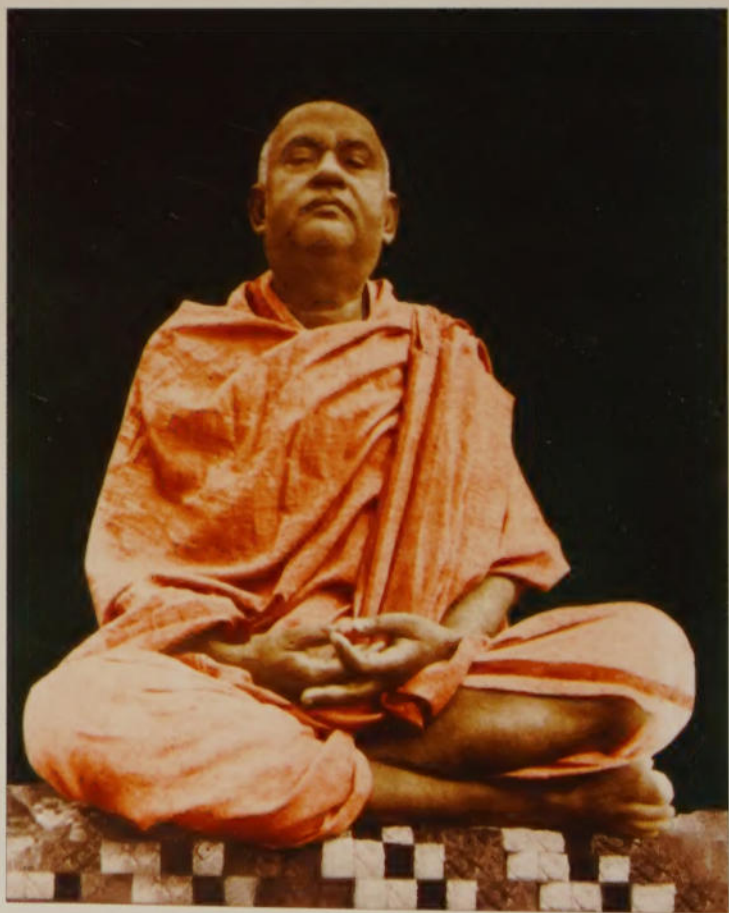


# Meditation according to Yoga-Vedanta

Swami Siddheswarananda





The First President of the Ramakrishna Order  
Swami Brahmananda (1863-1922)

# MEDITATION

## ACCORDING TO YOGA-VEDANTA

*By*  
SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

*Translated from original French by*  
PROF. V. A. TYAGARAJAN



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[mail@advaitaashrama.org](mailto:mail@advaitaashrama.org)

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*To the Memory of  
Swami Brahmananda*



Whether you like it or not, follow your routine regularly. By so doing you will gradually create a permanent habit. Perhaps now you do not enjoy meditating, but as you form the habit, you will come to the point where you will actually feel unhappy if you do not meditate. When you reach this stage, you will know that you have advanced along the spiritual path.

Daytime has many distractions and hence is unsuited for meditation, but at night all creatures go to rest and nature herself is calm and silent. This is the time for aspirants to meditate on the Lord. In the depth of the night the mind is easily concentrated.

— *Swami Brahmananda*

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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

With much pleasure we place this newly composed version of *Meditation According to Yoga-Vedanta* before our readers. We express our gratitude to Ramakrishna Math, Thrissur, for having passed over the copyright of the book to us. There is no gainsaying the importance of this book. The subject of meditation will hold the attention of the human mind as long as there is a striving on the part of human beings to plumb the depths of their personality. Swami Siddheswarananda's exposition and treatment of the subject displays a mastery of a rare type. We are sure that both the spiritual aspirants as well as the general readers would benefit from this book.

16 July 2007

PUBLISHER

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE TO THE FIRST EDITION

We have great pleasure in bringing out this translation of the French book *Meditation selon le Yoga-Vedanta* written and published by Swami Siddheswarananda in 1942 for the benefit of French devotees. After the Swami gave us the right to publish it, the translation was got ready and sent to him. He had intended to make some additions and alterations; but before he could complete the work, he attained Mahasamadhi on April 2, 1957 after a heart-attack. The translation was later verified by Mon. Pierre Pegon, a French disciple of the Swami. We tender him our sincere thanks. We now place this book before the Indian public and hope that it will appeal to all spiritual aspirants, particularly those with a modern educational background.

We tender our profound thanks to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the President of India, for having kindly given us a Foreword to introduce this book. We acknowledge with deep gratitude this token of appreciation from an eminent and learned man who knew the Swami well and

who had occasion to see for himself the work the Swami was doing both in India and in France.

We are deeply grateful to Prof. V. A. Tyagarajan for having so gladly undertaken the translation and so carefully and meticulously executed it. We deeply appreciate his devotion and piety, and the spiritual fervour which prompted him to undertake this arduous work; we tender our grateful thanks to him.

The portrait of Swami Brahmananda which appears as the frontispiece to this book has been copied from the original photograph and is not the one drawn by the famous French artist M. Bilis from the same original, which appears in the French book and about which the Swami speaks in his preface.

It is our fervent hope that this book will provide inspiration and true guidance to aspirants in their spiritual life where the practice of meditation is an all-important factor.

Thrissur  
10 February 1966

SWAMI ISWARANANDA

## FOREWORD

I am glad to find that Ramakrishna Ashrama, Thrissur is bringing out an English translation of Swami Siddheswarananda's book in French on "Meditation According to Yoga-Vedanta."

I had known Swami Siddheswarananda ever since he was a student at the Presidency College, Madras, in the second decade of this century. After completing his university career, he joined the Ramakrishna Order and worked in its Madras and Mysore branches. In 1937 the Order deputed him to Paris to work as a spiritual teacher and cultural ambassador of India in France.

He soon mastered the French language, became an effective interpreter of India to the West, and established a Vedanta Centre in Gretz where he continued to live and work with rare devotion till his death in 1957 at the early age of 59. Through his lectures and discourses in the Paris University and other institutions of culture and learning, and through his qualities of devotion and piety, he established himself in the esteem and affection of a good section of the intellectuals and spiritually sensitive

people of France. His wholesome influence was felt even beyond the frontiers of France.

Swami Siddheswarananda and I continued to keep in touch with each other till his last day. I had the pleasure to visit him in Mysore in the late twenties, and again in Paris in the late forties, and I have witnessed the deep love and respect in which he was held by his students and friends every where.

I hope the readers will benefit from the spiritual ideas conveyed by the Swami in this book.

Rashtrapati Bhavan  
New Delhi - 4  
15 December 1965

S. RADHAKRISHNAN

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION

The pages that follow are not a rigorous series of a learned discourse, nor are they distinct essays on the subject-matter corresponding to the headings of the different chapters. They are only a faithful rendering of the talks I gave in Paris during the years 1939 and 1940 in order to explain to a group of sincere aspirants who were intent on understanding what meditation meant.

I improvised these talks for them gradually, as the subject unfolded itself before me and took shape; also I had to modify frequently the course of my thoughts when pupils came to join my usual classes. Besides, I personally knew those who followed assiduously these intimate talks, and very often I made use of that occasion indirectly to reply to the questions that I was asked in private interviews.

Moreover, these talks were sometimes given after long intervals: in fact I had followed the practice of dealing each week with one aspect of Vedanta philosophy and of keeping for the last meeting of each month the study

of less difficult subjects. It is thus that I approached the practical problems of spiritual life and indicated, according to the principles of Yoga-Vedanta, the means to arrive at the goal.

By bringing together by a hyphen two philosophical systems (*darshanas*), the approaches of which are quite different, one, the yoga, which is in accordance with the views expounded by Patanjali and which leads one to mystic experience, and the other, the Vedanta, which emphasizes the metaphysical aspect and leads one to knowledge (*jnana*), I have followed the tradition of the Ramakrishna Order and confined myself to the exposition of the subject, not in a dogmatic manner and, consequently, biased, but inspired by the teaching of our Master. After having made experimentally the synthesis of all methods, Sri Ramakrishna declared, by taking cognizance of them, that for realizing the Truth of truths, there are as many ways as there are religions and systems.

In this humble work, I wanted to establish that between the practices of the mystic and those of the metaphysician, there does not exist, as far as ultimate results are concerned, any difference, when the aspirants, whatever path they might have chosen, start resolutely on the conquest of the Supreme Reality and when, for attempting this ascension, they are provided with the necessary equipment, that is to say, they possess the

indispensable moral virtues and fulfil the essential preliminary conditions.

The fourth chapter, "The Role of Japa in the Awakening of Kundalini," and the [eighth chapter] "Conclusion: Integral Experience," are not always from the same source as the other parts of the book. The major part of this chapter IV is composed of extracts from private letters, written by me to numerous persons, who had asked my advice and to whom I had given clarifications on Tantric traditions of spiritual exercises. Regarding the Conclusion, it is the "resume" of a lecture that I gave in 1942 in a students' club in the University of Toulouse on the fundamental characteristics of Hindu mysticism.

This work is dedicated to my own Guru, whose portrait figures on the frontispiece\* (which was possible to be reproduced — thanks to the liberality of Mme. Francis Rouanet — by a reputed artist, M. Bilis, from a photograph defaced by time). This portrait of Swami Brahmananda, excuted with rare talent, brings us direct evidence of a divine presence which treatises on meditation or philosophical talks could but feebly suggest. For us Swami Brahmananda remains a living symbol of all

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\* The frontispiece picture of Swami Brahmananda given in this book is not the portrait one reproduced by M. Bilis. It is one of the extant photos of the Swami — *Publisher*.

that consists of the most sacred in this spiritual tradition, which again only yesterday incarnated itself, under our very eyes, in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. I have attempted here to communicate to the reader, within the limits of permissible revelation, the truths that I have myself received from my Teacher; but there are for the spiritual life certain other elements which we hold sacrosanct, and these could be revealed only to disciples, who are worthy of them, by the time-honoured method of oral transmission.

In 1886, a few days before his end, the Master, who was then at Cossipore, asked "M", the famous author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, whether he could get him a water-colour painting, representing a bird hatching its eggs. The venerable "M" showed me the work of the painter, adding, "Unfortunately I could not get it finished in time. When it was finished, the Master had already departed. He told me that the bird that hatches had exactly the attitude of a *yogin*: its eyes were opened wide but all its attention was turned inwards." Nothing could better define the attitude of Swami Brahmananda. Besides, it was all natural for him because it came from the depths of his personal realization. Until his last moments, that is to say till 1922, he was the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In this capacity he administered our entire organization, of which he himself directed the innumerable branches, monasteries, centres

of social service, Sevashramas, hospitals, orphanages and relief organizations against floods and famine. All these cater to the needs of thousands of our countrymen. Well, the Swami taught us to regard life in every situation from the highest point of view. Even when he appeared absorbed in the heavy responsibilities of an active life, he always had the saintly consciousness of the constant presence of God. His example reminds us that "the sovereign good" can be realized here below only by the practice of meditation, and this book, a humble homage rendered to his memory, would not be in vain, if it awakens in those who read it the desire to progress on the path by consecrating themselves to this spiritual exercise.

I cannot terminate this preface without giving expression to my profound gratitude to M. Marcel Sauton for the help he has given me by resorting from his notes the texts of these talks and giving them a form, which work my still imperfect knowledge of the French language does not permit me to lay claim to. Several persons have a close knowledge of this work in the manuscript stage and they have given me valuable suggestions for which I assure them of my lively gratitude.

And, lastly, I offer M. Adrien Maisonneuve most sincere thanks for the trouble he had to undergo, in the present circumstances, for the publication of this book. In placing within the reach of the French public the

treasures of our wisdom, he has, in his capacity as editor, rendered our motherland eminent service of which all Hindus will ever preserve a touching recollection.

If among the readers anyone feel a desire to obtain fuller information on any subject treated here, the author will be pleased to supply them. He requests them to write to him to the following address.

SWAMI SIDDHESWARANANDA

Villa "Mon Repos" au Carla

LAVAUUR (Tarn)

FOIX

7 October 1942

## CHAPTER I

# CHARACTER BUILDING: THOUGHT-POWER

In spiritual matters there is no standard measure of instruction; doubtless, from the metaphysical point of view, the enquiry arrives at a fundamental, a common substratum; but as soon as it is a question of formulating practical rules, diversity begins to appear. One cannot point out a common path along which all may travel. Each aspirant must find out his own path.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, for example, Sri Krishna frequently repeats the one advice, "Fight on! Fight on!" But the disciple to whom this exhortation is addressed belongs to the warrior caste. Arjuna is a *kshatriya*. He ought to fulfil his special duty, his *svadharma*, and assure the protection of his subjects. In another *Gita*, commonly known as the *Uddhava Gita*, which forms the eleventh canto of the *Bhagavata Purana*, the Lord adopts an entirely different attitude. This time, the disciple Uddhava is an ascetic. Sri Krishna advises him

to lead a contemplative life and to practise meditation, *Raja-yoga*.

Arjuna for his part receives instruction which is suitable to his state of mind. He is on the field of battle. It is not for him to hesitate. His is the path of action, Karma-Yoga. Is not the world an arena? Are we not, all of us, in a sense, warriors? To fight on — that is the law of man, and life is nothing but a long series of battles.

According to the Sankhya theory, life begins to manifest itself when the equilibrium of the forces of Nature is disturbed. The latent powers of the *gunas*, of the inherent characteristics, then manifest themselves and come to play their part. The inherent characteristics of purity, activity and inertia, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, constitute the three aspects of primordial Nature, *Prakriti*.

If at any time everything should be permeated by *sattva*, purity, matter would cease to be gross matter: it would become spiritualized. It would be withdrawn into the silence and peace of the Spirit, of the One and the Eternal. Equilibrium would then be re-established.

As long as this superior condition is not realized, we remain in the midst of turmoil. The world of manifestation continues to unfold itself and, as Patanjali, the greatest of Indian psychologists, said, the spirit continues to fulfil the role of Nature.

The march of evolution is frequently compared to a heroic battle in which the reward is the liberation of the

individual spirit. It is called in Sanskrit *svarajyasiddhi*. One might, therefore, interpret in the following way the historic situation represented by the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna is the universal soul, the eternal *Purusha*, Arjuna is the individual soul in quest of deliverance. The conflicting armies represent the antagonistic forces of good and evil. The plane of Kurukshetra, the scene of the drama, is our mind.

In the empirical life, all of us are, to a certain extent, in the position of Arjuna. The field of battle is within us; there are the heroes who engage in the fight as well as the Lord who leads us across the snares of *maya* and makes us insensible to the temptations of the world.

The teaching of Sri Krishna is that we should not abstain from action, that we should not flee to a monastery in a mountain for shelter or hide ourselves in the depths of a cloister. We should not imagine that meditation furnishes us with a means to evade our obligations, and offers us an escape from life. Meditation will prepare us, if we follow in practice the rules of Yoga-Vedanta, to fulfil, better than in the past, our individual duties and obligations. That is because we rebuild our character upon solid foundations. In this way, every one becomes, according to one's disposition, a better citizen of the world and a more useful servant of humanity.

