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Prayer of the Optina Fathers

Lord let me with tranquillity of mind face everything this day bring.

Lord, let me submit fully to Thy holy will.

Lord, stand by me and support me in everything at every hour of the day.

Lord, whatever news I receive in the course of this day, teach me to accept it with a tranquil mind and firm trust that all is Thy holy will.

Lord, open unto me Thy holy will for myself and for those about me.

Lord, for all my words and intentions guide me through my thoughts and feelings.

Lord, in all unforeseen circumstances do not let me forget that all things are sent by

Thee.

Lord, teach me to treat all those in the house and those around me, the elderly, those of my age and the young, simply, rightly and reasonably, so that no one is distressed by me, but all contribute to the common good.

Lord, give me the strength to bear the fatigue of the coming day and whatever happens in the course of the day.

Lord, I thank Thee for all that happens to me, for I truly believe that everything is for the good of those that love Thee.

Lord, bless all my comings and goings, actions, words and Thoughts, grant me always joyfully to sing Thy praises and Thank Thee, for Thou art blessed forever.

Amen

Spiritual Training of the Mind

Swami Swahananda

The highest men are calm, silent, and unknown. They are the men who really know the power of thought. They are sure that even if they go into a cave and close the door, and simply think five true thoughts, and then pass away, these five thoughts of theirs will live through eternity. Indeed, such thoughts will penetrate through the mountains, cross the oceans, and travel through the world. Take up one idea. Make that one idea your

life. Think of it. Dream of it. Live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves--every part of your body--be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success. And this is the way great spiritual giants are produced. It is thought which is the propelling force in us; fill the mind with the highest thoughts. Hear them day after day, think them month after month--never mind failures--they are quite natural. They are the beauty of life, these failures. Each thought is a little hammer blow on the lump of iron, which our bodies are, manufacturing out of it what we want to be. We are what our thoughts have made us. So take care of what you think. (Swami Vivekananda)

There is a famous Sanskrit saying in a well-known Vedantic book, called Yoga Vashishta: 'Mind is the cause of bondage and freedom for man.' In one of the Upanishads, the Chandogya, mind has been raised to the status of the highest, in one context, as is the Vedantic method of trying to see Brahman in every situation. But because of the importance of the mind, it was said in this Upanishad, 'Worship the mind.' That is, the mind, if properly trained and purified, free from dross, can take the soul to the highest realization. Because it is with the help of the mind that you conceive things, you progress in spiritual life, and later, of course, the Vedantins feel that you will have to transcend the mind, and enter into deeper spiritual experience. To a very far extent the mind is with you. We are concentrating here on the spiritual training of the mind, but training of the mind means that we have a fund of energy. Varieties of desires crop up because of this energy. This energy is often diffused because of its having too many directions. A strong character is produced when these energies are collected together, and directed to a purpose. This is how Swami Vivekananda defined efficiency; not merely spiritual efficiency, but also efficiency in general life. Efficiency is energy controlled and directed to a purpose; that was how he put it. We have a lot of energy, but if we train the mind methodically and purposefully, some of this energy could be

utilized. Otherwise, much of our energy is frittered away.

William James said that an average man utilizes ten to fifteen per cent of his energies; geniuses utilize twenty-five to thirty per cent. That is all right as a fact, but then he added a very interesting sentence: that everyone can increase his capacity by five or ten per cent. Now if I am utilizing, say, ten per cent of my energy, and if I can increase it by five per cent, there is a fifty per cent increase - my energy is doubled. So that is the special hope that training gives - in getting a grip over the mental energy, and directing it in a particular direction.

But the first thing necessary is a fund of energy. The energy is there, of course - undirected energy. To direct it to a purpose, development of will is necessary. A strong will has to be created if you want to do something. Some things are mechanical.

Because of years of practice, you do certain things: you eat, you dress, you sleep - all these things don't require too much conscious energy, because these things have come to the level of habit. But development of will is necessary if we want to pursue a goal - which requires doggedness, which requires constancy, which requires a sustained effort. Will is necessary. Energy plus will. As you go on getting a grip over the energy, the will becomes stronger. Mc Dougall defines a strong character as a man who has been able to collect his energies and direct them to one or two main purposes. That is a strong character. Of course, he is a psychologist, he is amoral, so by his standard even a robber can have a strong character, a black marketeer can have a very strong character. But that is not safe for society. That type of strong character is a source of danger to society. So a strong character must always be illumined by higher feelings - spiritual or social. In normal life, a strong will, along with a good will, with social consideration is necessary. That will prevent a man from doing anything which will be detrimental to the larger interests of society. A fund of energy, a strong will to direct it, a will that is a

good will - if these three are combined, a very useful, true citizen could be produced. Mere strong character is not good. In our daily lives we can find hundreds of instances of this. It is normally accepted that education is a good thing, but it is a good thing only if it is put to a good purpose. Otherwise, it would be a safer thing for society to keep a man ignorant. A man who knows the loopholes of the law - say, a city man - compared to a village man, is more dangerous because of his knowledge, unless he is a good man. In Indian lore there is a story, in the Ramayana, one of the famous epics of India, the story of three brothers: Ravana, Kumbhakarna, and Vibhishana. All of them practised hard austerities, tapasya, which was the method of achieving success. A student shuts himself up, a musician gives up all other avocations, an athlete centres all his activities around his particular sport - these are all different types of tapasya, as it is called in Sanskrit. And that was the source of getting any type of special excellence. Now all these three brothers undertook hard austerities. When the result came, the three people produced three different results. The oldest brother, Ravana, was very rajasic and ambitious. He was tremendously energetic, but his mind was not pure - his idea was to dominate. So he doggedly dominated the whole world. But, in the process, he became a source of tyranny to the world also. The middle brother was, according to Indian context, a man of tamas, a man of dullness, inertia, cruelty. But due to this tapasya, his mind became one-pointed, and he could sleep for six months at a stretch, and eat as much as he liked at one stroke. Of course, sleeping is an enjoyment. After all, eighty per cent of civilization is meant for providing food and sleep. For the purpose of providing security of food and security of shelter for sleeping, that is practically the entire concern of civilization. The other concerns are mostly outside things, a little decoration. Of course, if sleeping is an enjoyment, then a man who could sleep more ought to be an ideal. Though of course, man doesn't like it too much. Anyhow, because of Kumbhakarna's mental composition of dullness, or lethargy, or inertia, this tapasya

increased that capacity. His mind was not purified. His mind was not given a higher turn.

The third brother, who was sattvic by nature, excelled in spiritual realization. That means that basic propensity is important - mere training is not enough. Mental training is good, strictly from the personal point of view. If a man needs to sleep, and if by training he can sleep more, it could be good. But, socially speaking, or spiritually speaking, ultimately it is not good. The mind needs to be purified; then only can you put a sharp instrument in a man's hand. A controlled mind, a one-pointed mind, a concentrated mind is a sharp instrument. It may do good to society, it may do bad to society. It may do good to the person himself; it may ultimately do bad to the person. So this is the spiritual element. In the social context, it is a social consideration, the larger interest of the society. Buddha spoke of 'bahujana hitaya bahujana sukhaya', 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many'. All our life's efforts and goals should be for the greater good of many. This is the democratic idea. Buddha said these words 2,500 years ago and gave it as a dictum for his followers. Live your life in such a way that you live for the good of many, for the welfare of many. That consideration is from the social standpoint. Spiritually also it is useful. So this normal efficiency with a fund of energy, a strong will to carry and give direction to the energy, and a good will, with regard to social considerations - if to that will a little awareness of the divine is added, it becomes an ideal spiritual personality. The purpose of all religions is twofold. Religions try to make us aware of ourselves, our real nature, and they try to train us in self-control. So self-knowledge and self-control are the two main purposes of all religious training. By self-knowledge, Vedanta means to know our real nature. We know we are human beings, but what is it in us which is abiding, which is eternal? The body is there, of course, but it is not eternal; the mind is there, but it is ever-changing. Vedanta says that it is the spirit which is behind the body and the mind which is our real nature. Real, in the sense that it is our permanent nature. I may be a clerk in an office,

a football player in a football game, a musician in a musical circle. These are all temporary functions. But I am a man first, my particular capacity is a secondary consideration. Similarly, I have a body; it is a temporary consideration, as my being a football player, or a clerk in an office, or an executive for a company. But I have a larger or more fundamental existence. The body is finished in 100 years, so that is not my permanent nature. The mind is changing. It is the spirit that abides, it is the spirit that continues.

Finding this out, and knowing it definitely, is what is called self-knowledge according to the philosophy of Vedanta. The other theistic schools also go halfway - in some way you find your real nature, and your relationship with the Godhead.

Self control is the pathway to realization. Spiritually speaking, why is self-control necessary? The mind is always clouded with various thoughts. The books on yoga, Patanjali and others, say that the mind is like a lake. All the time waves are there. When there is an upheaval, you are in an upheaval. When the mind is quiet, you are peaceful. So once you are able to stop the mental waves, the natural glow of the Atman will be manifest. The real nature of man is the spirit, the Atman, which is by nature joyful, by nature conscious. But that joyful nature remains unmanifest because of the waves of the mind - the ups and downs of the mind. Stop these ups and downs, and this joyous nature will automatically come up. Knowledge will flow; the real nature of man will be known when the mind is completely still, free from waves. These waves are created by desires. And that is why Buddha was all the time fighting against this idea of trishna, desire and hankering. If a man can stop his desires, right at this moment, he will have the highest realization. Now that is the purpose, spiritually speaking, of bringing in self-control. The more desires you have, especially inordinate desires, the more you are under the thralldom, under the control of your mind. The mind was given to man as an

instrument. When the mind dictates terms to us, we are its slaves.

There is an interesting old story of a man in India who wanted to go on pilgrimage. He was going along the road on foot. As he came to the highway, he saw a man coming on horseback. He had a desire, 'Ah, if I had a horse, how fine it would be.' Desires crop up because of one's proximity to things. If you are in a country where there are no cars, you will never dream that you should have a car. Proximity gives you the desire. Every day, new desires are produced.

There is a famous Sanskrit saying: 'Everything wears out but trishna, hankering'. It goes on becoming younger and stronger day by day. One desire is fulfilled, another comes in. And that is seen throughout the world - that by the mere fulfillment of desires, desires are not satisfied. New desires come up.

