fit for it. The 'I' is still strong in ignorance. It must be eagerly prepared to negate itself and one of the surest signs of such preparedness is total equanimity or patience.

To emphasise this beyond all doubt, Katha Upanishad gives us a puzzling statement: we shall not even know if we have realised Self or not. One who says he has, has not! The sun is unaware of Light, since he is unaware of darkness only others know who know duality. Others might - if they are themselves qualified, recognise the characteristics of the sage of Self-realisation - and even they only if their own time for liberation has arrived.

The Grace of God alone can enable us to cross the void or the deep sleep state. Vedanta says that Isvara is the sum-totality of the souls in deep sleep state. He is the Being so to say who knows who experiences the Bliss of deep sleep. Hence, He alone is capable of enabling us to cross this deep chasm.

He who crosses this and becomes one with Him, is liberated from all karmas which are the products of ignorance. If he remains established in that state till the body falls, he attains Brahma Nirvana (vide Bhagavad Gita Chap. II). The story of Jada Bharata warns us that we shall not relax our vigilance till the very last moment of the present incarnation. A slip at the last moment landed the great sage in two extra incarnations.

In all this process we have not been able to discover if society derives any benefit from the Jnana Yogi. He may not take active part in the activities of the world. But he works on a different plane. By mere "Wish" He brings about the spiritual elevation of people. He himself is a shining example and witness of a Higher Reality than the world. He is the channel through which God's Light and Grace reach mankind. His very presence is a blessing unto humanity. The sage is free. He may take part in the activities of the world or he may seclude himself in a cave and remain absorbed in Super-consciousness. Mankind has need for both and both of them serve the world. The sun, though far and distant from us and not involved in worldly activities, illumines the whole world and gives us life. But we still have need for electric lamps in dark rooms and also at night. The sage in a cave is like the sun: by His mere presence He illumines all. The sage nearer at hand, actively engaged in the world, illumines the dark corners of our inside.

10. THE SAGE

What are the signs by which we shall recognise the sage or the Man of Enlightenment?

He enjoys cosmic consciousness. It is not merely the self-consciousness of the human being nor the simple consciousness of the animal, but cosmic consciousness. He sees the world as we see a mirage or an illusory patch of water on the road when we know that there has been no rain to cause that pool and which we know to be an optical illusion. He sees it - but is conscious of the underlying Truth or Reality, viz., the Supreme Being. Whatever He sees is to Him a transformation of the Self, so to say. He sees diversity, but recognises the Unity. We can see the reflection of the sun in many ways, but we know that it is only one sun being reflected in different media. He knows that the forms, of the tree, animal, stone and human being are all false appearances, and therefore he does not get attached to them. He is not enamoured of them. He does not hate anything. Nor does He fear anything. They are all shadows, the real Substance is the Cosmic Being. His mind is totally undisturbed by desires and cravings.

The sage is full of Satva and is therefore extremely good. He has complete control over His mind. He does not refuse to engage Himself in constructive, self-sacrificing service. When the unqualified aspirant is told that the world is illusory and that the Self alone is Real, he is likely to go round knocking everything down and saying, "I am Real, you are unreal." This is far from the truth. It is the Self that dwells in us, in all, that is Real. Its appearance, including our own body and mind, is unreal. The aspirant should learn not to be bothered about his own body and he will arrive at the right understanding concerning other bodies, too. The dictum "The Self alone is real and the world is an illusion" is a double-edged sword and has to be treated carefully. The constant danger of identifying the Reality with one's own body, mind and psyche can be avoided only by engaging ourselves, in the words of my Gurudev, in untiring self-sacrificing, selfless and egoless service, coupled with constant, vigilant Self-enquiry. There are some argue that Karma Yoga is absurd. "Who is to serve whom?" they ask, imitating the famous utterances of sage Yajnavalkya, quoted earlier. Such questioning betrays their ignorant identification of the Self with their own body which they refuse to let serve others. Karma Yoga, on the other hand, is an invaluable aid to and touchstone for Jnana Yoga.

What is spiritual practice for an aspirant becomes svabhava - natural to a sage. The aspirant strives to be selfless, egoless and vigilantly self-aware. The sage is established in that state. When a man has cosmic consciousness, how is it that he breathes through a particular pair of nostrils and puts food into a particular mouth? The scriptures admit the possibility of such a sage losing

body and world-consciousness completely in which case the body is said to last for twenty one days and then to disintegrate. If this happened to everyone who realised the Self, who would be

there to teach us that liberation is possible? Some who become one with the Supreme are "returned" to us as it were, to become Teachers. They are the Great Masters, Prophets, Saviours: Moses, Jesus; Muhammad, Buddha and the great sage and Yogi of India. They are regarded as manifestations of the highest Being. What is returned is not the old personality, but God Himself comes down through their bodies.