That is the reason why the *Bhagavad Gita* has a much wider appeal than the *Uddhava Gita*.

Only a limited few can consecrate themselves exclusively to a life of meditation. As for the others — and they form the majority — who cannot follow this path, it is not less essential that they should participate in a life of action, *karma*. For them too, meditation is of considerable importance; it permits the aspirant to become the master of his own mind, to ameliorate his present condition, and to direct his progress, step by step, towards a religious or spiritual goal.

The mind is the only instrument which is at our disposal. It is our bounden duty that we seek, above all, to attain inner purity. Later on, it may be possible for us to achieve perfection; but it is necessary, as a first step to it, that the world should cease to hold out any attraction to us, so that we might use in an integral manner all the power of our spirit. It is only by means of the mind that we know the world around us, and it is therefore our duty to make the mind as perfect an instrument as possible. Whatever be the path that we might choose, the assiduous practice of meditation will furnish us with the means of obtaining the fullest control over the organism of the mind.

Each one of us has to play a certain part in society; the task to be performed may differ from individual to individual. What is essential is that we should squarely face our obligations, for, otherwise, we are in grave peril, and will receive severe shocks. It is essential that we

should be guided by a certain discipline in order that we might be able to overcome all the obstacles. In this way, we increase the strength of our spirit.

In order to realize it, it is essential that we should try to understand ourselves and the forces that are at work within us, although we are not aware of them.

If our life should unfold itself entirely on the material plane, and if we leave no scope for the forces within us to express themselves, we hardly lift ourselves above the animal level. The superior man is he who is capable of directing all his efforts towards a single purpose, for, he has within him the power of interpreting all the aspects of the universe. To the extent to which we give a unified direction to all the energies which lie latent in our mind, we recognize the power which lies within us.

That is why all of us should practise meditation. It is not demanded of us, I wish to state categorically, that we should cut ourselves away from the world, or that we should isolate ourselves from society. But it is our duty to comprehend those forces that are at work within us. The more perfect our control over the mind, the better able will we be to fulfil our obligations; that is the true function of intelligence. Man is heir to two distinct sets of heritages: the one is his biological heritage, the other is his divine heritage. It is only by virtue of his intelligence that man differs from animals, for, they obey only the impulses of their instincts.

The term intelligence, as it is commonly understood, is the faculty of distinguishing good from evil, of discriminating truth from error. It is the expression of the capacity that all of us have, that of being able to make a choice and to take a decision. When the spirit is perplexed and where there is hesitation at the crossroads of life, it is the voice within us that directs us along a particular path and makes us turn away from the other. That is the voice of intelligence. It is at such critical moments that intelligence ought to play its part. If it were lacking, we will have to remain at a lower level. We may not be able to benefit by the opportunity that presents itself, and the progress of our evolution would be arrested.

Intelligence depends to a certain extent upon our physical organism, for, that is how it manifests itself. If the physical organism should be defective, intelligence fares ill. The lamp that is hidden under a bushel cannot shed its light.

There are some modern psychologists who are of the opinion that intelligence does not grow. According to them every living being comes with a certain intelligence-quotient, which it conserves, without any remarkable change, until the moment of death. Opportunity merely brings to the surface the faculty that is latent in man. In the presence of fortuitous events, it plays its role. An environment that is more or less favourable, and a

physical condition which is more or less satisfactory, merely accelerate or retard the play of intelligence.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, however, gives to us an entirely different concept of the nature of intelligence. According to the *Gita*, there is but one universal basis, and that is the Atman. Now, the Atman is one; it is homogeneous. It does not admit difference either of degree or of division. It is present equally in every individual; and one cannot say of the Atman that there is a bit more of it here or a bit less there. If intelligence does not exist apart from the Atman, every human being, according to the role that he plays, must necessarily be comprehended in terms of the Atman, whether it be on the physical and mental planes, or on the spiritual plane.

It is in the spiritual plane that it becomes really one. When we succeed in realizing this unity as a result of concentrated attention, we also perceive the harmony of the cosmos. The universe will then reveal itself to us the manifestation of supreme intelligence; on the other hand, if we allow ourselves to be deceived by multiplicity, intelligence becomes degenerate. Our interests and our personal prejudices obscure it. The ego develops and we lose our reason.

In fact, reason is only superior intelligence, *buddhi*. This *buddhi* does not come into play in relation to the day to day demands of life. It intervenes only during critical moments. It is the reflection of a superior power

that transcends our deceptive individuality, and it is by means of the *buddhi* that we come into contact with this superior power.

It is by means of meditation that it is possible to isolate the *buddhi*, for the *buddhi* is not something that is external to us. It is by the continuous exercise of meditation that we discover that this superior centre is in ourselves, and when once we establish communion with it, the concept of unity becomes our abiding heritage under all circumstances.

When we take our stand on this firm foundation, we perceive that the entire universe presents itself to us the very expression of this unity. We become aware of universal harmony. The supreme goal towards which all evolution is tending is realized when one is unassailably established in this unity, and when one becomes aware that one is living in it. Such is the psychological and philosophical basis of meditation.

In practice, it is necessary that we should submit ourselves to an inner discipline. In fact we are capable of it. We would then be able to work both for our own welfare and for the good of humanity. In the first instance we fulfil a spiritual aim; in the latter, a social aim. We have, therefore, to discharge two kinds of obligations: one as regards ourselves, and the other, as regards society.

For the most part we perceive around us nothing but multiplicity. The interaction of likes and dislikes

determines the course of our individual existence. As long as our life is charged with desires, and tends towards a goal which is ever uncertain and is ever shifting, life becomes lost in diversity and we remain in ignorance.

As soon as we comprehend that the One is the only truth, whose energy it is that sustains and animates the entire universe, whose presence it is that rolls into a single whole all beings and all things, we realize that we are one with the entire cosmos. When we recognize the place of our duties in relation to it, there reigns within us a superior moral order, a divine harmony.

This stage of *sattvik* equilibrium has been realized by persons like the Buddha, Jesus, Ramakrishna and others. They have maintained harmonious relation with all the people who approached them; but this attitude of external harmony was no more than the expression of the perfect harmony that reigned within them.

It should, however, be understood that, while saying this I confine myself to the realm of manifestation; as for those who have attained the supreme goal, there is neither an inner level of consciousness nor an outer.

Not until we have established inner harmony is it possible for us to know what outer harmony is. According to modern psychologists, each individual is a bundle of impulses, a complex of diverse personalities. The individual feels the shock and the pain that results from the conflict between these contrary forces. That is

why it is necessary, in the first instance, that we should unify all the forces within us if we wish to perceive harmony in the universe around us.

As a result of such multiple personality, each individual becomes, as it were, a vast crowd of people. As a consequence of the disharmony that prevails, we feel troubled in spirit. That is why every occasion of conflict gives rise to animosity, anxiety, hatred and fear. These inferior instincts and emotions are ever on the lookout to exercise their domain over us. Thereby confusion becomes worse confounded.

Our picture of the external world forms in our inner life but a minor part of the content of the mind. It forms part of the fore-conscious. Deep below that, there exists another and a much greater part, the subconscious or the unconscious.

We thus see how essential it is that we should work for our inner purification in all its fullness, for, if we know not how to harmonize the diverse constituents of our inner life, we would not be in a position to perceive harmony in the world around us.

On the very day on which we resolve to lead a spiritual life, we are particularly asked to create within us a greater harmony of life. At any cost we should establish this inner equilibrium, and drive out from our mind worry, anxiety and fear. Does not every individual wish, in the empirical life, to conquer all the external forces in order

that his personality might grow? Suppose there is a person who has no idea of the spiritual life but who nevertheless feels the urgings of this unknown force; he cannot but think about it; he would try to understand it, and to master it.

As soon as we begin to meditate, we should try to practise discrimination, and to understand what it is that exercises a dominant influence upon us. Why is it that we always have the same kind of reaction towards particular individuals? Why is it that our desires have a constant tendency to orient themselves along a particular direction? We can hear the answer to it only during the silent hours of meditation.

In our empirical lives we ignore up to a certain point that we are the plaything of our individual temperament. What we call our individuality is no more than a centre, though it is extremely sensitive to our likes and dislikes, *raga* and *dvesha*. Let us strive to conquer them one after the other. In solitude and silence, by withdrawing into ourselves, we come to know at what stage we are. The study of the scriptures and other sacred books will tell us what we ought to do; but in the tumult and fever of excitement, we have no time to stop and think. Let us cultivate the habit of thinking over our problems within ourselves. In this way we rebuild within ourselves a new personality, a spiritual character.

When our life unfolds itself in all its plenitude, in quest of an ideal of our choice, it would be much more easy for us to concentrate and to put into practice, during meditation, such counsels of perfection.

Unless we submit ourselves to such discipline, our personal distractions will not fail to leave a deep impression on our nervous system. We will be creating within ourselves fresh complexes. It will almost become impossible for us to fix our attention for a given length of time upon any subject whatever.

It is not the aim of meditation either to weaken or to atrophy the mind. On the contrary it enables us to exercise an incessant watch over ourselves. All that it demands is that we should have self-knowledge, and in order to attain it, it is essential that we should resort to the light of reason, *buddhi*.

When Arjuna was overwhelmed with despair in the face of the enemy, the advice that Sri Krishna gave him, in particular, was, "Be pure, be bold." Let us follow this advice. Before we may realize the supreme union with the Lord, let us practise, in order to purify ourselves, the yoga of the *buddhi*, by identifying ourselves with the light of reason. We thus come into contact with the supreme intelligence; by doing so we awaken a latent faculty within us. We can thus "isolate" the permanent substratum, the superior centre, which is ever present within our individuality.

In order to benefit by such investigation, we ought to take a scientific attitude in regard to ourselves. We should observe impartially the warring forces within us. How is it possible for us to arrive at a correct judgement of ourselves as long as we do not have a worthy ideal, and as long as we cherish that inner tension which, in turn, leads to our identifying ourselves with our empirical selves?

It was some years ago. I was then in the monastery at Madras. I fell ill. The doctor was called in. I was not properly dressed when his arrival was announced. I said, "Wait a minute. I shall dress myself." By that time, the doctor came in. He said with a smile, "Today I have not come to see the Swami. I am here to examine a specimen." I felt struck with the remark. At once the idea came to me that whether it is for the scientist or the man who devotes himself to meditation, the method of approach is the same. Every rare specimen should be studied objectively. It is not, however, so easy! One cannot acquire, within a day, the mental habit of looking at everything that passes within oneself from the point of view of a spectator. Ordinarily even the objects of the external world are seen through the distorted medium of our mental content. To see an object as it is in itself, without projecting upon it the penumbra of our opinions and personal predilections, is indeed a rare test of our mastery over the kingdom of our mind. If we wish to attain such mastery, we ought to

be, at every moment, and under every circumstance, the unaffected witness of all our thoughts that are tinged with emotion. Our emotional reactions are so quick and they manifest themselves with such vehemence that very often our reactions are involuntary, we do not pause and think what it is that we do. Just an instant, we are already in a whirlpool from which there is no escape. It is as a result of false identification with our inferior self that there is such moral disharmony. We have not had the time to reflect. Even if we had it, the result might perhaps have been the same; for, it may be that our spirit did not have, as a prior condition to it, the faculty of formulating a correct judgement based upon wise discrimination and a proper use of intelligence. This rule holds good under every aspect of life, whether we look at life from the metaphysical point of view, the psychological point of view, the moral, or the social.

Let us cultivate within us that superior intuition, *buddhi*. We would succeed only to the extent to which we make our character more and more stable. We are called upon to exercise our will-power every minute of our existence.

To the extent to which we are bound by our past prejudices and our individual preferences, or, to take a concrete instance, to the extent to which we feel the *least* sense of resentment towards a particular individual, it becomes impossible for us to follow the path of *buddhi*.

More often than not, we try to rationalise the unpleasant sentiments that lurk in us. We try to find out valid reasons to justify our conduct. We refuse to accept that we are in the wrong. We do not want to lose either our rank or dignity. Our intelligence plays the part of a lawyer with a bad case to defend. But we cannot call it a spiritual attitude.

As a preparation for meditation, let us draw an inventory of the present situation, let us take stock; but let us confine ourselves to the role of the "impartial witness"; let us examine ourselves in such a way that we do not identify ourselves with whatever it be — good or bad — that we find in ourselves. Let us learn to look upon ourselves *as if we no longer belong to this world*. It is only in our true "I" that we should find our leaning point. Let us allow this "I" to express itself in us a little more, each day, for we do not wish to acknowledge the tyranny of the powers that obstruct us. Let us resolve that, on a future occasion, we will take into account all these factors before we take plunge. Let us understand that all these external factors that dictate our conduct are not really part of ourselves; it is only in this way that we may achieve final victory over the enemy who blocks the right of way for the higher faculties within us.

If we should continue to identify ourselves with our desires and inclinations, we would have to give up all idea of spiritual progress.

In order to make our task easy, we should pursue the following line of thought: "The play of the instincts, whose power I feel within me, is, in reality, opposed to my spiritual progress. If I should give way to them, I would never rise above the level of animality; and I do not wish to resign myself to such a despicable condition."

From the foregoing discussion, one perceives what resources meditation offers to us, if we wish to elevate ourselves to a nobler state of existence.

While you meditate, imagine that you have to solve an inner problem. That would be an excellent exercise; for it would prepare you to participate later on in the genuine meditation, by means of which you rise to a higher level of consciousness. Unless you have subjected your entire individuality to a severe discipline, you will have to give up this ascent. In the first place, we should try to understand the nature of the personal conflict within us. After having found it out, we should seek a method by which the inferior "I" could be conquered by the superior "I", *Atman*. Such is the advice which the *Bhagavad-Gita* gives to us (VI, 5-6):

Let a man raise himself by himself, let him not lower himself; for, he alone is the friend of himself, he alone is the enemy of himself. To him who has conquered himself by himself, his own self is the friend of himself; but to him who has not

conquered himself, his own self stands in the place of an enemy like the external foe.

The same idea has been expressed by Wordsworth, who says (Excursion IV, 330-331):

And that unless above himself he can  
Erect himself, how poor a thing is man.

Each one of us has to face conflicts that are entirely personal to oneself. Moreover, it is on account of these conflicts that our lives become significant. At the initial stage, they raise the question of well-being in the face of the obstacles that we encounter in order to satisfy certain material ends. But the real conflict, if it is to be worthy of the name, arises only when man becomes conscious of a moral order, and in the attempt to approach his ideal, hurls himself against the obstacles that lie in his path. We find ourselves then in a situation similar to that of Duryodhana, the opponent of Arjuna. Krishna is the common friend of both the adversaries. (The Lord should be equally benevolent towards all those who believe in Him, should He not?) When Krishna asked Duryodhana why he persisted in following the path of evil, the latter replied, "Lord, I know what is right, *dharma*, but I am unable to follow it; and I know what is wrong, *adharma*, but I am unable to abstain from evil."