That man began to pray. Whom to ask in an unknown land? So he began to pray to the Lord, 'O Lord, give me a horse, give me a horse.' Now as the story goes, at that time a band of soldiers was passing along the highway on horseback. This story is set in pre-vehicle days, of course. They had some horses to carry the luggage. One of them gave birth to a foal, a young horse. They were in a hurry to go, and they were on the lookout for a man who could carry the foal. They saw this man - a strong, hefty man, praying, 'Give me a horse, O Lord; give me a horse.' They said, 'Come with us. We shall give you a horse.' And they dragged him and put the horse on his shoulders, and asked him to march. Then he prayed, 'O Lord, you have misunderstood me. I wanted a horse to ride on, not a horse to ride on me.'

The mind was given to man as an instrument, as a vehicle, as a horse. Without the mind you cannot enjoy. All types of enjoyment are enjoyed through the mind. The moment you are absent-minded, you don't enjoy an experience. Somebody walks along; if you are

absent-minded you won't hear him, you won't see him. So enjoyment presupposes the presence of the mind. If you are eating food, and your mind is in the court or somewhere, you don't enjoy the food. You don't know that you have eaten the food. It is like that - the mind has to be there. The more the mind is present, the better will be the result. Mind was given to man to enjoy, to be utilized, but now the mind has become our master.

If I get up early in the morning, quite hopeful, hale and hearty, and somebody says something hurtful to me I go on feeling bad, and sometimes, if I am very temperamental I go on weeping the whole day. Why? Why should I put all my joys and all my sufferings in the hands of other people, and their behaviour? Many such situations will come in life, but a yogi tries to recover his balance completely and quickly. A yogi will never lose his balance. That is the ideal condition. But an average man loses his balance and takes a long time to recover. If it is too much, he is a problem to himself. But all men, to a certain extent, learn to control their minds, and control the vagaries of their moods. If you are in a good mood, even a bad experience is good. If you are in a bad mood, even a good experience seems to be bad. As we have often seen - with children you can notice it - if the child is in a very happy state, even if you give him a slap he laughs. If he is in a bad mood, even if you talk sweetly to him, he weeps and cries. The external situation does something, but the external situation is a suggestion which interacts with the mind. Most of the happiness and misery of a person depend upon his or her moods. So if we are to live life, we cannot always expect to have good experiences. That is not in the nature of things. It is in the nature of things to have some good experiences and some bad experiences. If it is not on the physical level, it is on the mental level. If in your physical condition everything is fine, your mental condition may not be good enough. Or if your mental condition is fine, then your physical condition may not be good enough. As it is often said, in the affluent countries, where physical conditions are easy and more

favourable, there are more mental problems. And in the poorer countries, where the physical condition is very harsh, mental problems are fewer, because poor people have no time for the luxury of mental problems. The idea is that in nature, things are often balanced. A completely miserable man, and a completely happy man will be rare. But all these experiences come to him. So efforts will be made to get a grip over one's moods. If you can have a grip over the external circumstances, well and good. The whole of science and technology, and all of human effort, is meant for that: to change the external situation. If it is a very cold country and you can provide arrangement for heating the house, it is a tremendous gain. If it is a hot country, and you can provide arrangement for cooling the house, it is a wonderful gain - so that man does not always have to fight against the vagaries of nature, or the extremities of nature. But external situations are not all the experience that man encounters. Really speaking, man's mental experience is much more important than the physical experience. The sufferings that his mind brings to him are much more intense and much more painful than the physical pain that comes to him. So the mind has to be controlled and directed. If a man has a grip over his mind, his reaction to the situation will be much less, compared to a man who has less control over himself. (to be continued)

God as Mother (continued)

Pravrajika Vivekaprana

Then they asked the next question: how do we know that these processes are not distorting reality? I call this reality, and on the basis of my own impression, I say this is real and then build upon that. This is real, therefore there has to be a God, an external

God, who is creating this world. So externality has to be questioned. Is it really true that the external world, as it comes to me, is really as it is, or is it undergoing processes? If it is undergoing some kind of a process, which is very complicated, which is subconscious, I had better uncover that in order to understand what God really is. If God is here, (because we went to the next level, and we said God, or power, seems to be everywhere), I want to relate to this power. But how does that experience come to me? Experience comes to me through these images that I make with the power of attention. I pay attention, the images are there. I do not pay attention, they vanish.

How do we know? Look at your dream life. I make images. What kind of images? Any image that is available at the waking level. There is light, there is sound, there is everything, colours. There is motion and talking, there are other people and objects, there is space and time - everything is there. So this seems to be a very mysterious something that is going on within and I had better understand it if I want to find out what is this mystery called God? For it seems to be linked with me. It is not only linked with the outside world, it is linked directly with me. And if that is true, then I need to pay attention. Can I pay attention all the time? Is my attention the same all the time? We discover very easily, it is not. I pay more attention, the thing becomes more capable of being grasped. I pay less attention, I seem to be able to understand nothing.

First was the idea of tapasya, second was the idea of paying attention. So paying attention became the crucial point to understand. How do I pay attention? I focus, and to focus I need a focal point. I cannot take the whole universe as my focal point, it is impossible. So what do I do? I take one image. I take any image. Why? Every image has arisen out of the same unmanifested level. If every image comes from the same source as I do, and images and thoughts are what I deal with all the time, let me focus attention on one image in order to relate to this basic principle of the universe which I

am searching for which is called God. So images were the next level, which is called Visista Advaita (qualified nondualism) in Indian thought.

How many images do we have? It is said that the Hindus have thirty-three million gods and goddesses. This is a great puzzle to the rest of the earth and its people. How is it possible? God has to be one, and how is it possible that each person seems to have a god or a goddess to themselves. Why not? I am trying to focus my attention in order to find God, and if the focal point does not please me or respond to me, if it does not seem capable of responding to me, how can I focus my attention on it? I know very well that if I like a thing I pay attention. If I do not like a thing, I ignore it. My emotions will go towards something that I like, or that I revere, or that I worship.

So worship became the next level. If you read the mythology of India, it is like a universe apart. It has its own time-frame, it has its own space, its own gods and its own heavens. The gods have their own paraphernalia, their own vehicles, their own instruments and weapons, their own dress. Why? It is because my mind is searching for something to focus upon, and if I like to decorate this world, why not decorate my focal point, because that is what is going to lead me to the discovery of my own inner level of concentration. That is the justification for thirty-three million gods. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, how many more can be added? He says as many as you like. He used very simple words in Bengali. He said, 'Jato mat tato pat' Jato means as many. Mat is opinions or viewpoints: as many viewpoints, so many roads leading to reality. What could be simpler than that? What could be easier than that? I have the freedom to find my own focal point. What could be psychologically more satisfying than that - to find my own focal point and then to proceed. Proceed in what way? Concentrate. Why do I need to concentrate? Because paying attention is very important. Without paying attention, there is no life, there is no understanding, no discovery, no reality. Therefore, I need to

train my attention. Of course, I am ignoring many facts that were discovered at the same time, but I want to give you this idea, because this is deeply connected with the Hindu idea of calling God the Mother.

Why Mother? She is the most familiar. The most intimate relationship. Therefore by calling her the Mother, I have made the most unknown, the most unfamiliar, the most familiar. Do I know how to relate to my mother? Or do I have to learn? Do I have to practise some special austerities? What do I have to do to relate to my mother? Nothing. I have just to let go. Let go and understand and imagine and get back the memory of how easily I related to my own mother, because that was my beginning, that was my source. Why can't I relate to this God which is definitely my beginning, my source, as Mother? This is not the only relationship suggested in ancient Indian philosophy between man and God. However, this relationship has been stressed by Sri Ramakrishna for this age. The reason may be mysterious, the reason can be very simple. The reason could be that modern life has become so complicated, so difficult and full of tensions that I simply want to go back home, and home is equal to Mother. Where there is a mother, there is home. I want to go back home. Or at least, in a day, after I have spent all my energy in scattering my thoughts, in scattering my feelings, in scattering my attention, I need to bring it back, so that I can go home. And where is home? Sri Ramakrishna chose a very strange image. In India we have many Mothers. There is not just one Mother. These are the Mother Goddesses such as Laksmi, who is supposed to be auspicious; there is Durga in the middle, who is supposed to be very powerful, and there is Kali, on the other side of the spectrum, who is supposed to be very very difficult. Even to the Indian mind, She is very difficult. Better not approach without some kind of preparation. Without some kind of purification, do not approach It, because She can kill. Indian minds are scared of Her. Bengal, however, seems for some mysterious reason to be a place where this Goddess Kali is accepted very easily. So Ramakrishna chose Her as the focal

point of his attention. He was training his own attention, and he took hold of a very ancient method and brought it into modern life, bridging the gulf between the ancient and the modern. Sri Ramakrishna showed that that which worked in ancient times works even today, because we have not evolved in the sense that modern people are not very different from ancient people. Our hunger is the same, our thirst is the same, our instincts are the same, our problems are the same. In no way are we very modern in the sense that we do not need a God. We need a God very badly. Whether God needs me or not is a tremendous, controversial problem that we need to solve, but I definitely need God. And to fulfil that need of God he chose a symbol which represents life as it is - a mixture of good and bad, a mixture of evil, so called evil, destruction as well as life. On one side, She is giving boons, on the other side, She has a sword in hand, ready to kill. So I am supposed to bridge the gap between the two. He bridged the gap for us, by calling Her Mother; by not being afraid, because no one is afraid of a mother. Even when she is going to give a slap, the child goes back to the mother. So, this symbol, which is very powerful for today's age, he chose, and focusing his attention on Her, he found Her responding, more and more and more.

This is the ancient idea: that the universe is very real. Of course it is real, it is Brahman. This Brahman is the only reality. Brahman is not applicable to any form or name or person. Brahman is the thread, you can say. So this Brahman has to be caught. How do I catch it? I catch it with the help of an image. There are millions of images, and Sri Ramakrishna chose one. He chose Kali for the modern man and woman and he called Her Mother. It is a feminine image, and again you can go very deep into these symbols and try to find out why and how, but I would just like to say that it seems to be absolutely necessary for this age to come to a very simple image which represents modern life in all its confusions, in all its tensions, in all its polarity between evil and good. It is very necessary to understand that there can be only one source, there cannot be many

sources. Because the world is so deeply interconnected, even at the physical level today we cannot escape from every aspect of life - it is not possible any longer. So Kali as the image of God as Mother seems to be the image for today's age which he has given to us. You can read how he related to It and how he cried and how he finally had a vision of the Mother. Why did he have a vision of the Mother? What did he say about this Mother? Did He say She had a form? He seems to talk about a light overpowering his senses, and making him unconscious in the first vision. He seems to be talking to Her many times when he goes into an inner level of consciousness called samadhi. He seems to hear what She says but the rest of the people there do not hear what is happening, and yet you cannot say that Sri Ramakrishna is pretending. It is not possible, it is just not possible. If you want to understand these things you must go deep into these ideas in which there is deep psychology and deep physiology also. People present in those moments tried to touch Sri Ramakrishna's eyeballs and they found no sensation. So that means it is possible for a human being to make this kind of connection with God. However, if you want to separate him and say he is not a human being, he is something special, and I am something very ordinary, you can build the gap again. You can say, I am on one end of a pole, he is on the other end; but I feel that in this age, if he came for anyone, he came for ordinary people like us. He is trying to bridge the gap. He is trying to show that there is a physiological level which can be left behind, there is a physical level which can be left behind, a psychological level that can be left behind, and yet you are very much there. That is what is God - God as Mother.