They, God in human form, when they come into this mortal world, appear to be mortals. They descend to our level to elevate us to theirs. To do this, the sage of cosmic consciousness assumes 'lesha avidya' - a little ignorance. This ignorance is completely under His control. They know that we are drowning in the sea of ignorance. They who have crossed this sea, jump into it for our sake. They are not cheated by the mirage. But for the sake of those who are still labouring under the illusion, they explain it. A question has often been asked by spiritual aspirants: "As the sage is aware that names and forms do not exist in reality, how is it possible for him to encourage others to engage themselves in worship, etc.?" An example might perhaps illustrate it. When a young son of a wise man is in a state of delirium, he shouts: "Oh! Look at that tiger. I am scared." The wise father does not retort: "Do not be silly; there is no tiger," but he says: "Never mind, here you see I have a big stone. I am throwing it at the tiger and killing it." We are all in a state of delirium in which we feel that the world is very very real; the sage accepts that for our sake and acts, again, for our own sake.

It has been said that the sage may behave like

(a) bala: uninhibited children, pure, artless and simple. Even Jesus declared that unless we are like little children we shall find a place in the Heaven;

(b) unmatta: idiots, entirely unconventional in manners, so that only they who are "ready" will recognise him;

(c) pisacha : goblins! Some act like demented or mad people and their appearance is unpresentable and dirty. They are sages and only they who have real spiritual aspiration will be able to recognise them.

Note: the converse is not true - idiots and mad men are not sages!

Even such sages provide the world by their very presence, not an itching sense-pleasure nor a tempting philosophical ornament but the greatest life-giving Truth "which shall liberate man" from the shackles of ignorance and

delusion, filling his moments with Eternity, life with Light and experiences with Bliss. The characterisation of their behaviour as "bala", "unmatta" and "pisacha," let us bear in mind is done by us! By worldly standards they behave like mad people; they do not conform to our standards - which is their particular mission. They do not act selfishly ; they are unaffected by pain and pleasure - and thus they are out of tune with the world, and, therefore, mad. I am reminded of what a Mauritian friend of mine once said. He was eating in a Parisian restaurant. He asked for water. They began to laugh and the waiter relayed the amusement: "Sir, they are all saying - If man drinks water, what will the cattle drink? Cattle drink water, Sir, and man drinks wine here."

The following are the words in which Lord Krishna extols the very sight of the sages (Bhagavatham X. 84/9-13): "Today our life has been highly blessed and the object of our taking birth has been fully realised. We have been honoured with a visit from the great Masters of Yoga whose sight cannot be easily obtained even by the gods. How can people whose austerities are poor and who see God, cabined in a particular image, gain your sight and touch, of enquiring about your health, etc., and of offering you salutations and worship? ... Holy men purify by their very sight ... The wise wipe off our sins even if we serve them for a few minutes."

Jada Bharata reminds King Rahugana, his royal disciple, that Self-Knowledge is not possible unless one bathes himself in the dust of the holy men's Feet. The same words are used by the greatest devotee of the Lord, Prahlada, who says that even devotion to God does not arise in one's heart without "bathing in the dust of the Feet of the Great Ones," In the Bhagavatham (X/51-54) Muchukunda says: "When the end of birth and death in the case of a soul undergoing transmigration is in sight, then his meeting with some great saint takes place. When there is fellowship with a saint, then alone is engendered devotion to You - God." Saint Tulasidas voices the same opinion in the Ramacharitramanas - the Hindi version of Ramayana: "Viveka - wisdom or discrimination between the Real and the unreal, is not possible without Satsanga or company of the Great Ones or Wise Ones which, in its turn, is not possible without the grace of the Lord."