As long as we have not discovered the cause of the conflict within us, our spiritual evolution would remain arrested; our ignorance of it would itself be a proof that our consciousness is yet attached to the lower centres.

When I speak of consciousness, I accept the point of view taken by *Raja-yoga*, which declares that there is close relationship between the centres of consciousness and the psychological reactions. Our biological heritage demands that the instincts should seek their present satisfactions, and the nerve-centres that come into play are the lower ones.

There are, in the human organism, six centres. They are commonly known as *chakras*. The lowest of these are those that assure the conservation and reproduction of the species. But from the evolutionary point of view, man cannot be regarded as nothing more than simple physiological organism; he is also a psychological being and a being with a moral consciousness. In so far as the psychological needs make themselves felt on the ethical plane, they come into conflict with the organic needs. We thus come to the very source of all conflict. At the same time we find here the justification for the moral discipline that the aspirant ought to impose upon himself from the very beginning of his ascent upon the spiritual path. For the most part, one is not conscious of the inner drama that goes on within oneself. Man has not yet come to put himself at the symbolic battle of Kurukshetra, where

the moral and spiritual values stand opposed to the reflex action of the instincts. We will be able to enlarge our horizon to the extent to which we clearly recognize the primacy of the spiritual factor.

If we have studied and analyzed the forces that work so tumultuously within us, it behoves us that we part from them this very moment, so that we may be free to unify all our actions, conscious and unconscious, which constitute our habitual conduct. It is only during this period of apprenticeship that we may succeed in recognizing and discerning our most secret tendencies or *samskaras*. The necessary light will come to us from the superior "I", and it is that Self that shall give to us the power to resist the impetuosity of the instincts and lead us towards a nobler life.

Let us accustom ourselves in advance as to how best we may solve such problems as are likely to arise. In this way, we will develop within us those precious faculties of analysis and discrimination. And later on, if an identical problem should confront us, our reaction would be entirely different. By repeated exercise, we would have, bit by bit, built up a nobler personality. We would then no longer act as in the past. We would have broken the bondage to the automatic reaction of the instincts.

As long as we identify ourselves with the conflicts of each day, it would not be possible for us to elevate ourselves to the higher centres of consciousness. We have

at our disposal only one means of removing all the obstacles that lie in our path, and we avail ourselves of it by giving to our character that strength which is wanting at present.

Could it be that it is the lack of imagination that prevents us from making our minds come closer to perfection? There is for us but one source of help. Let us fix our spirit unceasingly upon some historical personality such as the Buddha, Jesus or Ramakrishna. Let that picture ever remain before us. Let us think over certain events in their lives. Let us recall their teachings; and let that divine ideal be the witness of our individual lives, the companion of our struggles and our efforts. Let us seek their advice. They will serve as models for us, and our evaluation shall progress in so far as it is regulated by them.

Imagination plays a very important part in normal life. Why should we not avail ourselves of it in our spiritual effort? Let us hearken to the advice of Swami Vivekananda: "Imagine yourselves to be in a condition which approximates more and more to the perfect. You would thus approach perfection itself, for, you would have in some form or other progressively infused it in you. You would acquire a greater harmony, your spiritual radiance would grow, your dynamism would increase, you would then find that your whole being has become enriched." Here is an exercise which we could take to with assiduity.

Regarding this subject, I have been frequently asked the following question: "Swamiji, would not the exercise of meditation as suggested by you be an encouragement to us to practise auto-suggestion? Of late, we have had but too much of it. If the spiritual laws also should recognize the value of auto-suggestion, would they not also be subject to the same criticism? For our part, we know only this much that pure imagination is more or less nothing other than the realization of a desire." To such questions I have never hesitated to answer with a categorical "No." There are different kinds of auto-suggestions. It is essential to distinguish the one from the other, and not to put all of them upon the same plane. The method of Yoga rests upon the solid foundation of philosophy and metaphysics. It teaches us that where there exists unity and nothing but unity, we see multiplicity and nothing but multiplicity. *That is the cause of all error, of all ignorance and of all sin.* Science and Vedanta have but one common aim. Both of them try to know '*That by knowing which all other things are known.*' According to the Hindu psychologists, error intervenes when the *buddhi* descends to a lower level. Such is the rule. The psyche or *antahkarana* is surcharged with the impurities of *tamas*, or inertia, and of *rajas*, or activity; it is this "psyche" that we ought to purify. It is therefore indispensable that our thoughts and acts should be in harmony with the highest morality.

The sages of India have at all times advised their disciples always to keep within the field of consciousness one great central idea. That call of one and the same idea will help to develop our *shakti*, our power of thought. It is only by the power of ennobling thought that internal purification can be successfully accomplished. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, let us make use of a thorn to remove another thorn that has stuck in our foot; and then when the work is over, throw away both the thorns. Thus, it is only with the help of thought that we can rise above the region of thought. We will have direct experience, if we should arrive at this point. We would then discover another phase of reality, the phase of silence, the aspect of the non-manifest. In the empirical life we perceive only its complementary aspect, that of manifestation. Moreover, we continue to interpret it in our own way, in terms of our ego; it is not therefore possible for us to appreciate its exact value.

By means of the discipline of Yoga we go back to the first cause, to the very source of all things, and in the experience of *samadhi*, our individual mind becomes merged in the non-manifest. Inasmuch as the ego is the conscious support of our mind, it is only by the purification of the mind that the ego, in its turn, could be purified. That is why we give such great importance to formation of character. There is not a more efficacious means than this for the call to the ego to break its self-

limitation and to go beyond the individual plane to the universal.

We consider that the state of being "without an ego" is nothing else than the state of liberation, and when we take to meditation we take the path that leads directly to deliverance (*mukti*).

It is not the function of Yoga to judge the significance of this latter experience: but here Vedanta comes to play its part. It teaches us that the state of being "without ego" does not necessarily imply the extinction of individuality on the plane of manifestation. Vedanta carries its investigation much farther than Yoga, for, in order to build a complete system of philosophy it is essential that it should give to us a synthesis of the totality of human experience and *explain what life really is*.

Vedanta accepts the method of Yoga; thus it is possible for an aspirant to cross over to the other shore and contemplate the non-manifest aspect of reality. It is only at that moment that the goal of Yoga is attained.

Even when the Yogi returns to the plane of the manifest, after his experience, he is freed from ignorance. It was only ignorance that compelled the ego to perceive the many, where in reality the one alone exists. The sage who knows the Truth under both of its aspects, the manifest and the non-manifest, and who however continues to live in the midst of men, is the visible embodiment of the perfect being. The perfected being is one whom

Vedanta honours under the title of *jivanmukta*. Such is our ideal; it is what we ought to realize in ourselves, for, the *jivanmukta* is one who, while living in the body, is ever liberated.

## CHAPTER II

# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL BASIS OF YOGA-VEDANTA

Yoga and Vedanta have alike a common goal: their aim is the progressive education of the individual. Their advice to us is that we should reduce all inner tension until we arrive at a stage where the inferior "I" is withdrawn into the supreme "I".

The philosophy of Vedanta explains and justifies the experimental method of Yoga, by which we are allowed to attain a stage of consciousness in which *not a ripple of thought arises in the mind* — *yogah-cittavritti-nirodhah*, "Yoga is the controlling of all mental modifications."

What we call our "individuality" is, in its subtle aspect, nothing more than a particular mental formation. It is but an assemblage of inclinations, thoughts and impulses. The technique of Yoga opens out the possibilities of eliminating all resistance. It is then that the

individual is in union with the universal. It is but natural that this tension should express itself through the ego-consciousness, that is, the consciousness of "I". In the language of Yoga it is called *asmita*.

In order that you might comprehend the psychological basis and keep firm hold on the chain of logic that the method of Yoga pursues, I should like to give you the principal characteristics of the Yoga system which is, in turn, based upon the categories of the Sankhya.

The term "Yoga" signifies at once a technique and a system of philosophy. Yoga has therefore two aspects: the one, practical, and the other, theoretical. Together they constitute a coherent doctrine.

In the development of Hindu philosophy, one distinguishes six great systems of philosophy. They are the Nyaya, the Vaisheshika, the Mimamsa, the Sankhya, the Yoga, and the Vedanta. In all the principal handbooks of Indian philosophy, notably in that of M. R. Grousset, you will find detailed studies on each one of the *darshanas*.

Yoga may be defined as a scientific utilization of the feelings and of reason. It is a method that leads to mystic experience. The system of Yoga takes a middle position between the system of Sankhya and that of Vedanta. It has its bearings upon each one of them. From the psychological point of view, it is connected with the Sankhya

system, and from the philosophical point of view, with the Vedanta system; but while Sankhya maintains a dualistic attitude, Vedanta tends towards monism, or to be more exact, towards non-dualism (*advaita*).

In spite of these opposing tendencies, these two systems converge at the same point. Even the aspirant who follows the path of devotion ends by merging in his personal ideal. His individuality is effaced when the union is consummated. At the culmination of the mystic experience, which transcends the limitations of the intellect, there is always "the vanishing of the ego." When once that experience is realized, one comes back to the empirical plane; but during the experience — whatever be the point of departure and the path followed — the devotee and his ideal form but one.

Differences arise only when it is a question of explaining the experience. In the field of devotion, one explains it in dualistic terms. On the other hand, an aspirant who has a predilection for a monistic system would not fail to give a colouring to his experience according to his special preferences. If he should follow the method approved by Shankara, he would, after his illumination, regard the whole world as the very expression of that unity.

It follows, from what has been already stated, that if the aspirant should have an inclination towards a dualistic system (absolute dualism is represented by

Madhva, by Islam, and by Christianity), he would naturally translate his experience in terms of the theological language with which he is familiar.

The common feature that emerges from all religious experience, of whatever sort it may be, is that the ego-consciousness does not exist during the moment of experience.

Now, Yoga teaches us the method of rising to that state of consciousness where individuality is dissolved. If we should accept its discipline, it is on the mind that we should concentrate our effort; for discovering the truth, the mind is the only instrument at our disposal. Moreover, it is the laboratory where we ought to work.

The consciousness of "I", of which I have just now spoken to you, forms a part of the subtle body which, according to Vedanta, is composed of four constituents, which analysis permits us to distinguish.

### *The citta*

That is the very substance of the mind. The *citta* includes all the movements of thought, all the activities, and all the qualities of the spirit. It comprises equally the conscious as well as the subconscious.

### *The manas*

This term applies more particularly to that part of the mind which is in contact with the external world. The mind does not at all times exercise upon the same

plane, or work in the same sense. The mind receives the messages from the sense-organs that surround it. The mind centralizes them and gives them significance. It is in this way that sensations are born and they are in turn registered as impressions of memory.

Finally, it is the *manas* that presents to us one of the aspects of consciousness, that of empirical consciousness.

We thus see that the term *citta* is used to designate the mind in its widest sense possible. The term *manas* indicates only its superficial layer.

### *The ahamkara*

As soon as a contact is established between the individual and the external world, it is consciousness that grasps it. In the first place consciousness expresses itself as follows: "I am conscious." It is the sense of "I" (*ahamkara*) which manifests itself in this way.

### *The buddhi*

The fourth element is much more subtle than all the foregoing. That is the superior reason. We are conscious of external objects because there exists in us an intelligent principle which allows us to choose between many motives and to take a decision. *Buddhi* serves by giving a direction to our consciousness. It is, in a way, the helm of the mind.

In the empirical world we see but the effects. If we should set out to investigate their cause, we find that

the cause escapes from our grasp. Every time we believe that we have understood it, it eludes our grasp; in the course of our investigation we are led into a series of infinite regression; in the course of our ascent along the series of effects or products, we have but caught hold of the modifications, and the cause has always remained beyond our grasp.

The *antahkarana* (internal organ) is the instrument of cognition, which consists of the *citta*, the *manas*, the *ahamkara*, and the *buddhi*. Even the mind is but an effect, inasmuch as it is composed of parts.

Patanjali, the great exponent of the point of view of Yoga, says that the ultimate reality, the Self, can be unveiled only when all the effects have been reduced to their cause. This first cause is known as *prakriti* in Sankhya philosophy, and as *maya* in Vedanta.

The individual mind is but a part of the subtle cosmos. It is therefore essential that we realign the individual spirit which is the effect in relation to the universal spirit which is the cause. In other words, we have to take back the individual mind, the *karyacitta*, to its source, the universal mind, *karanacitta*.

The main task is beyond the power of the mind of the aspirant; for the senses naturally turn towards what is outside. It is this propensity that directs the diverse movements of the mind such as sensations, desires and tendencies. The individual spirit is nourished by the

external world, and, consequently, draws it towards itself.

As long as the individual spirit remains under the charm of Nature, whether we call it *prakriti*, *pradhana* or *maya*, it cannot enter into communion with the cause. It is by means of Yoga that one may break its enchantment. The aspirant who feels this onward urge acquires, in effect, the power of reversing the normal course of experience. Henceforth he directs his mind *inward*. He ascends towards the source and, at the end of his investigation, realizes the basis from which all the modifications of the mind emanate. Such is the precise significance of the educative discipline of Yoga.

The Sankhya recognizes two categories of existence: *prakriti* and *purusha*. The *purusha* is the eternal spiritual principle; the *prakriti* represents primordial matter.

The world of manifestation begins to unfold itself when, as a result of the apparent interaction of *purusha* on the *prakriti*, the equilibrium of forces at the heart of undifferentiated Nature is disturbed; the *gunas* or qualities are at once given a shake up and, as a result of the activity of *prakriti*, it gives rise, in the first instance, to *mahat*, which in turn gives rise to *buddhi* and *ahamkara*. From the subtle form of *ahamkara* emanate the subtle essences, the *tanmatras*, which correspond to each one of the five senses, namely of hearing, touch, seeing, taste, and smelling. At last there appear, in regular sequence,

the following categories: the *manas*, the five *karmendriyas*, the senses of activity, and the five *jnanendriyas*, the senses of understanding. This scheme allows itself to be considered from two different points of view; the macrocosmic and the microcosmic. As far as our present study is concerned, we shall confine ourselves to the latter aspect of it.

If we wish to contemplate the one, the Eternal Being, it is essential that we should re-establish in ourselves the original equilibrium of the forces of *prakriti*. We would then reproduce, in the reverse order, within our mind, the entire process of evolution. It is not possible for us, at present, to have the vision of the *purusha*. The spirit is obscured by innumerable *vruttis*, modifications or waves of thought. There is the formation of impressions; it may be that they are caused by the attractions of the external world, or by the functioning of the memory as it awakens the hidden layers of the unconscious. The ripples caused by these impressions form into waves. In so far as the mind is agitated, primordial nescience, *avidya*, veils the face of the *purusha*. It is essential that the most complete calm should prevail in order that the *purusha* might reveal himself to us in all his glory.