Eliot, Karma, and the re-birth of Language (continued)

David Moses and Miles Wright

Eliot was deeply engaged with the Upanishadic concept of an 'in-between' state, an intermediate zone in which the soul was destined to wake to full freedom and immortality or to be reborn in some form.' (Kearns 37)

Subsequently, a sense of expectation is expressed in the mantric repetition at the beginning of 'What The Thunder Said':

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves

Waited for rain, while the black clouds

Gathered far distant, over Himavant. (396 - 398).

Additionally, Sanskrit words make the reader search for meanings not immediately evident. The enigmatic codification of 'DA' signifies that the text is only operating on a surface level which lies on top of silence and of Self. Significance lies in the juxtaposition and equivalence drawn between the same experience of different cultures and the same experience in different literary traditions. Eliot's reference to the section as a 'song' draws attention to the musicality of the pauses, which we might identify as a caesura after the DA, taking the place of punctuation. Its enjambment into the next line emphasises the thunder as sound as well as Word. What seems to be a figurative expression may be seen to have an implied meaning in the dimensions of Mantra-shakti or mantra power translated into a form of poetry where meaning is communicated through sound and effect. If the thunder is the voice of God, then the Ganges is personified in the goddess Ganga. The mantric formulae 'the water dripping song' (Eliot, in Southam 187) forms a dramatic framework where the Ganges is an index to 'drought or sterility caused by some evil force or blockage.' (Kearns 32) Thus 'Ganga was sunken' and awaits replenishment from rain. Like the emptying process at the end of this section, the reader is left empty, but ready to pass on to the higher level of the arid

plain: 'it is the feeling of incompleteness of the actual that is the rent in the rock through which the life giving waters flow' but which do not come. (Sri Radhakrishnan, in Kearns 195) But again, the need for replenishment is not immediately available in language, deferring to the non-verbal teaching of the thunder: Be controlled, give alms, be compassionate - Give, sympathise, control. For a moment, I would like to go back to the idea of the door, I stated earlier. Kearns suggests an explanation for the unopened door to the rose garden of the much later 'Burnt Norton':

This door opens on what Bradley and Eliot alike referred to as immediate experience, the experience often predicated of children, of mystics and visionaries ... There is, as Bradley and Eliot are well aware, a profound human nostalgia for this hypothetical experience, a state of unity from which time, age, sophistication ... and even perhaps excessive philosophical reflection seem to have debarred us. (Kearns 232) 'Philosophical reflection,' is the forced, linguistic questioning which fragments thought, insight and knowledge. The failure of consciousness in a modern world to realise Truth through identification with Self, competes with a fragmented consciousness which is defective, distorted by the imposition of modern conditions and a memory complicated by desire. Superficiality of linguistic reflection is merely another form of entrapment.

Dayadhvam:

I have heard the key turn in the door and turn once only.

We think of the key, each in his prison

Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison

Only at nightfall, ethereal rumours

Revive for a moment a broken

Coriolanus DA (412 - 418) [my italic]

Reflection on what that imprisonment is, is an act of self-conscious awareness which confirms a discursive entrapment. Eliot implies that we cannot obey the command to sympathise because we are imprisoned within the circle of our own egotism. This is posited in *The Cocktail Party* - 'Hell is oneself, Hell is alone, the other figures, merely projections,'¹⁴ 'Satyam eva jayate Nanritam; truth alone prevails, not falsehood.'

(Mundaka Upanishad III.16.) As with the sea which passes through Phlebas' bones, the Godhead passes through the bars of the cell of entrapment of self-conscious actions, we may be instruments of good not thinking of ourselves as the doers but by 'making ourselves zero.'¹⁵ Critics usually posit *The Waste Land's* ending as a negative one.

(Kearns 2, 7, 227 Southam 126) Kearns observes that in the formality of the Upanishadic ending the syllable OM conveys the logos or Word of revealed truth: the poem declines from a final conclusion of complete illumination. But spiritual victory is guaranteed not by the doer, but by being an instrument of 'Self.' The Sanskrit encoding of 'The peace which passes all understanding' in 'Shanti' might imply a positive conclusion which is attainable, dependant upon how the poem is read. Though language is unable to adequately represent this transcendence, Sanskrit is one of the disposable tools which allows the move from teaching to a reflection resulting in the realisation of salvation: 'May my word be one with my thought, and my thought Be one with my word ... May I proclaim the Truth of the scriptures... OM Shanti Shanti Shanti.' (Aitareya Upanishad. Prelude.)

To assert that 'the theme of the poem is the waste land not as a certainty but as a possibility: of emotional, spiritual and intellectual vitality to be regained' (Southam 126) is problematic. It fails to account for the transcript of *The Waste Land's* increasingly

widened space between each 'Shanti', expressing a space for recollection, 'a space which can enjoy its own potentialities and hopes - and its own presence to itself. One's own time.' (Kearns 226) While it may be seen as the silence into which the quester, as in Prufrock, 'should have spoken' it is also a statement which implies and requires meditation. One of the things characterising Eliot's work is a concern with the limitations and failure of language to convey any meaning. While the mythical patterns of *The Waste Land* could be seen as a triumph in that they convey a sense of the purpose of mantra, language is often seen as deteriorating: So here I am ... having had twenty years - Twenty years largely wasted ... Trying to use words, and every attempt is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure And so each venture is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate With shabby equipment always deteriorating. ('East Coker' 172 - 180). The antidote to a fear of poetic sterility is to give it a form which to some extent mimics a sense of the loss of evident meaning. Superimposing Eastern ideas on the modern does reveal a lack of spirituality, attained by juxtaposing images and voices with the despair of the modern. As with the 'Tradition' it 'Makes the modern world possible for art'.¹⁶ The creative process restores a wholeness lost in common experience by displacement and consolidation to art. Meaning, when language fails, is deferred to literary form, and again the dead of the 'Tradition' take precedence as a representative body who see the totality of experience: 'And what the dead had no speech for, when living, They can tell you, being dead: the communication Of the dead beyond is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.' ('Little Gidding' 1.49 - 52) 'Burnt Norton' offers a 'critique of immediate experience' analysing the 'hypothetical ground of all knowing' (Kearns 206). It results in the disappearance of the analytical position. Any attempt to capture immediate experience in language or discursive thought leads to the infinite regress of self reflexivity, and makes each attempt seem merely a fallen copy of a lost original ... the existence of which has never

truly been established. To think we can find this invented or lost presence is to 'follow the deception of the thrush' (Kearns 232)

An Eden from which we are debarred in terms of textual engagement, it attempts to rationalise an illusive, deceptive reality which Bradley calls 'appearance' into a fundamental truth: but 'human kind cannot bear very much reality.' There is no absolute meaning in the poems, as there is no absolute meaning to the teachings. Eliot's observation in 'East Coker' is that there is 'only a limited knowledge to be derived from experience.' But the reality we experience might reflect what we call the 'eternal'. (83)

The characteristic of both reality and the eternal is a momentary existence which constitutes the recovery of time as timeless: a moment of meditative realisation. Again, the past is indivisible from the present because it contains within itself the beginning from which it came. Time present and time past Are both present in time future' ('Burnt Norton'. BN 1-2.) While critics (Traversi 126 - 130) give exhaustive accounts of the 'Aristotelian logic of causality' to explain the concepts of time and being in Four Quartets, there has been a failure to engage with other analogues such as the obvious sources from the Bhagavad-Gitā. Consider: In my beginning is my end ... In my end is my beginning ('East Coker', 1 / 209) What we call the beginning is often the end And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from. And every phrase And sentence that is right (where every word is at home, Taking its place to support the others ... ' In comparison with Kṛṣṇa's statement I am the self ... seated in the Hearts of all beings. I am the beginning Middle and end of all beings. (Bhagavad-Gitā 10: 20.) Kṛṣṇa is describing himself as within our framework of time, yet beyond and outside it. He is in the span of the eternal which is beyond time. Time is merely located within the eternal. He is the Self located at the 'still point of the turning world,' (136) the point of attainment. And Eliot expresses a need to explore what this Master's true nature really is. His use of the Bhagavad-Gitā brings the dichotomy of action with detachment into

play. Krsna, the incarnation of universal divinity and distillation of Upanishadic thought, is the intersection of the timeless with time who completes that dichotomy by revealing that time only appears to exist: 'only through time is time conquered.' (Burnt Norton. 90) Strictly speaking, synthesising Western and Eastern disciplines involves constant risk of contradiction. And Eliot's equivalencies between past, present and different cultures reveal what literary works say without an explicit treatment of what they mean. Perhaps it is fairer to consider the rich inter - connections of Eastern sources signal potential further meanings which extend beyond the literal level of the poem's narrative conduct. Scripture - a long static exposition - offers 'vertical' intersections to fragmented narrative, establishing relationships beyond those narratives to abstract, metaphysical concepts, suggesting a meditation for others. A Vedantic reading of Eliot's 'borrowings' reveals that it is not necessary for the poet to explain them explicitly - only to suggest that which we already know.

Religion and Life (continued)

Swami Bhuteshananda

Maharaj, what is bhava?

Bhava means 'being' or 'existence'. Its antonym is abhava or non-being. There is a Bengali saying: 'Bhava-rajye [bhaver ghare churi] What does that mean? The meaning is, you think in one way and express it outside in an altogether different way. This is 'theft in the world of being or bhava.'

Are recollection (smrti) and subconscious mind one and the same? Is the subconscious mind knowable? No, the two are not one and the same thing. There are differences.