11. PRACTICAL HINTS

1. The most important thing in this Path is The Four Means - Viveka, Vairagya, Shad-Sampat and Mumukshutwa. Our Master did not insist that an aspirant should wait till he was perfect in these before proceeding further; but they should never be lost sight of.
2. Humbly approach a Guru and serve Him, regarding Him as the Light of God. Till you find your Guru, go on studying holy scriptures and Vedantic texts like the Upanishads.
3. Lead an inner life. Turn all doubts, wrong thoughts and unhealthy emotions, upon themselves - track them down to their own source.
4. Be patient. Be persevering.
5. Do not neglect physical well-being in the deluded idea that the body is unreal. The Upanishads are emphatic that "The Self is not attained by the weak." You should be physically, mentally, morally and spiritually strong. Be regular in the practice of Yoga Asanas, Pranayama - control of life-breath, and meditation.
6. Do not neglect devotional practices. Our Master was regular in his worship of the Deity - Puja, etc., till the very last. Only God's Grace will enable you to realise the Self.
7. Do not neglect selfless service of humanity and of the Guru. Karma Yoga acts as a purifier in the beginning and as a touchstone later. Unless the heart is pure and completely free from selfishness and egoism, the Self cannot be realised. Unselfishness and egolessness are the signs of progress on the Path of Jnana Yoga.
8. Stick to the Path till the last breath. Never let the mind suggest to you: " I have realised the Self" - which is the voice of the ego and not of God.

12. CONCLUSION

To sum up:

Though the Jnana Yoga is tantalising by the easy with which it promises the highest reward, it will not do to forget that it is the innermost shrine of the Temple of Yoga, which is inaccessible until and unless we have crossed the outer courtyards. It was on account of this factor that the Ancients kept this as a closely guarded secret not to be divulged unless and until the aspirant's heart is completely purified.

The sage politely reminds us that we are, all of us, weighed down by three "defects", viz., mala - impurity, vikshepa - unsteadiness, avarana - veil. Though it can be argued that anyone of the Yogas alone can purify our heart, steady the mind and tear the veil, the wise men have discovered that purification of the heart is best achieved by nishkamyā karma yoga - the Yoga of dynamic, but selfless and egoless service, that the mind is best steadied by the practice of Bhakti or devotion to God and deep meditation - Raja Yoga, and that the veil is finally lifted through the practice of Jnana Yoga.

How does one know that one's heart is still impure? By the presence of animal instincts in them. Selfishness is the chief of these. Unless this is completely eradicated, Vedānta or Jnana Yoga might at best prove to be a great bluff; what is worse, it might lead to a completely perverse application of great truths like "I am Brahman" or "All this is Brahman" to cover animal instincts and vanity. These impurities, being gross, need dynamic treatment and may not always and so readily yield to the subtle influence of Jnana Yoga. Hence, even in Jnana Yoga itself, the dynamic selfless service of the Guru was insisted upon. My Master used to say that the evil passions must be eradicated by the squeezing out of that energy in right channels as one squeezes tooth-paste out of the tube.

It is only after this that the mind is even willing to apply itself to devotional and meditative practices. The very fact that earlier the mind was unwilling to worship God and sleep overwhelmed the aspirant every time he attempted to meditate proved the existence of impurity in the heart. Though Bhakti and meditation can and should be combined with Karma Yoga - dynamic selfless and egoless service of the Lord in humanity, one will experience real devotion to God or meditation on Him only when these impurities have been totally eradicated. Only then will the mind be steady. Meditation will be smooth and deep.

Then what remains is the veil of ignorance. It was this veil of ignorance or Ajnana - the opposite of Jnana, that provided a comfortable cover for the free play of the animal instincts. Ignorance is not a static illusion, but the illusion

of a shadow play. For instance, at night, in soft moonlight, the branches of the tree in the garden throw weird shadows on the ground. In the wind the branches move and the shadows, too. They present the appearance (from a distance) of animals or persons moving about, People get frightened. But when a flashlight is shone on these moving objects, they vanish, revealing the Truth. That is the state of Samadhi or Enlightenment. After you switch off the flashlight, the shadows return and move about. But you are not frightened any more. You see them - you still realise that they look like real things - but you know they are mere shadows. This is the state of a sage.

The veil is entirely removed by Jnana Yoga. Its presence is not even felt till the impurities are destroyed and the mind is steadied. Hence it is said that Jnana Yoga follows the practice of the other Yogas, though our Master insisted that, side by side with the practice of selfless service, devotion and meditation, one should study Vedantic texts and practise Atma-vichara - Self-enquiry.

These four Yogas are not separate, water tight compartments, though they are spoken of as different paths chosen by people of different temperaments and inner equipment. It is good to remember that even these differences are not absolute - that when we speak of a person of dynamic, emotional, mystic or philosophical temperament we only suggest that this particular aspect is predominant in him, not that the other aspects are absent.