Deliverance consists in cutting off all bonds of relationship between the true self and the *citta*. Henceforth it would become impossible for the movements of the

cosmic *prakriti* to be communicated to the subtle body or to trouble our individuality. When the self ceases to identify itself with the *citta*, it withdraws into its own field. There it would not be affected by the passions, for, the *purusha* is, in his real nature, none other than the witnessing consciousness of all the activities of the mind.

Even the slightest ripple in the *citta*, the mind, the subtle substance, would, by its formation, make the self apparently subject to diverse conditions, such as birth and growth, decay and death, and make it pass through the different stages of consciousness such as waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. If, on the other hand, the *citta* should regain its tranquillity, and that is the goal that we aspire to realize by means of meditation, the Self alone remains to the exclusion of all, whatever it may be that is other than the Self.

Yoga, as well as Vedanta, accepts the Sankhya theory. Both Yoga and Vedanta admit that deliverance can come only as the fruition of discrimination. But Yoga perceives, in the total cessation of all mental agitation, the most efficacious means for the attainment of the liberation. At no time should we identify this state of super-consciousness with that of deep sleep. By the method of concentration which Yoga puts at the disposal of the aspirant, he succeeds in breaking through the outer layers of the mind. He then enters the sanctum

sanctorum, so to say, and finds himself face to face with the *purusha*, the divine presence within.

It is only when the mind is established in serenity that concentration is at the stage of perfection. We have, as a preliminary step to it, to pass through the following six stages:

- The mind is troubled, *kshipta*. It is charged with *rajas*. It is assailed by the exciting events of the external world, and it proceeds from one thing to another. Instead of that, we might as well fix our attention on certain objects, but even then, we would be obeying only our passions and interests. That is not the kind of concentration that will help us to attain liberation.
- The mind is blinded, *mudha*. This time, there is an excess of *tamas*. It is a form or modification of sleep.
- The mind is agitated, *vikshipta*. This instability may be due partly to its inherent defects, and partly to accidental causes.
- The mind is gathered to a single point, *ekagra*. During that stage, it could, without deviation, be concentrated upon a single object. That is the correct attitude, and henceforth we prepare ourselves for the great effort that meditation demands of us. The mind is then permeated by *sattva*.

- The mind is restrained, *niruddha*. Here\* all its roving tendencies are paralyzed, even though there still exist in us, in a latent state, in the form of tendencies, those early impressions which are but waiting for a favourable occasion in order to enter upon the scene. The yogin should not only master the *vrittis*, mental modifications, at the precise moment when they begin to manifest themselves, but it is also necessary that evil should be attacked at its very root, and that the very tendencies should be destroyed. In the absence of such effort, they would regain their vigour at the very first favourable opportunity, and lead to fresh fruition.
- The mind is in perfect equilibrium, *samapatti*. It is then definitely beyond the region of being taken unawares in this manner. That is because whatever is likely to germinate has already been reduced to ashes. The mind is now in a position to assume the form of the object on which it is fixed. It is now united with its own nature. It becomes identical with that which is its aim.

Concerning this subject, the celebrated Vyasa has written:

When the memory is purified of all *vasanas*, remembrances, to us the term in its conventional sense, and when the inner

awareness, which is the inherent characteristic of concentration, *samadhiprajna*, is liberated from all contact with ideas, *vikalpa*, whether inferential or based upon oral tradition, the object taken as the aim of concentration remains as it is in itself, and as nothing more. It is then definitely characterised as having its own form, and as having no other form except its own.

On this point, Yoga and Vedanta alike arrive at the same conclusion. It is the *subjective* attitude, *purushatantra*, that is expressed in every interpretation, or tradition, that we give to life itself. How will it be possible for us to know the truth, *tattva*, if we project upon it our own prejudices, passions and preferences? The term *mata* applies only to one's own individual beliefs and opinions.

The discipline of Yoga as well as the method of discrimination that is employed by Vedanta points out to us how to conquer the resistance of the self. It is by rising to a stage that is devoid of ego-consciousness that we will be able to understand the object, *such as it is in itself*. Such is the objective method, *vastu-tantra*.

It may be stated in passing that European psychology and Yoga follow diametrically opposite paths. Yoga concentrates its attention upon the subject who perceives; the former upon the object.

According to Western philosophy, it is the object that is the source of all sensation, which the subject interprets

according to his mental make-up. But on this basis it is difficult to explain how exactly sense-perception is effected. Between the cerebral process and the mental process there opens out an abyss that cannot be bridged. How can the cortical vibrations that are produced on the sensory centres of the brain work upon the mind and give rise to sensations? This mystery has not been solved and the problem remains in its entirety.

The Sankhya system accepts a compromise which permits us to solve this internal contradiction in logic. The *antahkarana*, the internal organ, is composed of the *manas*, the *citta*, the *ahamkara*, and the *buddhi*, and it is this chain of intermediation that binds matter with the spirit. To be sure, the mind belongs to the matter side, but it is composed of an extremely subtle substance; it forms part of nature, *prakriti*; but it catches the reflected light of pure consciousness of the Universal Self, the *purusha*. In addition to it, the mind possesses the faculty of totally assuming the form of the object. According to the Sankhya, it is not the object that makes an inroad upon the mind and impresses upon it its own form; it is the mind that goes out in pursuit of the object and then takes upon itself the form of the object.

The Yoga system furnishes us with a means of undisputed value in order to arrive at that complete rest. It is only then that one realizes in all its fullness the pure

consciousness, free from all mental ideation and from all concepts.

The Yoga system demands of us that we should, at the outset, purify the forces of *prakriti* in the physical body, as well as the subtle body, the mind. As the next step, it recommends that we should progressively eliminate the forces of *tamas* and the domination of *rajas*. The aspirant then rises to a superior state where pure *sattva* alone remains. Finally, when he has attained the highest degree of purity, *sattva* also disintegrates. All agitation ceases at once. Equilibrium is re-established. In this way *prakriti* is separated from *purusha*. According to the teaching of Yoga, that alone is the realization of the Self.

We should specially keep in mind the psychological aspect of the problem. Without encroaching upon the texts that deal with studies upon this subject, notably the *Raja-yoga* by Swami Vivekananda, I should like to state here briefly the steps on the path of Yoga according to the classical texts:

- *Yama*: It is a rule of hygiene, of discipline and of morality. If there should be any obstacle to it in us, however slight it may be, it would hinder further progress.

- *Niyama*: We ought to purify our external nature, the body, and our internal nature, the mind, of all impurity. It is by means of *niyama* that we succeed in making use

of all the forces, physical and mental. The two work together for the complete purification of our personality.

- *Asana*: This term means "posture." The stabilization of the spirit is the aim that one pursues. The position of the body, chest forward, head erect, takes only a secondary place. What is essential is that one should always maintain a single dominant idea in the field of consciousness.

- *Pranayama*: That means having mastery over the movements of breathing in and breathing out. Let us cultivate the habit of taking deep breath, in a rhythmic manner, *without stopping the breath*.

All the works that deal with *Raja-yoga* stress the importance of controlling the breath. I do not wish to recommend to you this form of exercise. It would first of all be necessary to fulfil three conditions. They are, that one should live in a place where the air is pure, that one should follow a vegetarian diet, and that one should observe the laws of celibacy both in action and in thought. If any one of these should be wanting, one exposes oneself to grave dangers.

During meditation, you should apply yourself diligently, above all, to make your spirit calm. You would be spontaneously able to arrive at a stage where you can control your breath. At that stage there will be no risk at all.

Although I advise you not to try consciously to check the process of respiration, you could, on the contrary,

whatever be your spiritual development, practise, without fear, all the other exercises of Yoga.

If the retention of the breath should be methodically practised, it would lead one to the acquisition of supernatural powers, *siddhis*. That is not what we are in quest of. The aim of deep and rhythmic breathing is the establishment of a greater and a fuller harmony between mind and body. We may then remain calmly seated in our place. Both the mind and the body would then be at peace.

• *Pratyahara*: The mind is held under control. Henceforth we are in a position to call forth our ideal from within us. In order to evoke it in whatever manner that is most convenient and applicable to us, we have a choice among the following three methods:—

1. We may, by anticipation, consider that we are ourselves our own ideal.
2. We might fix our attention upon a high spiritual personality in order that his example might really live within us.
3. We might direct our attention towards some impersonal concept, the being without form.

It is at this stage that we begin to meditate. It is now possible for us to perceive the unity and harmony of existence. One then envisages the goal of all evolution.

Our ideal is before us. But it may be that meditation is not yet carried on in a continual and regular manner. It may be that the inner forces assert themselves; conflicts may arise between the diverse factors that constitute the heritage of our earlier days. They may come to the fore-front as latent impressions, *samskaras*. It may be that we are at times successful in practising concentration, but it may also happen that more often irrelevant thoughts intervene and prevent us from directing our aim upon our chosen ideal.

*Pratyahara* is that stage of apprenticeship where we gradually acquire the power of mastering our mind.

There are several ways of approach towards our ideal. We ought to choose that which corresponds most closely to our inmost aspirations, and we should hold on to it, to the exclusion of all others. -

• *Dharana*: If we are successful in maintaining ourselves in that state of concentration where a single idea occupies the whole field of our consciousness, even though it be only for a few seconds, as long as the meditation continues, it is unfailingly fixed upon our ideal, which is called *ishta*.

As we are at present, our imagination may represent it as though it were a very hard task. Later on, however, when we are established in what is real meditation, we would "realize" our ideal, without any effort on our part. But such experience is not yet within our grasp. For the

present, therefore, we should have the concept of chosen ideal, and grasp thereby one aspect of the divine. To the extent to which the ideal makes itself felt in us we will develop our spiritual life. That is why in India we are in the habit of repeating the sacred *mantras*.

We may encounter innumerable difficulties. Let us not be frightened by them. There have been other human beings who have had the power of realizing their ideal. Their experiences have enriched our spiritual heritage, which lies open to all humanity. Each one of us has a right to claim that part of it which is specially relevant to us.

It would be an error of the imagination to consider ourselves as being separate from the world. Such a sentiment makes us powerless and enfeebles us. It may be that the memory of our shortcomings may haunt us; but that is only the effect of ignorance. Would it not be much better to affirm our divine heritage and say, "I am *Brahman*", than to stress our biological heritage and say, "I am a sinner"?

By virtue of our devotion it may be possible for us to repeat what has been achieved in the past; but if devotion should be lacking, let us resort to the imagination that we have already attained that state which we wish to realize. Let us imagine that we have attained the state of perfection; and that we are ourselves our own chosen ideal. An affirmation of such faith, by its very renewal,

would lead us onward, by calling forth incessant changes from within us. Our external conduct would adapt itself bit by bit to the ideal that we cherish within us. Let us put to the test our tenacity of purpose and our capacity for perseverance. A day would come when we would merge in our ideal. *We would really become that which we seek.*

At the earlier stages of meditation, the aspirant takes the dualistic ideal, but he gradually tends towards union. The sentiment of separation weakens and finally disappears. At the initial stages, a subject meditates upon an object. That is his chosen ideal. But at the end of all spiritual effort, the subject and the object unite, the one in the other. St. Theresa d' Avila wrote in her *Confessions*: "When the soul remains in this divine union, that is the stage of two objects that were distinct, but which form but one."

• *Dhyana*: In this context we might recall to our minds the classical example of two communicating vessels. In the same way, a contact is established between our chosen ideal and ourselves. Thought now flows, in an uninterrupted current, along a single channel.

The difference between the subject and the object becomes less and less perceptible. When it finally ceases to exist, you have the experience of *samadhi*.

It is only by resorting to our intelligence, *buddhi*, that we are able to overcome all the obstacles in the path and enter into communion with our chosen ideal. At

once union is consummated. There is nothing more than the One, and nothing other than the One.

It is something similar to that which is produced in the state of deep sleep, *sushupti*. There also all distinction between the subject and the object is abolished; but *samadhi* should not be regarded the same as deep sleep.

• *Samadhi*: It is generally thought that *samadhi*, which has been realized by many great sages, is the very end of the spiritual life. What does Vedanta say in relation to it? We recognize that this is the only means at the disposal of the aspirant in order to purify his entire individuality. In that state of total immersion, in which the subject and the object are re-absorbed into their common substratum, the ego is washed of all that sullies it. Those who return from the state of *samadhi* are aware only of the oneness of the universe. They gain cognizance of the fact that the subject is a purely fictitious being. In every individual being they recognize no more than a wave of the same ocean.

When the relative consciousness vanishes in the course of *samadhi*, one attains a mystic experience of the highest order. There are, however, some who underestimate its importance and declare that from the social point of view such experience is of no value. They ask: of what service can such persons be to humanity, who, in this way, voluntarily cut themselves off from life

itself? If such great effort is necessary to attain the stage of *samadhi*, and if the aspirant seeks in it nothing more than an escape from life, why is it that the great yogis, whom we call the saviours of the world, have found it necessary, after the attainment of mystic experience, to come back to the empirical plane? They have continued to live among men; they have heaped benefits upon them.

If one desires to contemplate the non-manifest aspect of reality, which alone gives to its complementary aspect, that of manifestation, its real significance, it is essential that one should have an experience of *samadhi*. We have already studied this problem from the psychological point of view, and we will revert to it again when we examine the value of such experience from the metaphysical point of view. Although we admit that such *sadhakas* have attempted to lose their individuality in this state of absorption and changelessness, the question still remains, what is it that the world has gained thereby?

According to the *Bhagavad Gita* (VI. 27-32), the man who has achieved all that is to be accomplished, the perfected man, is he who is entirely at one with himself. He has integrated all the forces within him. After having attained mastery over the upward surge of the ego, he assumes a level-headed attitude which symbolizes the *sattvik* state. He has arrived at the meeting point where

the outer world and the world within meet and mingle. He has reduced all the effects to their original cause and he has made the world of manifestation merge in the unmanifest by a process of involution. There is nothing else for him but unity, and unity alone, and both the aspects of *samadhi* lie open to him.

Of these two aspects of *samadhi*, primary importance is given to that stage which, in India, is known by the name of *nirvikalpa samadhi*. It is the total merging in the One without a second. In the total union, individuality is utterly effaced; the world itself fades away like a dream; the ego-consciousness disappears; desire becomes extinct; the relative values of life known as *samsara*, the regions of sorrow, suffering and of rebirth no longer exist; and that is the state of *nirvana*, of total liberation. On this topic, the teaching of the Buddha has exercised a very great influence on Hindu thought. The reason is that the Buddha has brought into prominence the total extinction of all individuality. And the Buddha lived to a ripe old age; his experience inspired him with a boundless compassion. The happiness and welfare of all was his constant aim. In later ages, Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna have, in turn, opened out new paths towards the divine and guided men of goodwill to a more exalted condition.

The true *jnani* is he who lives in society as the witness of a state that lies beyond the merely human. He serves

as a model for other beings who desire to attain the same ideal.