There is no way of knowing the subconscious mind. But only when thoughts float on the surface in dreams or dream state, something of it can be known. The conscious, the

subconscious or the unconscious are different strata of the mind. Certain hidden ideas come to the surface by inducement or with the help of some stimulant. It is something like this: we had forgotten something of our childhood; and it comes to mind due to some stimulant that has a relation with that incident. I want to know about the other smrti, the scripture called smrti. Do all societies have smrtis? And are smrtis subject to change? None can survive without the codes of conduct, systematically stated in scriptures called smrtis. All societies have such codes in one form or another. Show me one society where religious codes or practices are not there! These codes undergo changes - they change with the times. Are smrtis compulsorily practised only in Hinduism? No, not that. Only the beasts of the jungle may have no society and, hence, rules - and that too in the ordinary sense. Beasts too have a society of their own: as for example, when they live in a herd, they have the herd instinct. But they do not have the critical bent of mind as human beings do. That apart, why Hindus alone, all have a society and codes.

What is `dry reasoning? The reasoning of the logician or tarkika is called `dry reasoning'. Such reasoning has no feeling or devotion. There are some who for various reasons could not embrace monastic life. They cannot follow the rules of householders either. That is, they cannot be householders too. What will become of such people? They will have no obligatory actions! And we can live the householder's life too and progress spiritually. They say that the elephant walks by, caring little for the dogs that bark. What does this mean? Ignore your detractors. Suppose someone harms us, we should not think of harming him in retaliation. This is ignoring the wicked.

What is the difference between the terms `Brahman' and `Paramesvara'? By `Brahman' the Absolute is meant. That which pervades everything, and is everything, is Brahman. Paramesvara or Isvara is the controller of the universe (niyanta). He is Brahman

enveloped with sattvic ignorance.

What is ajapa-japa? Can it be practised by us? Ajapa means practising japa with each breath - synchronizing the repetition of the name of God with one's respiration. This has a particular rhythm, and unless the rhythm is properly maintained, normal respiration will be affected, thereby causing ailments. When a knower of Brahman is not in the state of samadhi, does he have the perception of the world? His actions and behaviour are superimposed on him by us. When we say the world is nothing but Brahman, we mean that He has become everything: the sand and the sesame seed. Sand is Brahman, and sesame seed is Brahman. So both sand and sesame seed are one and the same! All this is our argument. If we need oil, we do not grind sand, we grind sesame seeds. The knower of Brahman needs neither sand nor sesame seed. What are the duties of householders? Householder devotees used to ask Sri Ramakrishna that, as they could not give up everything and seek God, what was the way for them. Sri Ramakrishna would advise them to perform all the household work but have the awareness that God alone was their own, the only Truth, and everything else was unreal. Sri Ramakrishna also advised them to remain unattached in the world. Using the metaphor of the rupee (sixteen annas make a rupee), he would ask them to offer fourteen annas of their mind to God and use the rest for household work. He would assure them that God can be realized while living in the world. Mahapurush Maharaj said once: 'Was I ever born?' Why did he say that? Yes, the very life of a knower of Brahman is an appearance, a semblance. He says that he has no birth, no death. That means his life is superimposed on the Reality. When the different colours of various flowers are reflected on a transparent crystal prism, the crystal appears to be tinged with red, blue, and other colours. Are they the characteristics of the crystal, or are they superimposed on it? Likewise, the different characteristics observed in the jnani's life too are superimposed. According to the Advaitic scriptures, I am Brahman. Can I meditate on this? Oh yes, you

may! Who are we and who are you? What is the mutual relationship? The Advaitic viewpoint has been taken up for discussion. So you are Brahman, and I too am Brahman. It is the Self or Atman relationship. I could not understand, you, Maharaj! It is such a simple thing: what is there to understand? I am the Atman, you too are the Atman, so the relation is one of non-difference and unity. But is this relation eternal? You see, you understand eternal or nitya as being there from birth to birth. But nitya here means kalatita, beyond time. So by eternal, it is not that the relation is there for all time, but it is beyond time. - Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar due acknowledgements to Prabuddha Bharata

My naked simple Life was I;

That Act so strongly shined

Upon the earth, the sea, the sky,

It was the substance of my mind;

The sense itself was I.

I felt no dross nor matter in my soul,

No brims nor borders, such as in a bowl

We see. My essence was capacity,

That felt all things;

The thought that springs

Therefrom is itself. It hath no other wings

To spread abroad, nor eyes to see,

Nor hands distinct to feel,

Nor knees to kneel;

But being simple like the

Deity In its own centre is a sphere

Not shut up here, but everywhere.

Thomas Traherne (?1636-1674)

God as Mother.

A talk given by Pravrajika Vivekaprana, a nun of the Sarada Math, at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, UK, on 30th September 2001.

The word God seems to be very familiar and yet it refers to a being which is most unfamiliar to us. We are always trying to puzzle out what it could stand for. On the other hand, 'mother' is a word known most intimately to every child. So it is as if the human mind, puzzling out what this life could mean, what this world could mean, is trying to bridge the gap between the most unfamiliar and the most familiar - that which is intimately known to us. Another thing that is very clear is that the human mind understands the manifestation that is this universe in terms of relationships. We try to work out this puzzle with the help of relationships. Every child is taught how to relate to the father, to the brother, to the sister, to society, to strangers, to the world at large,

to objects. Searching for God, or finding God, is definitely the basic purpose of human life, though we do not understand it all the time consciously. We seem to be puzzling out what is our relationship to the world around, to the people around, and finally, when we have the capacity to integrate everything that could possibly be imagined by the human mind, we say, "Where has the whole thing come from?" This question of where it has come from has given rise to many philosophies all over the earth, many psychological systems and many sciences, because everyone is trying to puzzle out the same question: where does it come from? How does it function, what is the meaning, what is the purpose, what is my relationship to it? I may not agree to call it God. I may call it the universe; I may call it matter; I may even call it physics, or chemistry, or biology; but behind these words stands the fact that I am trying to puzzle out a basic problem that arises with the questioning of where, how and what.

If you travel to India, to a very deep past - nobody knows how old it is - we find, through the words of Swami Vivekananda, that the people then seemed to have understood that human intelligence is evolving. We know from Western thought that the idea of evolution was introduced in the 19th and 20th centuries, but the idea that there is an evolving purpose being manifested to the human consciousness is very ancient in India. So much so that Swamiji says it is the evolution of human understanding that is linked to the evolution of the concept of God. God also has evolved. In my searching for a meaning to everything I am searching for God. If I evolve, as the Western point of view tries to tell us, and my conception of God does not evolve, there are great problems. If I believe that God was revealed once for all time, once upon a time, and cannot be revealed in every human mind, again and again, according to my own capacity, then the problem does not get solved. The puzzle cannot be solved. The only way out is to understand that with the evolution of my understanding, my concept of God also evolves. Maybe there was a time that God was thought of as an extra-cosmic power.

Power is manifested all around us. We are aware that this universe is a manifestation of some kind of a power. In the beginning, what names did they give to it? If you go to the Rig Veda, or the most ancient cultures, they would look at the sun, and say, well, that is something like God. Look at the moon, that is something like God. Look at the thunder, the power of thunder, that seems to be like God. They were aware that power is manifesting itself on this earth around us, in us, so they thought that there has to be someone who has created this. This word who is very important to the human mind, because we seem to be forced to think of the creator also as human. It is very natural for us to say who made it, because we believe someone has to make it, someone who is conscious. It cannot be inanimate. Why not? Because we are aware within ourselves that we are a mixture of two elements, conscious as well as material. So, one who has created the universe has to be a who. It cannot be what. I cannot say what created the universe. In today's physics that is what they are trying to find out. What is the first moment of creation? Instead of saying who created it, we have shifted our attention to what. But very soon, I believe, we will be able to merge what with who. Millions of people all over the earth are not satisfied with what created the universe. Physics is not something that I can live by. I may have a profession based on physical research, but I cannot live, I cannot call myself a conscious human being in search of love and feelings and sympathy and consolation and truth; I am not satisfied with what created this universe.

Who created this universe is answered in the beginning in dualistic terms by saying there must be a power which is beyond this cosmos and that created this world. Who is it? Since it is so powerful, it must be something that we are to be scared of. So, fear seems to be there originally. You go to the beginning of these cultures and you find people are scared, they are trying to please this God; they are trying to offer all kinds of sacrifices. They say, please forgive us for whatever we may have done. These ideas of asking for

forgiveness, which we carry still today, are there. We feel guilty. We do not know why. We feel that we have done something bad to be here. These ideas, connected with a very dualistic approach to who created the universe, created the first God, the first idea of God, or, the first concept of God as an extra-cosmic principle, or an extra-cosmic someone. What does he look like? You have all kinds of pictures, all kinds of images given in Christianity and in ancient Hinduism also. But they were not satisfactory, not close enough. They were difficult to relate to. It is impossible to relate to an extra-cosmic power which thunders, which creates lightning. I am scared of lightning, I am scared of thunder. I do not know how to relate to the sun, to the moon, to the sky; but I have a need to relate. This desire to relate, this desire to have some kind of an intimacy with this power which has created the universe, as well as me, seems to have worked with these ancient thinkers and they shifted their stand. They shifted their stand from the purely dualistic standpoint, which is called dvaita, to a very strange kind of a level by the method of thinking and meditating. This is the method that comes down to us in Indian thought: that there is a way of working at your own mental evolution which will also solve the puzzle of a God of the cosmos, as well as a God who has created me. The stand shifted from being purely external to something internal. They asked, who has created this universe? How do I relate to this God?

The word God is Western; there are so many words used for the same concept, so you can use any one, it makes hardly any difference. They say that the human mind is always searching. It is not true that there was a time when the human mind did not search, and suddenly, somebody came and said that there is a God and then it started searching. That cannot be true. The human mind has been searching from the very beginning. Even animals search in their limited ways. So, the human mind searched deeper, looked at events around, looked at people around, looked at the manifestation of nature around, and started finding similarities. There seemed to be similarities. There

seemed to be a law. There seemed to be something that runs through this universe. This thread that runs through, they said, is God. What is similar? There are seeds, almost invisible, which are put in the ground. They grow, and in the course of time, there is a huge tree. Where has it come from?