All the Yogas are linked together and intertwined. In Karma Yoga, we have japa - repetition of the Mantra, worship of God - Deva-yajna, study of scriptures - Rishi-yajna, and constant meditation on God - and worshipping Him with the flowers of our actions - all of which are elements drawn from the other Yogas. In Bhakti Yoga, we have study of scriptures, meditation and His service - service of all beings as He is Omnipresent - the elements that belong to other Yogas. In Raja Yoga, again we have study of scriptures - svadhyaya, worship of God - isvara pranidhana, and non-injury and non-stealing - ahimsa, asteya which in effect mean loving interest in the welfare of all beings. The Lord Himself emphasises the fact that the mind cannot be controlled by Pranayama - regulation of breath and life-force, etc., alone, without devotion to Him - Bhakti, (vide Bhagavatham X. 51/61) in Jnana Yoga, we have the insistence on the Grace of the Lord - isvara-anugraha, and the practice of meditation, and the declaration that the sage lives in the feeling that he is one with all.

That these can be combined in our life has been explained by Sri Hanuman who declared: "When I am body-conscious, I am your servant, Oh Rama. When in worship and meditation, I forget the body and have the individual-soul consciousness, I am part of you. When even that is transcended and I am established in the Self, I am Thee." Who can deny that in the life of even the

most advanced spiritual aspirant, these three states constantly alternate, thus providing the justification for the practice of all the Yogas?

The gross individuality which is the first and greatest impediment is the product of mala or impurity. This impurity is the residue of past animal incarnations. But the other two impediments, viz., unsteadiness of the mind - vikshepa, and the veil of ignorance - avarana, are the qualities of the mind itself.

Karma Yoga is meant to purify our heart, to totally rid ourselves of the impurities. We must eventually eradicate lust, greed, anger, envy, pride, etc. They will not go by the repetition of God's Name only. But by moving amongst the people, rubbing shoulders with the sick and the poor, serving them humbly and unselfishly and watching how our minds react. Is the mind jealous, proud? Does it sympathise with the sufferer? Or is it a pitiless heart, barren of the milk of human kindness? If there is no love in the heart, it is still filled with animal instincts and must be purified by the practice of karma yoga. The karma yogi must see God in all. He must have equal vision and move with equal facility and ease whether in the company of kings or the poor, old or young, man or woman. He must have equanimity and be of an unruffled temperament. He should do the work but feel that it is God Who is doing everything. There should be no tension and whatever happens to him he should feel is the Will of God. A karma yogi is always peaceful and is constantly in communion with God. He enjoys the samadhi known as Brahma-karma-samadhi - dynamically active whilst in constant union with Brahman or God.

A Bhakti Yogi is one who regards God as the lover, child, master and companion, and worships God in these various ways. He performs various rituals, sings His Names and adores God's devotees as God Himself. The omnipresent Being blesses him through the form of worship he has chosen and he attains Bhava Samadhi. The Bhakti Yogi prays, sings, dances and his whole heart enters into God, into his own chosen form of God. Isvara or God Who dwells in that chosen form initiates him into the higher mysteries of cosmic consciousness.

Meditation leads the Raja Yogi to Dharma-megha Samadhi - the Cloud of Virtue which showers all divine virtues. He is independent of everything in this world, including his own body and mind - Kaivalya. Psychic powers are usually associated with a Yogi, especially Raja Yogi. These stunts attract much publicity and we come to associate these things with Yogis. Even when we practise concentration and meditation we might develop minor powers of thought-reading, etc., but we should never use them.

Jnana Yoga is the path of the intellectual, analytical mind. The Jnana Yogi enquires into the nature of the Self and attains Advaita-avas-tharupa samadhi which is the immediate experience of non-duality.

This is the goal. Our Master emphasised that, whilst it is not impossible to attain this goal, it is not a play. It demands total sincerity and hard work! He demanded that we should emulate Benjamin Franklin's and his own example and make systematic progress in our spiritual practices. Towards this end, He advocated the maintenance for our self-improvement, of the Spiritual Diary. Every year we should take a few resolves calculated to lead us one step nearer the goal. Secondly, we should frame a daily routine into which the meaning of these resolves should be incorporated and in which all the spiritual practices we choose should find a place. Thirdly we should record our progress and failures in the Diary so that it can act as our friend, guide and philosopher.

If we follow our divine Master, Sri Swami Sivananda, we shall reach the goal here and now, in this very birth. There is no doubt about this.

May God bless you all!