When Vivekananda came to know that such experience was open to him also, he importunately requested his master, Sri Ramakrishna, and said, "Please grant me this favour. I wish to remain for many days in this state." The state of *samadhi* could perhaps be prolonged for a period of three weeks; afterwards the sage comes back to the world of relative consciousness, and Vivekananda was very keen upon realizing the supreme felicity. Sri Ramakrishna replied to him, "I am afraid, my child, your outlook is very narrow. What you ask is merely the outcome of an egoistic desire; but I know that your mission in life is something nobler than that. The time will come when you will be like a great banyan tree under whose shade whole crowds would seek shelter. Make an earnest attempt to see *Brahman* with open eyes."

In his disciple, Sri Ramakrishna had the pre-sentiment of one who belonged to the highest type of humanity. Vivekananda owed it to himself that he should live in the world; for he had to play the part of an educator and, consequently, if he should think only of his personal liberation, he would be going against his own spiritual welfare.

Later on Vivekananda understood the real significance of his master's teaching; and after the attainment

of *nirvikalpa samadhi* he remained, to the end of his life, one of the benefactors of humanity.

There is another form of *samadhi* which is known as *sahaja samadhi*. The sage who has realized it in experience continues to live in society; but this experience confers a superior awareness upon him, which he cherishes at all times and never gives up. In effect, he perceives the divine in every being, and in all things. Henceforth, there is a permanent contact between the totality and the purified individuality; the ordinary ego-consciousness, which is the source of all conflict, is annihilated; to one who has become a man of realization, there no longer exists the distinction between matter and spirit. There exists for him only an ocean of homogeneous consciousness.

It is difficult to speak of this latter condition; in order to understand it, it is essential to have a personal experience of it. It is, nevertheless, the goal towards which we are tending. The problem is how to attain this long and painful ascent. It may be that we may have to go through critical moments when every thing may apparently seem to be wanting; let us not allow ourselves to be beaten. If we feel in us the inner call, let us not hesitate, let us start marching. We will come to the end of all our difficulties, for we carry with us a compass that will guide us out of all our difficulties and help us to accomplish our pilgrimage. That is the *buddhi*, reason,

or pure intelligence. That will help us to set right our mistakes and keep us along the right path.

Let us hearken to the voice of our *dharma*. It is essential that we ought to follow the spiritual path in order that we might ascend to a higher level of consciousness.

This secret call comes to every being when the time comes. Let us, in the first instance, learn to recognize it. That is our primary duty. In this way we will be able to prepare ourselves for the struggle that is to follow. But let us ever keep in mind, in the midst of all the trials and tribulations that we encounter, that we shall, all of us, achieve the supreme goal.

### CHAPTER III

## SADHANA OR THE PURIFICATION OF INDIVIDUALITY

God is in us; but we are not in God, that is why there is so much suffering. We do not know that God is within us; and the aim of meditation is that it should furnish us with a direct proof of it. That is why we consider that *Brahmavidya*, the knowledge of *Brahman*, is the true and only knowledge.

According to the *Mundakopanishad*, knowledge is divided into two categories. The one is secular knowledge, *aparavidya*, and it can give to us, at best, an intellectual comprehension. It deals with the domain of literature, the fine arts and the sciences. The other is sacred knowledge, *paravidya*, by means of which one realizes the underlying truth of the world of appearance, the *Atman* or *Brahman*.

If we wish to acquire this superior knowledge, it is essential that we should subject ourselves to the appro-

priate discipline. The growth of this knowledge in us depends upon our greater or lesser capacity to assimilate the truth.

Whatever be the original starting point, each human being should start out in quest of the divine. That is what Vedanta teaches us. It is not a mere play of the intellect, or arm-chair philosophy, or a mere academic tournament. From the outset, it makes a heavy demand upon us. It is indispensable that we should change totally our entire manner of acting and thinking.

In the India of today, the position is exactly the same as what it was in ancient Greece at one time. Philosophy preserves a concept of values, which is essentially practical. It is "the art of living." If there were no moral and religious foundation, it would not be possible for us to attain that exalted sense of reality. Meditation is, therefore, the only means at our disposal which will lead us to our goal.

It is true that the mystics of the West have also practised such spiritual exercises. But we have to note that in India a scientific method has been worked out in detail out of observation collected from time immemorial. The most diverse of cases have also been taken into account. That is why it may be said to be applicable to the whole of mankind. We may say it has universality of appeal.

From the Hindu point of view, the essence of meditation lies in transferring the centre of our consciousness

from a lower plane to a higher. In this way, we lift up the very hub of awareness from where it is at present situated.

The method that the people of Europe may follow in order to attain this elevation may be different. One may go to a church, and one may kneel at prayer, if one is so inclined. Whatever be the method, the aim is to comprehend a different aspect of reality other than that which is presented to the empirical consciousness. That is the aim of spiritual effort.

The lives of the mystics of the West are of value to us, for they prove to us that they too have sought in meditation the means of cutting off all contact with the world, and of attaining the most exalted state of awareness.

According to yoga, the foremost task to which the aspirant should dedicate himself is that he should establish the *most complete harmony* between the body and the mind.

Among the majority of people, there is a deep conflict between these two aspects. The technique of yoga is based upon the fundamental hypothesis that there is no co-ordination between the body and the mind, and that is why they do not obey the same rhythm.

We are perfectly aware of the fact that the knower of *Brahman* no longer makes any distinction between the body and the mind, between matter and spirit. These

two terms indicate only partial aspects or special interpretations of one and the same reality. But we have not yet ourselves arrived at the point. If we accept that conclusion, it is only because of our faith in the testimony of the great sages. But it is equally essential that we should take into consideration what our actual condition is. We would then perceive the discord that exists between our body and our mind. It is, therefore, essential, at the outset, that we harmonize these two aspects.

What is it that leads us to the spiritual path? The answer is ever the same; it is the occasion when there is a conflict within us. If no such conflict should ever arise, there would be no need at all to set out on our spiritual quest. But when we hear within us an imperious urge, we set out and try to re-adjust our entire being.

The man who has never felt any such conflict within him has not also felt at any time the desire for meditation. Such a person follows routine habits. He obeys what is conventional, and goes to sacred places. Briefly, he fulfils the obligations of a social religion, and he is perfectly satisfied with it.

The mystic life lays open to us an inner drama. A profound aspiration draws us towards the spiritual life; but our body refuses to collaborate. We are torn asunder between two opposite tendencies. On the one hand, we feel an urge to come closer to the truth; on the other hand, we also feel, on account of innumerable causes

such as education, environment, the duties of life, heredity and the like, all the forces that run counter to it. Consequently, we are caught, as it were, in a dangerous whirlpool, and we do not know how to escape from it. It is only at such moments of conflict that we try to establish harmony between the body and the mind. Such is the reason for our accepting the original hypothesis that our body and our mind are at conflict with each other and that they do not obey the same rhythm.

It is essential that we should lessen the conflict and assuage the wounds. Hence it is that at the very outset meditation demands discipline, *yama*, and purification, *niyama*. Let us, therefore, seek to bring about a greater state of harmony between the life within us and the life around us, so that there may be perfect coordination between the one and the other. In order that there may be cooperation between the mind and the body, it is essential that we should observe certain rules of hygiene, both as regards the body and as regards the mind.

The question is, is such harmony within our reach, and are we capable of establishing it? The answer is that we will find the requisite energy with us if only we know how to deduce from the lives of the great spiritual teachers the full significance of their teaching. At no time is it possible for us to derive from mere secular studies that firm sense of conviction; for in all such studies there is always scope for doubting. But it would be far

otherwise if we take the attitude of living in the presence of a sage who knows from his own experience what the truth is. We would then find within ourselves that certainty of which we are in quest.

Let us, therefore, choose for our spiritual life an orientation that is well defined, and let us not deviate from it. It may be that at some future time doubt may assail us, and make us fall into despair; it may be that for a while we may beat our wings like a caged bird, but the aspirant who has by long practice acclimatized himself to live in spirit in the presence of one who has attained realization, whether it be a person like the Buddha, Jesus Christ or Sri Ramakrishna, would at last find within himself the strength to overcome the obstacles in his path and triumph over doubt and despair.

We are yet to attain the truly human level. As Sir John Woodroffe wrote, "We are yet not human, we are only candidates for humanity." The lives of the great sages present to us models to lead us to a more elevated state of existence.

All the great spiritual personages have realized a perfect equilibrium between the body and the spirit. We find in Mahatma Gandhi one such example of perfect harmony. Yet he considered himself to be a mere apprentice. Ramana Maharashi is the type of the *sthita-prajna*, the man of steady intellect. He never lost this equilibrium. Sri Ramakrishna carried this harmony to

a very high degree to which none had ever attained before.

Our body is so framed as to be able to fulfil certain actions. Our behaviour is determined to a considerable extent by the instincts. That is why each cell and each chromosome of our organism set up special vibrations and drag us to seek satisfaction in the life of the senses. Our mind is overcome by the attractions which work upon it in such diverse and changing ways. How can we reconcile such contrary tendencies? How can we pacify the tumult of the spirit?

To answer such questions properly, I have always sought to draw illustrations from the life of my Master, Sri Ramakrishna. One of the most outstanding traits of his character was that he would not allow himself to deviate even to the slightest extent from whatever promise he had made. It was impossible to find in him even the slightest divergence between thought and action. To him, they are not two distinct things; action was merely a continuation of thought; and thought was merely the anticipation of action. We should not regard it as the outcome of a rigid discipline imposed from without. That harmony of behaviour was entirely natural to him. Should we want to get inspiration from his example, we could momentarily succeed only with pain and exceptional effort.

It is possible to deduce similar teachings from other sages also; but Sri Ramakrishna has lived close to our

times. We know of his life from hour to hour. It lies before us in all its entirety, like an open book. Every time he said, "I shall do such and such a thing," the fulfilment of it followed, cost what it might. His physical body and nervous system alike responded to his thought.

It is easy for us to measure the distance that separates us from Sri Ramakrishna, for, with us, the body resists the force of thought. It revolts against the discipline that we wish to impose upon it. It is, however, essential that we should attain such unification if we wish to realize the state of the *sthitaprajna*, the man of steady intellect.

I take a special delight in narrating these stories. In my opinion, they possess an evidentiary value which the visions of Sri Ramakrishna could not always provide. These offhand incidents of day-to-day life cannot fail to appeal to our hearts. They enlarge our comprehension of spiritual life. They belong to the region of facts, which no one can deny. We are free to examine them, to control and give to them such interpretation as is most acceptable. It is only with very great difficulty that the people of Europe are able to comprehend the profound significance of the mystic visions; for they are not sufficiently acquainted with the Hindu tradition upon which these mystic visions lean for their support. Be that as it may, the perfection that Sri Ramakrishna attained on the moral plane might inspire us with a desire to model our conduct after that of his. Doubtless, we may not be able

to act with that same sense of spontaneity, but let us try, as far as possible, to instil in us that same harmony between action and thought. When we come into contact with the moral truth within us, that very day, and at one stroke, we come into contact with the supreme goal of our individual existence.

Sri Ramakrishna had unified his thought and the reflex actions of his body to such a high degree that there are some people who regard themselves as critics and say that they find pathological symptoms in him.

On one occasion, he said to a disciple of his, Mani Mallick, that he would go and see him on such and such a day. In all such cases we obey the law of reflex action. We are not clearly conscious of the promise that we have made. Sri Ramakrishna had forgotten the promise that he had made. Now, Swami Brahmananda, who was then eighteen years of age and who lived with Sri Ramakrishna at that time, heard one night the sound of sighing. He got up and went into the room. Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "I feel an unendurable sense of sorrow. I do not know what the reason is." All at once it came to his memory that he had promised Mani Mallick to visit him that very day, but he had not kept the engagement. In India, the day is calculated from sunrise to sunrise. Sri Ramakrishna had yet time enough to go on foot the few miles that lay between the temple of Dakshineswar and the house of Mani Mallick. Brahmananda tried to

dissuade him, but it was in vain. He said, "I will go to him tomorrow morning and I undertake the responsibility of explaining why you could not meet him at his house." Sri Ramakrishna refused to listen. "I have promised to visit him, and I ought to carry out that promise. Otherwise, it would be impossible for me to live even for a day more. The Divine Mother would not consent to live for even a day in a body which has been sullied by untruth." Brahmananda lighted a lamp. He accompanied his Master, whose muscles seemed to have contracted and who appeared to be dazed. Not a word was spoken. Both of them arrived at the villa of Mani Mallick. On one side it was bounded by the Ganges. On the other three sides a high wall enclosed it and made it inaccessible. They knocked at the gate; but there was no reply. Mani Mallick had also forgotten the appointed date, for otherwise he would not have failed to put a carriage at the disposal of the Master, as was his usual custom.

When they were in quest of an open door, Brahmananda discovered that in one place a few bricks had fallen from the wall. It was possible for Sri Ramakrishna to put one foot through this breach in the wall. Thrice he touched the soil of the garden, and thrice he cried out, "Mani Mallick, I have come." That work accomplished, Sri Ramakrishna calmly took the return path.

On another day, Sri Ramakrishna complained of acute pain in the stomach. A friend had said to him, "If

the pain should recur, come to me. I have a few small pills of opium. A single dose would be sufficient to remove the pain." His abode lay close to the temple of Dakshineswar. Sri Ramakrishna recalled to his mind this offer of his. He went to the house of his friend. As the master was away, it was the gardener who received him. Sri Ramakrishna was acquainted with him for a long time. He explained to him why he had come, and the gardener replied, "I know where the pills are. Wait a minute." He returned immediately and tied in a corner of the dress of Sri Ramakrishna a packet containing a few pills and said, "Take one of these pills as soon as you return home." In the garden everything passed off normally, but hardly had Sri Ramakrishna taken a few paces in the street, when he exclaimed, "What is the matter! I feel as if I have become blind." At once he asked the gardener, "Has your master permitted you to give me these pills?" It was only when the gardener took back the packet, according to the order of Sri Ramakrishna, that he regained his power of vision.

Here is one more instance of a similar nature. Sri Ramakrishna was accustomed to use a few lemon drops at the time of taking his food. A disciple had taken on lease a garden, and he had given a general permission to Sri Ramakrishna to take a lemon from his garden every morning. It was dinner time, and Sri Ramakrishna was seated in the midst of his disciples. Although he had

complete freedom of movement, some irresistible force paralysed his hand the moment he tried to touch the lemon. Swami Yogananda, who attended upon him at this time, took the fruit and examined it. It was quite fresh. Sri Ramakrishna asked, "Why is it that I am not able to touch it? I am afraid something is wrong. Go and ask him who brought the fruit." On enquiry it was found that on that very day the lease had expired. The property had passed into the hands of someone else. Sri Ramakrishna had no longer the right to use the fruit, and what lay before him was, in fact, a stolen fruit.

I could give innumerable episodes of a like nature. The life of Sri Ramakrishna abounds in them. If we should really consider them to be signs of a pathological condition, I submit that we should all try to attain a similar state of ill-health!

These few examples help us to understand to what a high degree Sri Ramakrishna had realized in himself this sense of harmony. We find that truth vibrated in every cell of his body. He was the incarnation of a superior type of humanity. If we did not have such models as our guide, and if we should rely only upon our unaided efforts, the path that lies before us would become more difficult.