From something invisible. The invisible becomes the visible. If the invisible becomes the visible in its manifestation in external nature, why should it be difficult to imagine that I also come from a source which is invisible becoming visible. This invisible becoming visible is the shift that happened in Indian thought. First is visible. The first level is that all this is visible. Who has created it? That also must be highly visible somewhere beyond. I cannot see the whole universe, I cannot see beyond the galaxies, beyond the stars, beyond the sun, beyond the moon, so somewhere out there, there must be a being, very powerful. The next level is to say: no, it should be here; because I put the seed in the ground and it was invisible, and suddenly it became visible. So that means the power which I am searching for has a way of manifesting itself from the level which can be called unmanifested to manifested. How does it do so? It simply takes energy from various factors and somehow brings it within and then manifests itself in a new form. So all these forms, millions of forms, whether they are animate or inanimate, or whether they are animals, or insects, or human beings, seem to be manifestations of something very powerful, very invisible, which has all capacities within it. If this is so, the concept of God which was very far away has suddenly come very near. Now I can relate to it. I can relate to a tree, to objects, to other human beings, and to animals. There seems to have been a tremendous euphoria, a tremendous sense of joy and adventure that the God who was far away has suddenly come very near. It is possible to relate to this God. In what way? If it is totally invisible, how do I do it? How do I reach this God? In order that I may be able to relate to it, this God has to become small, has to have a form. It is impossible to relate to the thread that is there in everyone. I know

that I can relate to a few people, I can relate to a few animals, I can relate to a little bit of the space-time framework in which I live, but how to relate to this basic principle, which is manifesting itself everywhere? Is it possible that the sameness of this invisible reality can be caught, can be grasped, by taking a small image? There must have been thousands of people searching for this and doing research, because otherwise it would have been impossible to come to the conclusion that they came to. They seem to have understood that it is possible that that which was formless has taken form. What kind of form? Any form, since I need a form to concentrate upon. Now this idea of concentration seems to be very basic to Indian thought. Not that it is not basic to Western thought. It is equally basic to Western thought as applied to external research, research at the physical level. The very same fact was understood in India in a different way by turning it towards oneself. What happens when I concentrate my mind? We find that when I concentrate my mind it is somehow more illumined. It is not so illumined if I get up early in the morning and my mind is scattered all over - sometimes it is dull; sometimes a little more bright. It is haphazard. But is there a way of concentrating on something so that it will become more illumined? We find that yes, it is possible.

We do not know where this idea came from, this idea that one can concentrate on oneself, or one can concentrate on an image; but we find that the act of concentration evolves me, my mind, my understanding, and therefore, I can understand more and more about what I am searching for, concentrating upon my own power, inside power, mental or intellectual power - whatever you like to call it. The intensification of this energy became the key point of Indian thought. They gave it a very beautiful word, it was called tapasya. Tapa is heat, it also means making very strong by a power which intensifies. So, this idea of tapasya, which goes back to Vedic times, is very predominant. Till today the idea is dominant in the Indian mind that tapasya is something mysterious.

It can create anything that you like. There is tremendous power in the universe. There is power within myself. With the help of tapasya I can solve any problem. Whether it is worldly, whether it is evil, whether it is good, I can turn this tapasya into whatever I want. I want to kill an enemy, I have to do tapasya. I want to live for a very long time, I must do tapasya. I want to discover something basic in this universe, I have to do tapasya. So when we come to the next level of thought in India, tapasya seems to be the main thread. Do tapasya and you will get whatever you want. This gave rise to a tremendous psychology, which is called raja yoga, where the mind is studied with the power of tapasya, and layer after layer of the inner person is uncovered. This inner person is called sukshmarira, the subtle body, what we call the mind.

This subtle body, which is made of up of very fine material, seems to be covered over with many layers. With the power of tapasya, concentration, these layers were uncovered. Then it was discovered that not only were they uncovering their own mental levels, they were also uncovering the understanding of the world around. So this link is what gives you the clue to how the Indian mind went deeper and deeper and understood that uncovering oneself is uncovering the mystery outside too.

How did they understand this? By a very simple experiment which we have almost forgotten in India: How do I experience the world? Do I experience it as it is? Do I experience it with the eyes which are visible? I open my eyes and the world is there. To this day we believe this, though physiology tells us otherwise. We have gone through education at the school level, college level, university level, and we come back and believe exactly the same thing: that I open my eyes and the world is there. These ancient thinkers discovered that this is not so. The eyes are merely the outer windows; there has to be something more. That something more is within the nervous system. It is there today in all the books. You can read about it. There is a centre of vision in the

brain which has to function in order that my eyes can see. Then is that all? They said: no, not at all; there is something deeper than that. What is that? I have to pay attention. If I do not pay attention, the eyes may be there, the centre of vision may be there in my brain, but I will not see. So which is the crucial level? The crucial level seems to be paying attention. Who pays attention? Is it the mind paying attention to me, or is it I paying attention to something within myself? It seems as if there is a tremendous laboratory within where all kinds of activities are going on, all kinds of processes are going on, and I have to pay attention in order that the whole laboratory starts and continues functioning. The laboratory seems to function at a subconscious level because we have forgotten how exactly we make images. We have forgotten, we do not know. But in a simple experiment I can understand that if I do not pay attention, I cannot experience this world. If I pay attention, the world is there and if I do not pay attention, the world vanishes. Is it a great discovery or is it something very common? It is not common because till this day we have not been able to understand the depth of this experiment: that paying attention is something very important. I pay attention and the world is there in front of me. Does it pass through many processes? Definitely. There is a physical level, a physiological level, a psychological level, and there is a metaphysical level, which the Indian mind adds. That there is a physical level everyone knows today. The light of the sun has to be there, it has to fall on the object. The object has to be photographed by my eyes, it has to be taken to my centre of vision. So far, it is absolutely clear; nobody can deny these facts any longer. But what about this 'I' which has to pay attention. Is it also part of the process or is it standing somewhere behind the process? If it is standing somewhere behind the process, because it seems to say, "I pay attention," then attention is the bridge and I seem to be standing behind that. So, if I stand even behind attention, I do not seem to be part of the psychological level, or the physical level or the physiological level. I am a metaphysical entity. It is a

very strange conclusion, a very simple conclusion, and one can experiment with it and find out whether it is true or not. So, I pay attention and therefore the world is there in front of me. (to be continued)

Eliot, Karma, and the re-birth of Language (continued)

David Moses and Miles Wright

Eliot's use of Eastern texts is predominantly Mantric. His use of scriptural texts as an ineffable space parallels Christian scriptural exegesis, where the concept of God as Alpha and Omega signifies the origin of meaning and final end of the world. This finds an equivalence in the status of the 'Word' of God in Hindu scripture:

AUM , this syllable is all this.

A further explanation of it:

All that is past, the present, the future

All this is simply AUM.

Whatever is beyond the twofold time that too

Is simply AUM.

(Mandukya Upanishad. V.i. trans. Wright.)

As the arbiter of intertextuality, we might see Eliot himself as the source of meaning, highlighting him as author(-ity) and meaning of his own text. He couples the idea of the

absolute meaning of a Self beyond time with a self whose meaning is silent reverberation (AUM) rather than verbal: 'words, after speech, reach into the silence.' ('Burnt Norton' 139) Silence itself is the underlying meaning into which words flux, and then dissipate leaving all in place; the poet and his flawed language are just the instrument of its disclosure. If the allusions of The Waste Land defer meaning from one voice to another, this flow could be seen to find fixity in the presence of the speaking subject of the scriptural references, by identifying their origins as Mantra: 'May my word be one with my thought, and my thought be one with my word.' (Aitarya Upanishad Line 1-2) Silence is a perennial flow of language interrupted by vocal speech which abstracts silence. Chanted or listened to, it implies its origin as Godhead, 'The essence of man is speech' (I.i.2) 'the Rg is nothing but speech.'(1.i.5.) (Chandogya Upanishad trans. Wright.). Mantra is described as 'a word or formulae that represents a mental presence or energy; by it something is produced, crystallised in the mind ... Mantras correctly uttered or sung became part of the liturgy of sacrifice which gave them an additional authority, as well as ensuring communication with the chosen deity.' (Kearns 34)

Kearns' definition is a western one. Mantra is really not about thought, but about where thought is from. Mantric language is a doorway that allows you to go back to where you came from, a doorway, behind which is nothing, in front of which is language stretching out into creation - into time and space. Mantra is tracing your words back to where you came from: 'therefore that which purifies the word is attainment of the Supreme Self. He who knows the truth of its origin attains the immortal Brahmin', says the Vakyapadiya (1.131. trans. Wright.) If the mantra is closed to contingency, the significance of the line 'Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves / waited for rain' (396) is central to 'What The Thunder Said'. It is a call for replenishment through the Word made flesh, Shiva, who mediates with the heavens letting the life and salvation-bestowing waters then flow

gently to the earth for the physical and spiritual refreshment of mankind. On one side of the mantric doorway the word does not exist, on the other side it is flesh, and corruptible. In Prufrock, we may identify the intersection of the real with a prescribed social ideal. The intersection is one of realisation over appearance and pretence. There is a sense of life being acted out while the subject is etherised and displaced from any sense of self. Caught between appearance and reality, Prufrock offers the same sense of throbbing between two lives as Tiresias, in *The Waste Land*. Endlessly futile reincarnations to be escaped are `related to this intermediate zone between life and death, leading either to rebirth or liberation, is the concept of karma, a law of "action and reaction."' (Kearns 38) The irony is that Prufrock cannot achieve the just reimbursement of an introspective, enquiring devotion, because the `overwhelming questions' of existence are just out of his angle of vision, his situation devoid of faith in anything. These speculations may be seen in analytical philosophy, determinism verses free will, essence over existence, what Wittgenstein termed `the unutterable.' For Prufrock `karma may, in his case at least, have made a mistake.' (Kearns 40) `I should have been a pair of ragged claws' draws on the concept of rebirth at a lower level as a result of actions in a human life.

Lead me from the unreal to the real;

Lead me from darkness to light;

Lead me from death to immortality.

(Brihadṛanyaka Upanishad. `Refrain'.)

The refrain is from the same Upanishad appropriated for `What The Thunder Said'. What is interesting in the first line of the Brihadṛanyaka is the Sanskrit word Koṣa, which means `sheath' or `envelope' to describe the human being in which the self is enclosed.