In whatever manner we look at it, it is obvious that it may not be possible for us to reproduce in us, within a day and with any degree of success, a type equally perfect. It will be necessary for us to give proof of an

incessant perseverance and follow the same goal through innumerable lives.

Our first effort should, therefore, be directed towards our physical organism. In this way, we will be able to form our character. It is that which matters, and meditation is the current that carries us towards the destined goal. During the time that we spend upon meditation, let us try to reconcile these two currents within us, which run counter to each other. Let us have patience. We have to go through a long and arduous journey before we reach the goal. In order that we might prepare for it, we should learn how to concentrate; in this way we awaken the forces that lie asleep within us. The life of the great sages is a pointer to us that the goal is not inaccessible. They too belong, like us, to the same human species. Even though it be much later, a time will come when we too will succeed in attaining that which they have themselves attained.

It is by means of meditation that we create within us, even if it be slowly, a new life. We have to play the part of some one else. Let us learn to play the new role. In this way, we will accustom ourselves to participate in the spiritual life.

After having reserved, each day, about half an hour for meditation, we relapse into the stream of normal life. We then tend to forget all those firm resolutions that we had formed. As a result of it, the effort taken during the

hours of meditation creates fresh obstacles of a different sort and produces disequilibrium of a different kind.

That was why Sri Ramakrishna exhorted his disciples to cultivate, at all times and under all circumstances, that spiritual attitude of mind which they sustain during the time of meditation. If it should be otherwise, if we maintain a very high ideal of life during the short time that we spend in meditation, and if on coming back to our day to day life in the world, we cease to think of our chosen ideal, we would expose ourselves to an endless spiritual crisis. If we should thrust directly one end of a glass vessel into a blazing fire, we hear a crackling sound; the glass will break. But no such danger will take place if we take the precaution of heating the entire glass before a gentle fire.

Let us follow the same precaution in our mental attitude also. Even in the midst of our multifarious occupations we should continue to meditate upon our chosen ideal. Let us cherish as precious the memory of those instants when during the hours of meditation we have felt within us the dawning of the consciousness of truth. By so doing, it will provide proper food for thought, and our mind will remain purified and at peace.

We read in the Upanishads, especially in the *Kathopanishad*, that the senses have a natural tendency to draw us towards what is external. Such an outlook comes to us as part of our biological heritage. Consequently we

tend to over-estimate the value of the objects of the external world. The spirit within goes out after them in order to possess them. To proceed along the spiritual path, and at the same time to yield to the emotions which the instincts awaken in us, will result only in our going out in quest of trouble. As long as we are making such double movements which run counter to each other, we needs must endure a grievous discord within us.

Let us learn to profit by the hours we spend in meditation by withdrawing our attention from the objects that surround us. We ought to make a study of our mind. If we cannot establish a distinct sense of separation between the objects that surround us and the subject who meditates, it will not be possible for us to be established in peace.

Let it be definitely understood, however, that it is no more than a stage in our spiritual journey; for when we have reached the goal at the end of the journey, we will find that all such distinctions vanish for ever.

It is only as the result of our ignorance that a false identification takes place. Ordinarily we do not stop and observe the picture that is moving before us as in a film. It is only by means of meditation that we are able to disengage ourselves. Thanks to it, we are able to isolate ourselves. We do not allow ourselves to be caught in a whirlpool. It is only then that we have the opportunity to subject ourselves to an impartial analysis.

If we were to enquire into the cause of such false identification, we will come to understand that it is due to desire which arises within us; for it leads us to the incessant pursuit of external objects. The man of steady intelligence, the *sthitaprajna*, will remain indifferent to the moving spectacle before him. He alone is endowed with the true spirit of non-attachment. He knows that it is only out of desire that one goes in quest of external objects in order to find satisfaction and pleasure in them. But the sage is he who remains free and unmoved by any kind of mental agitation. It is in this way that he is successful in attaining self-mastery.

During the course of our meditation, let us try to examine the nature of the conflict within us. Let us try to understand its working. If we push our investigation far enough to its very foundation, we will succeed in putting an end to all the agitation of the mind.

In the *Raja-yoga* of Patanjali, the second *sutra* tells us how to obtain such result. The advice given here is generally misinterpreted. In the West, people generally imagine that the advice given by Patanjali will lead to the complete atrophy of all thought. If such were the case, that result could be obtained much more easily and with little effort by taking a mild dose of opium. The aspirant might very well dispense with the practice of yoga and with the hard travail that attends upon it. Patanjali gives to us a psychological reason as to why it is necessary to

still the waves of thought. The reason is that it is our desire that creates veritable cyclones within us. If we do not pacify these tempestuous working of the spirit, it will not be possible for us to know the truth.

We will see later on, in chapter VI, with what motive it is that Patanjali gives us such advice and bids us follow the method prescribed by him. He does not demand of us that we should confine ourselves to inaction, or that we should regard as vain all the empirical values of the world.

Let us apply ourselves diligently to quieten all the waves of thought. That psychological process, however, is not so easy. On the other hand, it presents great difficulties. It is essential that we should go back to the very source of our existence in order to arrive at the core of the mystery of silence and unravel the enigma of the non manifest. Such is the price that we should pay in order to unveil the secret of manifestation.

Let us try to subject our mind to a conscious and voluntary spiritual discipline. In this way it is possible for us to eliminate the external layer, the world of name and form, and realize that substratum whose energy, *shakti*, it is that appears to our eyes as "all that which is."

As soon as we are able to contemplate this totality, *sarva*, under the real aspect of what it is in itself, our attitude towards our environment will be inspired by the continuous presence of that supreme reality, to which

India refers under the name of "That" or "*Brahman*" and to which Europe refers under the name of "God." Whatever name we may employ, that reality is all-permeating and omnipresent. It is that Reality which we will later on and under every circumstance discover within us and around us.

On the very day on which we understand the term "all that which is" in each one of the three phases of manifestation, such as unfolding, sustenance and dissolution, we will also realize that all this is the *Atman* and nothing more than the *Atman*. We will then have the strongest incentive to adapt our conduct to what is morally true. We will then continue to labour for our individual perfection and be efficient in contributing to the welfare of others like us. The sage in whom this truth comes to life is indeed the salt of the earth. He deserves to be called the benefactor or saviour of humanity.

The discipline of yoga can at no time be compared to a stupefying drug which benumbs our sense of awareness and which renders us deaf to the obligations and duties of the world around us. There is no need, therefore, for the people of the West to be afraid that by following this path of yoga they would be reduced to a position where it would become impossible to sustain life. Such unrestrained criticism comes only from those who have a special reason for calumniating and spreading a perverse view of yoga. They are based upon the

tragic results obtained by a few unscrupulous people, who, with insufficient preparation, are drawn by the lure of things occult. These mere amateurs of all kinds of fantastic exercises are led astray, and they suffer from all kinds of disorders, physical and mental.

It is only in such cases and by such persons that discredit has been cast on the technique that India has developed during several thousands of years, and which she places at the disposal of all those who desire to practise meditation.

If you have the rare privilege of meeting a qualified guide, if you have strictly followed the essential moral rules, you will find that the synthesis of yoga offers you an infallible means. It will be conducive to that purification which all spiritual progress demands.

There are only two ways of realizing this inner void. When thought rises in us it takes the form of successive waves. If, in a reaction of disgust, we say to ourselves, "I shall not tolerate this state of affairs any longer, I should like to put a stop to all these movements, and make the mind a *tabula rasa*," we choose a method of procedure which is not easily accessible to the generality of mankind. Only that man who is gifted with an exceptionally strong will may claim to do it. To take an instance, it may be possible for a great yogi like Tota Puri, who was for several months the instructor of Sri Ramakrishna. There have been a few other sages who too have realized

it in practice. They pacify, at will, all the agitations of the mind. Everything takes place as if at the click of a lever at a given command. The current of thought is completely cut off. The yogis have a determined aim which they follow and it is by the application of that aim that they are able to stop instantaneously the flow of thought. But if we should try to imitate their example, we will encounter insurmountable difficulties. In all probability, it may so happen that we may never acquire an equally strong will-power. Nevertheless, let us recognize it to be truth based upon solid foundations, that it is possible during meditation to make calm, at will, all the waves of thought that arise in the mind.

There is a second method which it is much more easy for us to put into practice. The essence of that method is as follows: Let us try to live at all times as the *impartial witness* of all that takes place in our mind. We accept that, under the influence of a given desire, certain currents of thought are formed in our spirit. These thoughts fascinate us. There is the play of the association of ideas. It then becomes impossible for us to concentrate our mind upon our chosen ideal. If, under all circumstances, we maintain the attitude of the observer, and if we take care not to identify ourselves with the thoughts which are like moving pictures that are projected upon the screen within us, it naturally follows that the power which animates them will weaken and will gradually fade away.

It is only when the mind is restless and is agitated that it is possible for us to observe, and to some extent to measure, the speed with which one thought succeeds another. Let us treat them as if they were foreign to us. Then the inner tension would decrease. Afterwards we would come close to that stage where we may realize *the void of the mind*. The reason is, we would have made ourselves immune to the roving thoughts and to that extent we will be able to approach the real spiritual problem.

Let us now consider to what extent we could attain success in this way in reaching our goal. There is no gainsaying the power of imagination. It would be a great error to allow it to go to waste, without making proper use of it. Let us at no time fail to keep in the foreground of our consciousness the remembrance of our ideal. Let us remain faithful in our adherence to it. If we should propose to ourselves a new ideal every day, we would never succeed in having a clear vision. It is, therefore, indispensable that we should always concentrate our mind upon the same object.

It is left to our choice as to whether it should be an ideal in the form of a person, or that which is impersonal. Whatever be our choice, it is essential that we should, during meditation, rivet our attention upon it. We ought to habituate our mind to remain at peace at the feet of our chosen ideal, our *ishta-devata*.

Concentration is therefore, the first step in all meditation. As soon as our concentration becomes effective, we begin to realize that sense of harmony that exists between the subject and the object. Let us learn to establish, at the earliest opportunity, the most complete accord between the life of each day and a life lived according to the moral ideal. Above all, it is only in this way that it is possible for us to establish such equilibrium, of which we may be capable.

If, in the course of our normal occupations, we had cultivated the habit of being absorbed in a single idea, we will find no difficulty in maintaining the same attitude of mind during meditation also. We should, therefore, take pains to see that during every hour of our life, we learn to live in our chosen ideal. That effort within us will have an immediate impact on the whole of our moral life.

Our first duty is, therefore, to attain a sufficient degree of concentration. We should continue to practise it until we attain complete success.

The question now is, on what object shall we concentrate our thought. According to Patanjali, the problem arises only because we have too many objects from which we could choose. If, however, we take an empty white carton on which we have traced a black point, or if we direct our attention towards the tip of our nose, such a method will not have any spiritual value whatever. But

we are all interested in having before us an ideal that lends itself to meditation. By adopting this latter method, we will not fail to derive a double benefit. We not only learn how to concentrate, but we also make rapid spiritual progress.

What confers a special value upon our efforts to concentrate is the aim that we set before us. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance to choose for our ideal that which corresponds to our inmost aspirations.

Each one of us has complete freedom in the matter of choosing one's spiritual ideal, and each one follows a path that is found specially suitable. One and the same ideal may not be suitable for all the aspirants. What is good for one may not be good for another. The method to be followed may also differ from person to person, according to one's aptitude and temperament. Are we not obliged, each one of us, to fulfil the particular law of one's being? But if we prefer to have an ideal that is personal to us, let us try to perceive in it, and by means of it, the impersonal aspect thereof.

The ultimate reality is a mixture of that which is personal and of that which is impersonal. It thus presents to us two complementary aspects of it. It is, at once, subject and object, spirit and matter, thought and action. If we should envisage only one aspect of these two, whether it be purely dualistic or purely monistic, our vision will never comprehend the whole truth. Now, it is

possible to distinguish between the two poles of reality, and each of these is the function of the other. The ultimate reality may be compared to a piece of bar magnet. We may cut it into as many bits as we like; but however small they may be, each one has the two poles, the positive and the negative. From whatever point of view it may be that we examine the truth, it will always be found to have these two aspects; the one personal, and the other impersonal.

If we keep before us, as the object of concentration, a personal ideal, let us associate with this ideal the concept of the impersonal. The personal lends all the value that it has to the impersonal. That is why the *sadhaka* considers the personal as his inspirer and his spiritual guide.

We should not think that it is all the product of our imagination. For example, the cross is a mystic symbol which supplies the same need which in India is represented in the form of Kali or Shiva. They help us to concentrate our minds upon the spiritual aspect. If the aspirant is at all times conscious of the fact that he is a human being, there is all the more reason why he should choose as his ideal a sage who has realized the truth.

Do not imagine that by following this advice you will become slave to forms. All that it means is, that you should comprehend what the true goal of evolution is. Whatever be our preference, whether it is Buddha, Jesus, or Sri Ramakrishna, what is essential is that we should

regard our ideal as the embodiment of human perfection and the very goal of all evolution. It should be for us the expression of life itself and the very incarnation of the noblest of our aspirations.

When, in the course of contemplation, we direct our mind towards our *ishta-devata*, our chosen ideal, it is not on the physical form that we should concentrate. Such an exercise will help us to realize only some inferior aspect of it. Let us see that which is higher. Let us try to realize what is impersonal in and through the personal.

If we should choose as the object of our concentration some simple object, say an empty carton, we would have totally neglected the emotional aspect of our nature. No one can ever gainsay that emotion plays a preponderant part in our lives. As soon as we begin to meditate upon a person like Buddha, Jesus, or Sri Ramakrishna, there take place within us certain corresponding reactions. The entire range of our sensibility comes under the influence of our chosen ideal. But it also follows that if we have not attained the desired degree of purification, we will have to remain beyond the pale of spiritual life. In fact, the emotions are intimately associated with the power of the instincts. That is why, to the extent that we succeed in the purification of our individuality, we will also succeed in transforming instinct into intelligence, and later on, intelligence into intuition.

In the course of this slow progress, let us constantly keep before our mind the figure of some great spiritual personality. Let us consider it as the very goal of our spiritual effort. Let it be our aim to elevate ourselves to their level. The ideal that we ever keep before our eyes becomes the model that we ought to imitate during every moment and under every circumstance of our lives. If we should concentrate upon our *ishta-devata*, permeated by such thought, we will succeed in awakening all the forces that lie latent within us. They will help us in our inner purification and support us in our transformation.

If, on the contrary, we decide to concentrate upon a second-rate person, our aspirations would not be entirely exempt from an alloy of what is debasing. But if we choose a high ideal, it will not expose us to the same risk. The reason is, the sense of veneration that we have for an exalted personage will itself carry us forward and lead to our complete purification. It is here that we see the precise function of *bhakti*. As long as the purification has not attained perfection, obstacles will always arise to prevent us from progressing along the path. *Bhakti* is a real science which permits us to sublimate the emotional aspect of our individual nature. There is very close relationship between the science of *bhakti* and the science of truth, because truth includes sensibility also.