Interestingly Yeats translates Ko«sa as `personality': `In the beginning all things were Self, in the shape of personality.'⁸ Yeats fails to tackle the dichotomy more clearly explored by Prufrock's attachment to the personality and ego, maintaining his fluctuating state between an attenuated reality and the point of asking a question which would dispel appearance in favour of the reality of Self. The mingling of Ecclesiastes, with its emphasis on vanity and ego, and the repetition of binary oppositions, is collocated with the observance that appearance is a version, but not actually Self. Mediation is the empty countenance which we present to others. `There will be time, there will be time To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (26 - 28) The Dhammapada of the Buddha offers another source. The overwhelming question is, what would the subject do if s/he met their original face, rather than the faces prepared and constructed for others?⁹ In Prufrock faces, not selves meet. Visages are the empty gestures of a modern world devoid of spirituality, and where agency is etherised in favour of the idealised constructions acceptable to a socially superficial world. By evoking the context of the Brihad«ranyaka Eliot evokes an already established discourse on appearance and ego. The Brihad«ranyaka uses binary oppositions in order to show how they deteriorate and prove unsatisfactory. Clear opposites, good and evil, are inadequate relatives, failing to account for the interrelationship of the individual to all things. They are spiritually dangerous because they necessitate one individual passing judgement on another, an act of ego compelling I over (s)he. Part of the anxiety of Prufrock is that which is unattainable about existence: an individual freedom. Buddha's `original face', like Bergson's depth of being is `that which is most uniformly, most constantly and most enduringly myself. ... our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it.'¹⁰ This is the development of the idea of a double self `one aspect being the everyday self, experiencing common reality; the other, a deeper self, attuned to profound truths, and normally in subjugation to the superficial self.' (48) For Prufrock

the constant repetition of everyday actions reasserts time, notable in the poem's repetition complex. It is the cycle of birth and death, characterised by the stasis of 'a hundred indecisions, / And time for a hundred visions and revisions'. (33) The endless repetitions of worldly experience are a futility to be escaped.

The birth and growth of the body

Takes place through the offerings of Intention, touch, and sight, and by means of Food, drink and impregnation;

Whereas the embodied Self assumes

Successively in different situations the

Physical appearances that correspond to its actions.

(Shvetashvatara Upanishad. 5. 11. Trans. Wright.)

In Upanishadic terms, if the waking experience is impermanent, there must be something abiding to support it, a reality exclusive of sensory perceptions. Freedom from the conditioning of mind and body is into a world unbound by the limitations of time, space and causality. It is the dreamless state where, in psychological terms, the nervous system is repaired, and which we could see, symbolically, as absorbance into the sea of Samādhi 'till human voices wake us and we drown' (131) or the 'death by water' in the ocean of samsara. As a lump of salt thrown in water dissolves and cannot be taken out again, though wherever we taste the water it is salty, even so, beloved, the separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal.

(Brihadāranyaka 2.4.12) Because Eliot's texts use Upanishads as a documentary manifestation of reflective thought which attempt to confront the problems of consciousness, we could see the object of the text as the process of reflection itself.

The Waste Land's apparent fragmented consciousness may be an attempt at a non-hermetic language open to individual agency on multiple levels: 'the poem is what it means to different sensitive readers.'¹¹ The apparent occlusion of direct engagement with political factors gives way to socially representative figures: no transformation of self can take place in isolation from changes in a social context which rehearse what those encounters actually mean. By its 'frictional complementarity'¹² the poem attempts a reconciliation of the established values of Eastern mysticism with the abstract market forces embodied in 'Mr Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant.'⁽²⁰⁹⁾ The sexual liaison of 'the typist home at teatime' (223) represents constant re-enactments of carnal desire which Tiresias has 'suffered' (243) in the past, present and future. He sees whole substance of the poem and the business-like transaction of a moment devoid of spiritual awareness. It is something imposed by the modern upon individual selves, and is highlighted by the painful observations of Tiresias who, martyr-like, takes that suffering awareness upon his self. If Tiresias is, as critics posit (Smith 100 -113 Brown 90 - 142) Eliot's version of himself, sage-like, entering the poem, spiritual value is a subjective perception: 'man is now what he has always been and always will be. The narrator, the examining subject, is in motion; the examined reality is static'.¹³ Passion is objectified as an assertion of individuality, allowing the 'other' to be enjoyed, simultaneously subjective understanding is always struggling to transcend the web of relationships enmeshed in it, producing a heteroglossaic art form. Kearns suggests Tiresias' Indian counterpart to be the Seer figure Prajapati, the androgynous visionary and narrating consciousness behind the Brihad-ranyaka, which corroborates Upanishadic influence as structural rather than local. (Kearns 206) Eliot's own observation that 'those highly-organised beings who are able to objectify their passions ... are also those who suffer and enjoy the most keenly' (Southam 209) again sets Tiresias outside of everyday existence as one whose death in life has lost the sense of other people as

inviolably other. Prajapati, as Tiresias, is the intense perceiver who brings all things into existence. As the organising consciousness of the Upanishads, he is often seen as ego because the act of creation is ego. But he is also the ego of the reader, - another intense perceiver - who becomes creator, creating the scene through language, on her own level. (to be continued)

Religion and Life (Continued)

Swami Bhuteshananda

I cannot digest sane advice. Can you tell me why this is so?

We accept only that advice which is pleasing to our mind. We close our eyes to unpleasant ones. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'I have told you everything; accept it after discarding the head and tail.' However, when it comes to renunciation, he is firm: 'Nothing can be attained without renunciation' he declared. Even if there is a little dirt in the needle, the thread cannot pass through it. Has the dirt been inherited from past births? Is there any account of how much has been stored in this life itself?

So many people are repeating God's names. But still there is no transformation in society. Why?

Some good work is going on. But the dirt has got accumulated for so long; will it go in a day? People think that the whole world will change for the better. Such a thing has never happened before, and will never happen in the future also. ... So many 'moulds' have been created until now. Where are those 'moulds'?

Should we follow the dictates of circumstances?

If you swim against the current, you will feel the push. Now, if the circumstance is favourable, follow it; if it is not, try to avoid it and transcend it.

What is meant by the `Indivisible Satcidananda'?

Let us assume that His form is indivisible. Then He is the Lord and I am His servant. Can we not become His servants if He is within us? We can worship the Formless also. If we worship the Formless, all-pervading Reality, why will there be a division between Him and us? Sri Ramakrishna has spoken about trees, fruits and flowers made of wax [cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 363]. He is immanent in everything and that is why Sri Ramakrishna said that He is like the salty taste that inheres in salt. You may say that strictly speaking this is not Advaita; but we are speaking about the inherent presence of God. In what way is He inherent? Like butter in milk. Maharaj, do we not get ghee in a different stage of processing milk? We are not concerned with that. We see He is present everywhere, like the thread being everywhere in the cloth. I read so many religious books, I visit temples quite often; yet my mind does not become pure, why? Dear child, you are not aware about the dirt that has accumulated in the mind. Go on scrubbing and it will become cleansed. ... It takes time.

What is the difference between sukha (happiness) and santi (peace)?

If you like to eat rasagollas, you feel happy by eating them; but you will not attain peace. The mind does not become free from anxiety etc. When the mind becomes free from anxiety, you have attained peace.

Is there anything beyond the universe?

If the Creator is not limited to the universe, He is beyond it then. He has pervaded the

universe with one part of His glory; so He is beyond the universe.

Just as people get lost in the crowd, when I lose my way in the world, what should I do?

Do not 'get lost'! Do not go astray! Hold His hand - the hand which leads you safely through, and then proceed.

My mind becomes restless just after meditating for some time. Why?

My child, you have progressed a lot then! At least you are able to meditate for some time and the mind is becoming restless after that - that meditation becomes deep. Day and night the mind dwells on worldly things and in between you remember God once or twice: can the mind become concentrated in this way? You should think of Him always. You should open your mind and read it. You should do some self-examination.

My mind is such a small one, how can I perform self-examination?

It is certainly possible. With this small mind you thought a lot and so you got a job, became a father, and now, a grandfather too. Why can you not think and examine your mind now? 'I know what is dharma but have no inclination to follow it; I know what is adharma but have no inclination to give it up.' Your point is, 'O Hari! Repeat Your name Yourself. What can we poor people do?' Suppose we say, 'Your path is this one,' you will say, 'You must take us along the path.' If we ask, 'Why do you not come here?' you will instantly say, 'You should bring us here.' That is, 'We shall not do anything at all!'

Maharaj, whenever I can get some time I run to your presence. I do not know if I have the ability to do anything myself. This coming here will not go in vain, I hope? Why will this 'running here' go in vain? But you will also have to prepare yourself. If you run here just out of curiosity, and spend your time in talking, it will not be keeping true holy company. Why should holy company become futile? 'Holy company' means the company

of God and we should be conscious of that company. Or else, it is not holy company.

Some are ordained by God to go downwards, while some upwards. Does this depend upon the potential of the souls so ordained? No, it doesn't. It is according to His sweet will. ... No, not depending upon the potential of the souls This is because, who has created the 'potential' souls? Even the 'potentials' are His own creation. (Candi 'Devi Suktam', 5) The Divine Mother says: 'I make a dear creature great, a brahma, a sage, and one with supremely divine intelligence.'

Maharaj, are all things on this earth dependent upon experience (anubhuti) alone?

You see, all experiences or anubhutis cannot be true. There is consistency in truth. Truth can never be a chameleon. What is light can never be darkness.

Maharaj, what is the difference between prarabdha and karmaphala?

Prarabdha, 'that which has begun to bear fruit', is also a form of karmaphala, 'fruit of action'. Whatever actions you had performed in past lives, and have begun to produce fruit now, are called prarabdha. What you are experiencing now and what you will be experiencing in the future are also, in a broad sense, karmaphala.

What is the meaning of bhavaroga?

Bhavaroga is the 'disease of the world' - the disease of worldliness. Bhava is the world and roga is disease. We are burning in this world, yet we want worldly attractions. If we had considered our living here merely as duty, and that we are only performing our duties, the world wouldn't have scalded us much. In the Durga Saptasati, there is a statement from the businessman, Samadhi (1.32): "I do not understand why, but even though my wife and children are so averse to me, my mind is terribly drawn towards them." This is the fate of most people: their son tortures them, but still, 'After all he is

our son!' It should have been a sense of duty instead of attachment; had there been a sense of duty alone, things would have been benevolent. This is called maya, this is slavery to the senses! We are bound hand and foot to the world. We do not aspire after liberation from bondage. And even if God Himself comes to give us liberation, we become terrified. An old lady was carrying a heavy load on her head. She could not carry it for long. So she cried with all her heart to the Lord of Death, Yama: `O Lord of Death! I cannot bear this suffering any more. Please take me away!' Hearing her heartfelt wail, Yama appeared before her. Instantly, the old lady said:' Father, since you have come to me, anyway, please carry this load for me.'

-Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar due acknowledgements to Prabuddha Bharata

The Five Commandments of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Dayatmananda

The Five Commandments of Sri Ramakrishna M. (humbly): "How ought we to live in the world?" Master: "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all -- with wife and children, father and mother -- and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you. "A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'My Rama' or 'My Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all. "The tortoise moves about in

the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God. "If you enter the world without first cultivating love for God, you will be entangled more and more. You will be overwhelmed with its danger, its grief, its sorrows. And the more you think of worldly things, the more you will be attached to them." This was the fifth commandment of Sri Ramakrishna. In our last article the practice of discrimination was discussed. The natural corollary of discrimination is detachment; discrimination without detachment is useless. Every spiritual aspirant, ultimately, learns that he has to live in this world with detachment; it is the very corner-stone of spiritual progress. This teaching of Sri Ramakrishna contains three important points:

1. One must perform one's duties diligently, with reverence and love.
2. One must never forget that no-one in this world belongs to him except God.
3. Without acquiring love for God and some amount of detachment it is impossible not to be overwhelmed by attachments and cares.

(1) Most of the spiritual aspirants in this world are householders having many duties, responsibilities and the inevitable worries. If one does not know how to detach the mind, at least to some extent it is impossible to focus the mind on God. Sri Ramakrishna gives such devotees clear and definite guidance. One must discharge one's duties with great love and care. No one can attain the state of inaction except by going through the field of action. For most people it is not possible to sit quiet. The field of action strengthens one's character. Right attitude, concentration, tranquillity and devotion - with these every action is transformed into spiritual practice. Sri Ramakrishna's advice to serve one's parents etc., with great love and reverence 'as if they were very dear to you' is not make believe. He is merely cautioning us not to fall into the trap of

attachment. Many devotees think that they are serving their parents, family etc with detachment. This is pure self-deception. When things are going on well they think they are progressing spiritually. But let there be slight trouble - immediately they are overwhelmed. The test of detachment can be found in tranquillity of mind. True devotees, under difficult situations, not only remain tranquil but depend all the more on God. That is why Sri Ramakrishna's advice is so very important. This was the advice given in the Gita by Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Every religion emphasizes the practice of detachment. At the same time detachment must not make us cold, callous and insensitive to others' pain and feeling. Says Swami Vivekananda : `There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery, the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. Surely it is better to be attached and caught than to be a wall. We do not want that. That is weakness, that is death.' Spiritual aspirants also must be careful not to over-do their duties. In the name of obligations and duties it is possible to go beyond all reason, to fall into the net of maya. Often maya masquerades in the form of daya. Sri Ramakrishna used to call impure love maya, and pure love daya. According to him: 'There is a great deal of difference between daya, compassion, and maya, attachment. daya is good, but not maya, maya is love for one's relatives-one's wife, children, brother, sister, nephew, father and mother. But daya is the same love for all created beings without any distinction. Again, 'Maya' entangles man and turns him away from God. But through daya one realizes God.'

Devotees are required to develop daya but not maya. So one should have a clear idea of one's obligations and duties, and how to perform them. A question by the author of `The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' makes this clear. Disciple: How long, Sir, have I obligations to the family? The Master: "So long as the family is not provided with enough to maintain itself. But if your children can support themselves, you have no more duty to them." To

some householder devotees the Master said : "You will look upon money only as a means of getting food, clothes and shelter, of worshipping the Deity and serving Sadhus and devotees. But it is wrong to hoard it. Bees labour hard to build their hives, but man comes and robs them. You need not renounce `lust' completely. But after a few children are born, you and your wife should live like brother and sister."

(2) No one really belongs to any one in this world. A Sanskrit poem says: `Just as twigs being carried by the current in a river come nearer and again get separated so also people come nearer and get separated according to the results of their past actions.' This is absolutely true. If we look back into our past we can realize how true this statement is. The One and only Eternal Companion of our life is God alone. We learn this truth only after much suffering. Every being in this world is journeying towards God, the final destination of all. The journey comes to an end only when we reach Him. Therefore all the unions and separations in this world are only accidental and meant only to help us develop detachment and devotion. Until we learn our lessons we will be presented with the same situations and difficulties. Hence Sri Ramakrishna's advice that we should never forget that no-one belongs to us except God. "Always consider that your family concerns are not yours; they are God's and you are His servant come here to obey His commands. When this Idea becomes firm, there remains nothing indeed that a man may call his own."

(3) It is not easy to believe that only God belongs to us unless one acquires some amount of devotion to Him. This is possible only through constant unremitting practice for a long time. With faith in one's Guru and in the teachings of scriptures one should carry on with regular practice of japa, prayer and service. In course of time the mind gets purified and the seed of devotion grows slowly. If one has devotion to God then there is nothing to fear or worry about. Devotion itself takes possession and unerringly guides the devotee

in all matters. Even under trying circumstances devotees keep their balance. In fact the more the troubles the more would be their longing and reliance on Him. The more they experience pain the more they feel the insubstantiality of this world. Difficulties increase their detachment further. Thus slowly but surely they progress until they reach Him and become Blessed. We have discussed the five commandments of Sri Ramakrishna in considerable detail. Undoubtedly any one who sincerely tries to put into practice these five commandments will make spiritual progress and will realize God. "Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion; knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again."

Saint Francis' Joy

Br.B

Saint Francis and Brother Leo were on their way from Perugia to St. Mary of the Angels. It was winter, and in the bitter cold St. Francis was suffering intensely. Calling out to his companion, who was walking a short distance ahead, St. Francis instructed him as follows: `Brother Leo, even though the Friars Minor set good examples of holiness and edification, write down and take heed that perfect joy lies not in these things.

` Walking along the road a bit further, St. Francis spoke again: `Brother Leo, even if a Friar Minor could give sight to the blind, make the crooked straight, cast out evil spirits, make deaf people able to hear, make the lame walk and the dumb speak, or even revive those who have lain in the grave for four days, write - perfect joy lies not in these things.

' Pausing for a while, St. Francis exclaimed loudly: ` Brother Leo, if a Friar Minor were proficient in all languages and sciences, and knew all the Scriptures, and could thereby foretell and reveal not only future things, but even the secrets of the conscience of the soul, write - perfect joy lies not in these things.

' After some time St. Francis said again: ` Brother Leo, little sheep of God, even were a Friar Minor to speak with the tongue of angels, know the courses of the stars and the virtues of herbs, and were the hidden treasures of the earth revealed to him, and could he understand the ways of birds, fish, of all animals, of human beings, and of trees, of stones, of roots, and of waters; write - perfect joy is not to be found in these things.

' Going on a little further, St. Francis again called out loudly: ` Brother Leo, although a Friar Minor were such a gifted preacher that he could convert all unbelievers to the faith of Christ, write - perfect joy lies not therein.

' When this discourse of St. Francis had been going on for nearly two miles along the way, a bewildered Brother Leo asked him eagerly: ` Father, in the name of God, pray tell me how can one find perfect joy!.

' St. Francis explained: ` If, when arriving at Saint Mary of the Angels, drenched with rain, frozen from cold, muddy and exhausted with hunger, we knock at the door and the doorkeeper asks us angrily: ` Who are you?' and we reply: ` We are two of your friars,' and he says: ` You lie! You are a couple of ruffians who wander around deceiving people and stealing the alms of the poor; off with you!' and he refuses to open the door and makes us stay outside in the rain and snow, hungry and cold. And if we endure such cruelty, abuse, and rejection patiently and without complaint, humbly thinking that the doorkeeper really knows us for what we are, and that it is God himself who makes him so denounce us, write, Brother Leo, in this lies perfect joy.

`Suppose we go on knocking, and he comes out in a rage and chases us away with blows and abuse, saying: `Go away, you dirty thieves! You will get no food or lodging here, go to the poorhouse!' and we can suffer this treatment calmly and gladly, write, Brother Leo, this is perfect joy.

`And if, moved by hunger and cold, we knock again, and pray to him with tears that he let us in for the love of God, and he grows even more furious and exclaims: `These are persistent rogues, let me give them what they deserve!' and storms out with a heavy stick in hand and seizing us by the cowls he throws us on the snow, all the while beating us frantically with the stick, bruising every limb of our bodies, and if we can endure all these things patiently and cheerfully, thinking of the agonies of the blessed Christ, write, Brother Leo, in this lies perfect joy.

`Now, Brother Leo, listen to the conclusion. Greater than all the grace and all the gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ grants to His friends is that of overcoming self, and willingly to bear pain, injury, abuse and discomfort for love of Him only; because we cannot glory in any other gifts of God except this one, for any other gifts are not ours, but God's. This is why the Apostle said, `What have you got which is not of God? And if you have received it from Him, why do you glory as if you had it of yourself?' But in the cross of tribulation and affliction we may glory, because it is our own. Therefore the Apostle said, `I will not glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The Lord bless thee and keep thee.

Show his face to thee and have mercy on thee.

Turn his countenance to thee and give thee peace.

The Lord bless thee, Brother Leo.

St Francis of Assisi

Universal Values for the World Conscience

Dr Shelly Brown

A Vedantist since 1953, Dr. Brown is the author of Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda's biography.

Since September 11, we have been living in a tinderbox of anger and confusion, anxiety and grief. Our world is much less certain these days, despite a better sense of ourselves and of those around us as capable of profound empathy and selfless deeds. We are discovering our common humanity. We are learning that everything, bad or good, has a ripple effect on our general well-being. It is at such moments that we turn to the wise, the beneficent, and the compassionate - the true well-wishers of mankind. We listen in gratitude to the peace-loving religious leaders of the world, and offer our prayers to the legion of good-hearted workers everywhere who labor in the cause of dignity and freedom. We share our stories of those who have inspired us, and who have given us hope.

I was privileged to know one such benefactor of humanity, the late Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda - a legendary monk of the Ramakrishna Order. He spent a lifetime in conversation with top scientists and scholars, striving tirelessly to bring the timeless wisdom of Vedanta into the mainstream of global thought and endeavor; in the process, he inspired scholars, artists, and public figures worldwide with his scheme to promote a truly humane world civilization. The new global citizen, he said in essence, must be culturally and scientifically aware while at the same time perceiving the spiritual unity

underlying all aspects of human life.

Swami Nitya-swarup-ananda was himself a global citizen, and another was his friend, the English historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee. 'At this supremely dangerous moment in human history,' Dr. Toynbee wrote in 1969, 'the only way of salvation for mankind is an Indian way.' He was pointing to the universal aspects of Indian thought that include a reverence for all life and for all religions. This teaching is right, he said, 'because it flows from a true vision of spiritual reality.