Hindu psychologists have studied with care the diverse ways in which the emotions manifest themselves,

and they have distinguished five important ways in which the feelings express themselves in a human being.

They are as follows:

- The serene majesty of silence, *shanta bhava*.
- The adoration that a servant offers to the lord, *dasya bhava*.
- Parental tenderness, the love of the father or the mother for the child, *vatsalya bhava*.
- The amity that exists between friends, *sakhya bhava*.
- The tenderness of love, *madhura bhava*.

Every human being, worthy of that name, must have felt at least one of these five emotions. It is, therefore, open to him to put to the test each one of these successively, for each one of these attitudes corresponds to the different relationships of one's life. It is left to each *sadhaka*, according to his age, his character or temperament, to adopt such an attitude of mind towards his *ishta-devata* as seems to him to be in conformity with his disposition. On this choice depends what relationship the aspirant shall establish with his ideal both during meditation and in the day-to-day life.

If in the course of our spiritual lives we try to keep off all feelings and be guided exclusively by concentrating our attention upon the intellectual aspect, we will not fail to discover the inconveniences in such a method. That is because we would not have taken into account

an important element of our individuality. Let us, therefore, always remember that meditation ought to rest upon a human plane.

During the course of meditation, we incidentally aim at the renovation of our entire being, and the more profound our concentration upon our ideal, the more rapid will our transformation be. This process of purification will give additional strength as much to our intellectual part as to the emotional. Both these aspects, each in turn, will become the object of an inner offering. If we do not pay to the emotional part of our nature such amount of attention as is desirable, the process of our evolution will slow down for a long time.

As soon as we have purified both these aspects of our nature, we are in a position to realize fully the harmony within. The affective element constitutes the very basis of our nature. We do not have the right to neglect what is so important. Let us, therefore, try to establish an equilibrium between our sensibility and our intellect. In this way we cut off at one stroke all the obstructions that lie in our path. After this, the path lies open before us. We are now able to enter upon the spiritual life.

## CHAPTER IV

# THE ROLE OF JAPA IN THE AWAKENING OF THE KUNDALINI

If tempestuous thoughts should arise from the subconscious and cause an agitation of the spirit during the time of meditation, that should be regarded as an indication that we have yet to continue further the process of purification of the spirit.

Our concentration upon our *ishta-devata* should be such that it permeates the whole of the conative and affective aspects of our personality. Immediately thereafter it will become possible for us to come into the most intimate relation with ourselves. We can never claim to attain such a result if we should choose as the object of our concentration an empty carton or the tip of our nose. The moment we quieten all the movement of thought, we will have at the same time purified the inmost recesses of our being.

If we should investigate into the very depths of our personality with the light of a very small lamp, it will

hardly throw light even upon the surface layer. But we want to clean it thoroughly and we ought to direct our attention to the very depths of our being. All our talk of a transformation will be in vain as long as our individuality comes only into a superficial contact with our ideal. Our purification will not be complete unless the light descends into the very recesses of our being and illumines every cavern and every secret chamber. We will have to take into account, for the moment, the hard labour that it involves. We will then find many a ruin and many a neglected corner that we have ignored in the edifice of our lives, and we will take upon ourselves the work of cleansing it. That is how spiritual life grows. Henceforth there is nothing to prevent our progress. Meditation allows us to throw a flood of light upon the very bedrock of our personality. The only question is, how shall we proceed in order to attain success.

It is *japa* that furnishes us with the means to it. It puts at our disposal a proved technique. And what is *japa*? *Japa* is the methodical repetition of a sacred formula, a *mantra*. *Japa* is really efficacious only when the aspirant takes care, during the course of this exercise, to keep in the forefront of his memory the spiritual significance of the *mantra*.

The Catholics also make use of a similar process. They repeat the litany. They make use of a rosary. In the one case, as well as in the other, the aim is the same. The

effort is directed to plant, at all times, a true suggestion in the spirit. Moreover, by such repetition we gather to a head and unify all the forces within us, which work in the mind independently of, and too often, contrary to, one another. In this way we will in the end be able to create an internal rhythm which is capable of breaking the resistance of the conscious part of our individuality.

At times a rhythmic modulation of sound that breaks out in the street is by itself sufficient to shatter a glass vessel kept in an almirah. A metallic bridge may give way under the rhythmic marching of a troop. Even the strongest resistance will break down under an appropriate rhythm. By means of *japa*, a similar effect will be produced within us.

In the course of our first few attempts at meditation, a stage may frequently arrive when we find ourselves as if in front of a wall. We feel as if we are prevented from proceeding further. What should we do? Let us try and see if we can succeed in attaining a state of entire relaxation. Let us see if we can succeed in keeping under restraint the spirit as well as the body. By the repetition of the sacred word, the obstacle will crumble of its own accord, and we may then reach those regions of our individuality which till then had remained closed to us. Henceforth we are in a position to dedicate ourselves to the cleansing of the most secret recesses of our personality.

*Japa* is endowed with two different kinds of value. The one may be called exoteric and the other may be called esoteric. We shall examine each one of them in turn.

The exoteric value of *japa* rests upon the awakening of a spiritual sense in us at the mere vibration of a given sound. In the first place, each sound is intimately associated with an idea which forms the counterpart of it. As soon as we evoke a certain sound in our mind, there appears at the same time the idea that is attached to it. If one should always keep in the forefront of one's consciousness a single spiritual idea, the mind will be gradually liberated from all impurity. Its nature will become refined and *sattvik*. It is only then that the *buddhi* shines in all its splendour. That is because the mind is composed of subtle essences, of invisible substances, called the *tanmatras*, and *japa*, at long last, restores these elements to their original purity.

In the second place *japa* opens out to us a new field of awareness. By awakening our spiritual energy, we will be able to accelerate and direct our own evolution.

Finally, this *shakti* groups into a single bundle all the diverse energies, conscious or unconscious, which are playing in the mind, each one in its own way, and makes them all take a unified outlook.

Concerning this subject, one may recall to one's mind the illustration of how under the influence of the harmo-

nious vibrations produced by a full volume of various sounds in concord, even the thin grains of sand that one has scattered on a metal plate rearrange themselves into happy patterns. Our mind may be compared to that thin layer of sand. The constant vibration of a *mantra* leaves a tangible impression upon it. It gives to it a special configuration. It is in this way that the mind is imperceptibly modelled after our *ishta-devata*. Sri Ramakrishna was endowed with such force of thought that he became the very divinity that he took, each in its turn, to be the object of his adoration. From the spiritual point of view, the function of *japa* is that it calls forth in us a transformation of a similar nature.

The esoteric significance of *japa* is based upon that special science by means of which the aspirant learns the secret of awakening the sleeping power of the *kundalini* or the cosmic power. It is the *shakti* of the Mother, the cosmic energy which resides virtually in every living being.

The true awakening of spirituality takes place when the *kundalini* awakens over the entire length of the vertebral column by passing along the central canal which is called the *sushumna*, and which remains closed for the majority of mankind. A very small part of the energy derived from it flows along the side channels of *ida* and *pingala*. It is in this way that it manifests itself as the vital force and thus assures the normal functioning of our psychophysical organism.

As long as the central canal is obstructed, the primordial energy of the Divine Mother remains sleeping, as it were. It may be that for some reason or other it might work even in its sleep and filter through the obstacles. Even the slightest expression of this force is enough to shed its light upon the living individual; for, its immediate effect is a notable elevation of the centre of consciousness. But it is also likely that this awakening may take place along the two side canals, *ida* on the left and *pingala* on the right, which are to be found on either side of the central canal. In that case we will not be able to derive any kind of benefit from the spiritual point of view.

But, on the contrary, if one's individuality has been entirely purified by a strict moral discipline, and if the sacred formula, *mantra*, should be assiduously repeated, it then works directly on the central canal, which throws open the floodgates as it were and the spiritual energy, *shakti*, which lay imprisoned at the lowest centre, the *muladhara*, at the plexus which is situated at the bottom of the vertebral column, flows freely along the entire length of the *sushumna*, from one end to the other. When the movement of the *kundalini* along the conduits of *ida* and *pingala* is arrested, it takes an upraised course along the *sushumna* and illumines step by step higher centres of consciousness, the *chakras*, which lie one above the other.

In Europe as well as in India I have heard the aspirants telling me their personal experiences during the ascent of the *kundalini* which, according to them, produces, it may be, a sensation of heat or some sensation in the vertebral column, or perhaps gives rise to auditions and visions that are entirely subjective. Let me give you some advice on this point: *do not attach any great importance to these manifestations.*

In the experience of beginners, it is but natural that particular reactions should take place by the movement of the energy along the side canals; let us not imagine that the experience of things spiritual could be acquired so cheaply.

It is only as the result of laborious efforts, of perseverance and the support of an inflexible discipline — to which one might add, among other conditions, the observance of the most complete form of chastity and leading one's life in harmony with the highest moral ideal — that the internal organism, the *antahkarana*, becomes capable of perceiving the subtle vibrations of the *mantras* which operate on the *sushumna*. It is not a mere external contact; but it arises from within and awakens the superior centres of consciousness.

Even when the purification of the individual has not yet been completely achieved, it may be possible that an aspirant might, under the influence of a powerful sentiment, realize a certain expansion of consciousness.

There are, for example, aesthetic experiences of an uncommon nature. One may even feel for a time an elevation of spirit, as though it were a spiritual experience. But, on examination, it will be found that it is only a question of the secondary current flowing along the side channels of *ida* and *pingala* that has produced the external ascent of the *kundalini*.

From the esoteric point of view the value of *japa* rests entirely upon the definite knowledge that the *mantra* is an objective factor that could assure us our spiritual development. Let us see how we ought to understand it.

In India we have the firm belief that the *mantra* is none other than the Divine in person. To the Roman Catholic, similarly, the Holy Sacrament is not a mere symbol. To him such expression would almost seem sacrilegious; for he believes that the Lord is really present in the consecrated Host. It is in the same way that we also look at the *mantra*, which is the spiritual body of the Divine.

Each divine aspect has a form and a name that appertains to it. The name and the form cannot be separated from each other. The name is composed of different symbols which present themselves in a predetermined order. They constitute, taken together, a true *garland of letters* (*varnamala*); name and form are but one and the same thing. The one is not different from the other. It is by this special conjunction of mystic syllables that one

comes to endow with life the very letters that constitute the word.

When this "tran-substantiation" takes place, the divine aspect attains the state of *jagrat*. It comes out of its sleep and becomes awake in us.

Generally speaking, the *kundalini* remains asleep and rests in the plexus of the *muladhara*. It is, at that moment, in its causal or non-manifest state. As a result of prayer and the continuous practice of *japa*, the *kundalini* becomes awake and travels along the central canal. It manifests itself as a spiritual entity. In this way, the divine assumes the form of our personal ideal, *ishta-devata*.

In the course of its ascent, the Mother-energy, the *shakti*, is carried forward from one plexus to another, which forms different stages, as it were, along the entire length of the vertebral canal. The higher centres of consciousness become awakened to the extent and according to the measure of its ascent. Consciousness thus comes to take its stand upon higher and higher centres. At last it attains the supreme centre.

In this way we succeed in reaching the non-manifest, which is at the very basis of all manifestation, and which forms the support of the world of sense perception. From the point of view of the microcosm, it is only then that the great secret unveils itself; one realizes then the substratum of all manifestation. It is only when the ego that

has passed through all the stages of purification is in the end entirely dissolved, that the form of the *ishta-devata* merges in the Impersonal. It is at the highest centre that this union is consummated; the microcosm and the macrocosm make but one.

Later on when the aspirant emerges from the plane of meditation to the plane of empirical consciousness, he is totally devoid of the sentiment of "I" (*ahamkara*) which he had at one time. Hereafter, at whatever centre it may be that his consciousness rests for the time being, he knows that all manifestation is but a reflection of it, either in part or in whole. Above all, he has come to realize the Divine Mother. It is "She" who is mirrored in every aspect of existence.

If the aspirant should transcend his subjective experience, that totality of manifestation which, in its grosser form, is known as the external world would then appear to him as resting upon its own substratum, as *maya*, the cosmic energy, the Mother divine.

We will not, therefore, be justified in giving to the term *maya* the meaning of "illusion" as is so often done. To do so will be wrong. *Maya* is, properly speaking, the *shakti* of Brahman.

A realized being sees in all manifestation a descent, a concretization of the divine; and in the *mantra* that one repeats one perceives the sacred tabernacle or abode of the Divine in person.

In India we do not accept the point of view that the presence of the Lord would be revealed to us purely as the consequence of individual effort. The consequence of *japa* is not only that it purifies our being, but, thanks to its own objective nature, and by virtue of that which is manifested by sound, the *mantra* introduces us into the very presence of the Divine.

The role that the *guru* plays is that he initiates us into the "sacred name." This sacred name possesses in itself an apostolic value. God is in us but we are not in Him; that is the whole tragedy of life. By pursuing with tenacity our religious observances, *sadhana*, we will at last arrive at divine life; we will really live in God.

It is only at the cost of long continued efforts that our body and our mind would become pure. As the effect of the continuous repetition of the *mantra*, both body and mind become *sattvik*. When the union of the *jiva* and *Shiva* is effected in *Paramashiva*, that is to say, when our individuality is re-absorbed in the universal, consciousness attains the highest stage at the centre known as the *sahasrara*; it is only then that the thousand-petalled lotus opens, shining in all its divine splendour.

All this may be regarded as a brief excursion into our esoteric tradition.

When we turn to the West, it is necessary that we should exercise great caution. When giving an exposition of a method which all the great mystics have followed

consciously or otherwise, it will not be proper to introduce thoughtlessly exotic ideas into the spirit, which would still further complicate the task of the aspirant.

Moreover, let us not forget that the *Bhagavad Gita* admits that all the paths that are followed by individuals are equally legitimate (*Gita*, XIII. 24-25):

It is by means of meditation that some aspirants behold the universal Self in themselves through the individual self; there are other aspirants who too attain success either by means of knowledge, sankhya yoga or by means of action, karma yoga.

There are some others who are incapable of following any of the above three paths. Such persons follow the religious observances which they have been taught. Even such persons cross over death and reach the other side; for they have taken as the supreme refuge that Divine Being of whom they have heard.

Each aspirant could find his path towards the Divine by following that path which is most suitable; there are, in fact, as many religions as there are individuals.

Just as the law of Mendelism is entirely applicable to our biological organism, it has also its counterpart in our spiritual heritage. That is a factor that we ought to take into account. Our *sadhana* will not fructify if we should do violence to the cultural traditions which con-

stitute the fundamentals of our psychology. It is not possible for us to think of suppressing them; but it is possible for us to let them grow; and in proportion to that, our spiritual horizon will also enlarge. That is a problem which can be best solved by each individual for himself, with the aid of a spiritual guide.

In India we have at all times attributed the first place of importance to continence, *brahmacharya*. The reason is that the strict observance of this rule allows the aspirant to gather to a head, when once it is sublimated, all the scattered forces of the sex instinct and thereby awaken the spiritual energy, *ojas*, which, when properly utilized, will illumine one's higher nature.