' This vision of spiritual reality is embodied in the Vedas, the oldest scriptures known to man; and its essence, Vedanta philosophy, has been studied in India for thousands of years. Vedanta spread in America after it was preached at the 1893 Parliament of Religions by the charismatic Swami Vivekananda. His message of universal love and the acceptance of all religions made a lasting impact at the Parliament, and later throughout the Western world.

Swami Vivekananda preached a universal religion based on Truth, and his legacy stands strong today. There are Vedanta centers, monasteries, and retreats throughout the world associated with the Ramakrishna Order that Swami Vivekananda founded in 1897, including several dozen in the United States. The numbers in this country are relatively small, but the potency of this universal teaching has not been diluted. The relevance of this ancient philosophy to the technological age came into sharp focus recently when the role of 'Vedanta in the Third Millennium' was discussed at a national conference arranged by the Vedanta center in Chicago.

On the one hand, there is a natural affinity between Vedanta philosophy and modern science. Both are experimental; both demand proof. Vedanta has been called 'the science of the soul' because it probes the innermost life of the human psyche, just as

physics and biology probe the mysteries of the phenomenal world. It is no coincidence that the unity of matter discovered by physics echoes the unity of spirit that the ancient sages discovered eons ago.

On the other hand, Vedanta is way ahead of modern science when it comes to the universal wisdom that is needed to temper technology's tremendous power. Wondrous scientific advances have far outstripped mankind's moral capacity to cope with the misuse of science for selfish ends or its hazardous by-products. Thus, ease of communication and travel coexist with the empowerment of brutal individuals to do unprecedented harm. New energy sources coexist with stockpiles of hazardous nuclear waste. Medical miracles coexist with serious ethical dilemmas.

These and other global problems should come under the scrutiny of a moral power that is equal to the world's technological power - and in a form that is widely acceptable to diverse dogmas and creeds. Vedanta is rooted in the perennial spiritual principles that have been realized by the sages and saints of every major faith-tradition, so there is a common bond at the mystic core. In Vedanta, there is no proselytizing and no need for conversion - only a spiritual deepening within one's own faith-tradition and a heart-expanding awareness of the human community as a whole. On an individual level, many people are experiencing a crisis of faith: 'What sort of God would permit this slaughter of innocents?' In this respect, too, Vedanta offers the comfort of a universal viewpoint in that it holds God blameless. From a transcendental perspective, God is uncontaminated by the duality of the phenomenal world. Good and evil are a matter of human choice, and we reap the consequences of human actions. In times of crisis, good thoughts and actions - the stepping-stones to our enlightenment - are not so easy to come by and must be consciously sought. Vedanta is a pragmatic philosophy that stresses the need for individual spiritual discipline, such as self-reflection and meditation, in order to balance

the head and the heart and to make us more thoughtful, more loving, more giving, and more expansive - in every way more expressive of the divinity within. We may not be able to change the world, but, as the Bhagavad Gita urges, we can treat ourselves as friends rather than enemies, and lift ourselves up from within. This positive approach is a practical tool for the clergy who are counseling the bereaved while coping with communal feelings of helplessness and rage. India's perennial wisdom, which sees every soul as divine and every religion as a path, and which focuses impartially on the science of spiritual realization, has been a wellspring for today's interfaith dialogue and exploration of pluralism. It can play an equally important - indeed a crucial - role in lending its holistic spiritual perspective to our current global crisis.

Discussion in the Meadow

One beautiful summer's day at about noon a great calm reigned at the edge of the forest. Everything was quiet. Then the chaffinch raised his head and asked: 'What is life really?'

All were concerned about this difficult question. The chaffinch flew in a wide arc over the wide meadow and returned to his branch in the shade of the tree. The rose was just unfolding her buds and cautiously pushing out one petal over the other. She said: 'Life is a development.'

The butterfly was less profoundly moved. He flew from one flower to another, sucked here and there and said: 'Life is all joy and sunshine.'

Below in the grass an ant strained himself with a piece of straw, ten times longer than

himself and said: `Life is nothing more than toil and trouble.'

A busy bee returned to the meadow for the honey-bearing flowers and said: `No, life is an alternation of work and pleasure.'

Where such wise sayings were being made, the mole also poked his head out of the ground and growled: `Life consists of tears, nothing but tears.'

Then he went on towards the sea. There the waves were breaking and throwing themselves with all their might against the rocks and groaning: `Life is a continual struggle in vain for freedom.'

High above them the eagle flew in a circle. He rejoiced: `Life is a striving towards the heights.'

Not far from the shore was a willow tree. The storm had already bent her sideways. She said: `Life is bending beneath a greater power.'

Night came. With silent wings an owl glided over the meadow towards the forest and hooted: `Life means taking the opportunity, when others are sleeping.'

Finally it became quiet in the forest and meadow. After a while a young man came that way. He sat down tired in the grass, stretched out his arms and legs and said, exhausted from dancing and drinking: `Life is a continual search for happiness and a long series of disappointments.' Then quite suddenly the dawn rose in its full splendour and spoke:

`Just as I, the dawn, am the beginning of a new day, so is life the beginning of eternity!'

Eve Wright

As migratory birds appear on our shores at this time of year, so Vedantins come to Bourne End from many places - this year including France and Italy - for the annual spring retreat. In our case, unfortunately, this did not presage the advent of warm weather in England. During the retreat the sun shone but thereafter the summer seemed to disappear without trace. This year, as last, we were graced with the presence of Swami Veetamohananda from the Gretz Centre in France who continued the study of the Bhagavad Gita with us. This year he led us through Chapter 3 in which Sri Krishna teaches Arjuna the path of karma yoga or communion through action. Swami Veetamohananda told us that 90% of our lives is spent in action, either acting or reacting. Such actions can bring us worries and suffering if we do not understand the secret of right action.

He told us, quoting from the Upanishads the verse which describes the trees and the mountains as meditating, that the whole of the universe is in perfect harmony. We, human beings, are not. Why? Because 99% of our lives is blinded by the ego which is pulled this way and that by 100,000 desires. As we build up our inner force, the 'hard' ego softens. Suppression of inner nature does not work, it has to be transformed. Gradually, as we are less and less at the mercy of internal forces and mental tension, our lives become richer and more fulfilling.

In the Bhagavad Gita Arjuna asks Krishna why he is being urged to act when knowledge is superior to action (as described in Chapter 2). Swami Veetamohananda explained to us that Arjuna is dispirited so Krishna urges him to action (self-effort) so that knowledge may grow. He said we are all heroes and have to pursue our destiny of freedom. Krishna replies that both paths of action and knowledge lead to liberation - both are good and necessary. Pure intellect shows us how to act correctly. Right understanding comes

through right action. As knowledge grows, gradually the need to do certain duties falls away.

Krishna also tells Arjuna that the world is bound by actions, except those performed in sacrifice. Swami Veetamohananda added that eternal sacrifice goes on in the cosmos all the time. Parents give way to children, plants and animals to other plants and animals. It is all part of a universal law of sacrifice. All the great saints have lived lives of sacrifice as examples. The lessons learned from their examples are not limited by time and space. As we practise the lessons taught by these great ones, we embody their spirit. The spirit of their teachings enliven and inspire our lives. We are all expressions of Infinity itself but we are ignorant of this fact. The Divine Ideal is the perfect embodiment of this Infinity and acts as a symbol of that Reality, indicating to us who we really are. Ignorance is not a state of not-knowing, it is like the weed covering the pond so the life beneath cannot be seen. It must be removed through righteous action. We must feel our connection to this Infinity. As we think, so we become. Throughout the three days of the retreat Swami Veetamohananda kept emphasising the concept of interconnectedness which he said was the theme of this chapter of the Bhagavad Gita. Everything is related to everything else. Modern physics has come to the same conclusion. He quoted Swami Vivekananda who said that when an atom is moved, the rest of the world is moved along with it. Swami Veetamohananda also kept referring to the interconnectedness of the different approaches to the Divine. We need love and devotion to draw us towards the Divine and the intellect to discriminate so that our actions may be righteous. When the actions are righteous, the mind is free of tension and our devotion can flow freely.

There was much in these three days for us to feed our minds on and to influence our actions in the coming year when we look forward to seeing Swami Veetamohananda with

us again.

Eve Wright

Book Review

Selections from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, annotated and explained. Annotation by Kendra Crossen Burroughs. Series editor Andrew Harvey. Published by Skylight Paths Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, USA. ISBN 1-893361-46-2

In the last fifty years the number of sacred books made available to all and anyone has grown enormously. Not so very long ago certain sacred scriptures were only available through a teacher and even then possibly not for women or members of certain classes. Now we all have access to them for study and inspiration and many different spiritual publishing houses are springing up to feed those hungry for more. One such publishing house is Skylight Paths in Vermont who have engaged the well-known British writer on mysticism, Andrew Harvey, to edit a series of books which include the Bhagavad Gita, the Dhammapada, The Way of a Pilgrim, Zohar and The Gospel of Thomas. The series is entitled SkyLight Illuminations and the publishers promise that the translations will be accessible with useful commentaries by experts. In this case the translation is by Swami Nikhilananda and the comments, though attributed to Kendra Crossen Burroughs, were clearly performed with the advice and guidance of Swami Adiswarananda of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre, New York. Andrew Harvey appears to be eminently qualified to edit the text as he confesses in the Foreword that The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna has been one of the most important books of his life. He writes that if there were one book he could take on a desert island, it would be this one. `I first encountered this small man who has changed my life and influenced every step of my

journey.. when I was twenty-five,' he continues and then goes on in a moving way to describe what the book and Sri Ramakrishna has meant to him. 'There has never been a time in which humanity needed Ramakrishna's holy company and inspiration more.' and 'I believe that the guidance, example, and vision of Ramakrishna are essential to human survival' The volume comprises only just over 200 pages with the main text on only the right hand side, the left kept for annotations and comments. It therefore includes but a small selection of extracts from the Gospel, starting with M's first meetings with Sri Ramakrishna and going on to include such themes (as chapter headings) as Worldly Duties, Dive Deep and A Yearning Heart. The comments give a very useful introduction to Vedantic thought and clear explanations of Sanskrit terms which would be extremely helpful to a newcomer to them. This is a book you might well like to give to an interested friend who is unfamiliar with Hindu spirituality and the glowing introduction by Andrew Harvey would undoubtedly inspire one to delve more deeply into the wealth of literature available through the Ramakrishna Order.