Thus, as we have already seen, the vital force that comes into play in our psychophysical organism by means of the conduits of *ida* and *pingala* is but a feeble part of this *ojas*. Now Swami Vivekananda has expressly declared that we should not take the manifestation of this *shakti* to be the real ascent of the *kundalini*, which always takes place only along the central canal of the *sushumna*. It may be that among some aspirants the onrush of emotion produced by some exalted sentiment, or some sudden aesthetic emotion, or even a wise practice of meditation, may be sufficient to release the entire vital force which suddenly rises along the canals of *ida* and *pingala*. When such ascent takes place, it will give rise to strong reactions, which when reaching the superior centres of conscious-

ness, seem to borrow the characteristics of a spiritual experience. On the other hand, in as much as these reactions had taken place at the lower plexus, they merely affect the corresponding nervous reflexes. The function which these reflex emotions ought to fulfil, according to the position which they occupy in primordial nature, are made to hear those imperious calls, and at that moment the candidate to spiritual life runs the greatest risk.

It is equally possible that it may present itself in such a way that it does not exercise the least influence on the lower centres and, as a result of it, produces no kind of reaction whatever. The vital force would then flow not along the lateral canals, but along the superior centres of the central canal only. This time it produces an entirely different result. One feels an expansion of the spirit in a manner that is spiritual.

There is a special reason why the Hindu method prescribes that the aspirant should concentrate either on the heart centre for the greater part, or what is equally valid, the forehead between the eyebrows. That is because one should take pains to fix the ascent of the vital force which, for all normal purposes of existence, flows along the canals of *ida* and *pingala*. As soon as we succeed in fixing this vital force steadily in some higher centre of the *sushumna*, it is transformed into spiritual energy in consequence of and to the extent of our success in concentration.

We know that although the life-force animates the biological centres, it is capable of being sublimated by the mind; for the mind is capable of accomplishing really marvellous things. *Japa* and meditation are the two means by which we attain our personal ideal, *ishta*, and that implies that the entity that we have taken as the aim of meditation appeals at once to the rational aspect and to the emotional. The aspirant who gives himself up wholeheartedly to meditation no longer identifies himself with the subconscious currents of the force of the instincts. It is in himself alone that he finds the means of changing the direction, and of directing them towards the spiritual centres, whose awakening is henceforth assured.

The *Gita* tells us that the sex instinct as well as the emotion of anger proceed alike from *rajas*; they are inseparably associated, for both of them equally set in motion the grosser appetites. It is moreover well known that any violent desire sets in motion the corresponding organs to which they are attached. Consequently the thought and its corresponding psychological reaction are mutually inter-connected. When we are in the presence of whatever awakens in us a noble enthusiasm, sublime thoughts and feelings arise within us. We feel a sacred thrill in our gross body, *loma-harshana*, and we have, in this way, a foretaste of the supreme bliss. These ascending movements may at times reach the head; we

might become insensible to all those things that lie far below that radiant region; it would seem as though we have grown wings and that we have been liberated from our slavery to the earth.

The aspirant who practises *Raja-yoga* accepts as an indisputable fact the parallelism that exists between the body and the mind. Thanks to *japa* and meditation, it becomes entirely possible to master the nervous reactions, and by means of a progressive acceleration, it becomes possible for one to increase, day by day, the power of one's will. In this way, one comes to re-unite all the scattered forces and to elevate them to higher and higher centres. The spiritual aspirant thus attains the ability to reverse the normal course of the life-force. He learns how to hold them in restraint. That which is essentially mobile and dynamic then becomes static.

The final resultant that is obtained by the conjunction of *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and *samadhi* (absorption), is called *samyama* (identification) in the technical language of yoga. In this way, we come to the very boundaries of genuine spiritual practice, *tapasya*. The term *tapas* means warmth. Now the *sadhaka* gathers together the nervous fluids which were formerly dispersed all over the senses. He makes them converge towards the central hearth where the heat is generated. That is the heat of spiritual ardour. The concentration of these forces takes place in one of those centres situated along the path

that the flow of the central energy takes, when the *kundalini*, the Mother-energy, is liberated. It exercises henceforth an irresistible call. The physical law, "force attracts force," is equally valid on the spiritual plane.

As soon as this unification takes place, and not a ripple of thought is there to agitate the mind, the aspirant attains the integral experience of *pranayama*. The term *pranayama* is not composed, as it is ordinarily thought to be, of the two words, "*prana*" or breath and "*yama*" or control and mastery. Really speaking it is derived from the two words "*prana*," which means "energy," and "*ayama*," which, according to the *Amarakosha* dictionary, is a composite term meaning "stretching like a bow" — it means development and extension. "*Pranayama*" is, therefore, the process by which all normal manifestation is held under restraint, and by which the life-force is gathered to a head and gradually carried to its highest degree of intensity.

At the initial stages, this awakening becomes perceptible when one feels the circulation of *prana* along the side canals of *ida* and *pingala*; it is further accentuated when the *prana*, turning back from its path, begins, according to the description that has been already given, to pass along the central canal of the *sushumna*; finally it attains its culmination when the *prana* is lifted to its culminating point at the *sahasrara*; immediately the lotus expands and unfolds all its petals.

At first the aspirant should assiduously cultivate the exercises of *pranayama* and follow step by step the instructions of his *guru*. Later on, when he attains the stage of concentration, he would note how, without any conscious effort on his part, and without even resorting to the respiratory exercises as before, he would find himself established in that state of plenitude where the life-force acquires its highest stage of development. The reason for it is that the mind is henceforth freed from all desires, freed from all tension, and purified of the last subtle traces, *vasanas*, which had exercised such an irresistible influence over one's likes (*raga*) and dislikes (*dvesha*). It is only then that, in line with it, the *prana* ceases to pass along the side canals of *ida* and *pingala*.

All the methods that lead to *samadhi* rest on this fundamental principle; it is necessary to prevent the scattering and loss of energy which is produced by such external branching off; and in order to obtain that result, it is essential that the two nerves, *nadis*, are in some sort devitalized and are allowed to wither up. The *prana* then traverses along the *sushumna* and, after having passed through the six lotuses, it evokes, in the *sahasrara*, the state of complete absorption.

When the *kundalini* emerges out of its state of sleep, it might partially awaken any one or more of these different centres of consciousness and give rise to that kind of experience which resembles the mystic

experience, but it is only when the ascent is genuine and is carried to the supreme centre that the aspirant conquers at one stroke fully and entirely the whole field of knowledge. He unites, at that moment, in a total vision, the two aspects of reality, the manifest and the absolute.

We have seen that it is only by imposing upon oneself a rigorous discipline that it becomes possible for one to awaken the *kundalini* from its torpor. The majority of the *sadhakas*, therefore, incessantly cultivate the growth of the will-power, and when their individuality is purged of all impurity, they succeed in evoking the ascent of the cosmic energy. But it is equally open to one to obtain the same result by following an opposite path. Other aspirants there are who seek to reduce the inner tension, so that all resistance might be broken. They too succeed by a supreme effort of self-abnegation, *sharanagati*. They make a sacrifice of their will-power. They set it down as a sacrificial offering at the altar of the divine. When the aspirant attains such a high degree of detachment that there is no individual will-power of his own which seeks expression, where the will has been completely divested of all desire and of all preference, one feels as though the floodgates have opened from within. It is then that the descent of the divine takes place in him and penetrates to the very core of his being. His individuality is then dissolved under this torrential downpour.

It is all the same whether it is an ascent of the *kundalini* or a descent of the divine. In either case it is the same energy, the Primordial Energy, that is manifested.

Whatever be the method that is followed, in both cases there are considerable difficulties to be overcome. One can realize the truth only by paying the price of a supreme effort. It is not without significance that the *Upanishad* compares the spiritual path to a razor's edge.

But more often than not, we are so impatient that we seek to have a personal experience, and there takes place a violent outburst of sentiment, which appears, to those who misunderstand it, to resemble a spiritual experience. Swami Vivekananda calls such experience by the name of illusory experience.

As long as the purification of the feelings has not been completed — and it is essential that we should include in it the unbroken observance of truth and of celibacy — there is always one great danger to guard against when there takes place a sudden and premature ascent of consciousness. It may so happen that owing to a fortuitous concourse of events, the emotional force, which has been evoked at the higher centres, might suddenly descend like an avalanche upon the inferior centres. They might then cause an abnormal excitement of the lower passions upon which they depend. Hence, if there should remain any further traces of impurity in our nature they might awaken the memories of a

biological heritage. It is, therefore, essential that the aspirant should call forth his moral resources in order to triumph over such cases.

Some time before the passing away of the Master, when Swami Vivekananda spent his time at the garden house at Cossipore, he saw that some of his brother-disciples were seeking, by means of group dances and songs, to attain mystic experiences by a cheap kind of ecstasy. He gave them a severe warning. He exhorted them at once to put an end to such practices.

He reminded them that in order to find the truth, it is essential that they should plunge into the very depths of their being. It is only by the repetition of the *mantra* (*japa*) and by concentration that the superior consciousness may be awakened.

He was afraid that on account of nervous tension his brother-disciples might try to evoke such cheap kind of spiritual experience of which we have already spoken. He prescribed for them a proper scheme of diet. It was essential that they should at the outset strengthen their physical organism. That is what the *Upanishad* proclaims: "One who is not strong cannot realize the *Atman*."

All the rules regarding fasting and prayer to which we submit ourselves have their basis upon a fundamental principle. It is essential that the life-force, which among certain aspirants makes itself felt with such impetuosity along the side canals, should be entirely held under

restraint. If we should ever come to realize that high stage of perfection comparable to that stage which is referred to in the *Chandogya Upanishad* when it speaks of the nature of the *Atman* (see chapter VI), it is essential that all the side canals along which the one energy travels should be hermetically sealed. All those extraneous factors which drag us towards the external world and, consequently, towards the growth of the lower impulses, constitute, from this point of view, a real source of danger.

If any time this force should awaken and pursue the path to which it is accustomed, that is to say, flow along the canals of *ida* and *pingala*, it is essential that we should modify our diet and that we should furnish our physical organism with only that much of energy of which it may be strictly in need in order to carry on its current activities.

One who consecrates oneself to a life of contemplation and who has given up all physical activity does not seek to store within oneself an excessive quantity of physical energy. If it is a question concerning an aspirant who lives in the world and who has, in consequence, to acquit himself of heavy obligations and carry out with success in a world of hectic activity some hard task in order to earn his bread, he might have to follow a set of rules which would not be exactly identical. While it is recommended for such persons that in order to maintain the body at a proper temperature it is essential that they should seek substantial nourishment, so that they might

not fail to discharge their obligations; they too should see to it that they reduce, by means of fasting and prayer, the vital energy in them whenever they feel that it is going beyond certain limits.

There is another advantage to be derived from these rules regarding one's food. They help us to overcome the subjection that the sense of taste imposes upon us. It is a well-known fact that the pleasurable sensation that is felt by the tongue, the lips and the palate during eating or even during speaking has a direct bearing on the sex instinct.

The aspirant who has become awake to the subtle values that underlie all things, will not fail to note the important part played by the different centres. For him it is essential that he should give up all excess of speech and all self-indulgence in regard to his food so that he might lead a life of absolute continence. But such a discipline can be of value only when it is associated at all times with a spiritual discipline. Consequently, it becomes all the more essential that one should resort to *japa* and to *prayer*.

It is worth noting that in the India of today, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Ramadas and many others have brought into relief the importance of *Rama-nama*. It is by repeating this sacred name that they constantly practise the presence of Sri Rama in themselves. We regard Sri Rama as one of the divine incarnations.

Let the aspirant then, as far as he is concerned, repeat the name of his *ishta-devata*, his chosen ideal of the divine that might specially appeal to him. On this point it were well if he should follow the advice given him by his *guru*.

While attention is drawn to the physical aspect of their individuality in the beginning, *japa* permits aspirants to store up *ojas* and to give it a definite direction, thereby enabling them to rouse the *kundalini* from its sleep and to open up the central canal, *sushumna*. When once that canal is clear, at once it becomes the means of communication between the six centres of consciousness; and simultaneously with it the six lotuses open and there takes place the effulgent illumination of the six *chakras* which is called in Sanskrit the *shat-chakra-bheda*. Immediately thereupon the *sadhaka* enters into *samadhi*, and the individual soul, *jiva-shiva*, then plunges into the absolute, *parama-shiva*.

In this connection, we ought to recall to our minds that Sri Ramakrishna, who was conscious of the difficulties that every aspirant encounters in the present day world, in order to bring about a transformation of one's personality with any degree of success, has specially recommended the practice of *japa* to his personal disciples. He has said, "In this *kaliyuga*, the unbroken repetition of the name of the Lord (*Hari*) is in itself the most efficacious means of reaching the other side of the stream."

## CHAPTER V

# THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION: THE CHOICE OF AN IDEAL

The object upon which we meditate, as we have already seen, plays a very important part in our inner transformation. According to the Hindu conception of yoga, it is moreover essential, for, the aspirant cannot make any headway in the spiritual life if he does not stop at a particular chosen ideal. During the time of meditation, it is upon this particular object that he ought to concentrate.

It, therefore, follows that meditation presents to us two distinct phases. At first, it is by means of meditation that the *sadhaka* devotes himself to his chosen ideal. Secondly, it is by means of meditation upon his chosen ideal that the *sadhaka* is able to make his way and to penetrate to the very depths of reality.

There are many who imagine that meditation is a process which sets discursive reasoning to work. For our part, we would like to regard it as a means of concentra-

tion which the aspirant makes use of in order to elevate his consciousness far above the normal plane.

At the initial stages, our consciousness remains attached to the lower aspects of our individuality. It is so intimately associated with it that it is, so to say, incorporated with it. In order to evoke the separation of these two elements, it is essential that we should gradually warm up the whole of our psychic being until it has purified the inmost layers of our subconscious. It is essential that we should successfully accomplish this preliminary task before we can hope to attain the stage of the *perfected man*, the man of steady intelligence.

It cannot be said that we have as yet attained the status of *human beings*, for, really speaking, it is none other than the divine state; in order that we might ascend the intermediate rungs of the ladder, it is essential that we should learn to conquer the material aspect of it, under whatever form it might present itself. It behoves us to recognize the spiritual force that operates under each one of these aspects, for, really speaking, what we call "matter" is, in the last analysis, nothing else than a defective version of the reality.

Our task is that we should break down these different enclosures by which the ego is isolated from the ultimate totality. The question is not one of reducing or mutilating our existence; on the other hand, it is one of incessant growth and of infinite enlargement. It is only

in this way that we approach, step by step, the ultimate truth.

One of the great followers of Shankara, called Madhava, has given us in a work entitled *Panchadasi*, which was written during the fourteenth century, the following definition of renunciation (VI, 5-13):

The annihilation of the external world and of the jiva (i.e. the ego) does not signify that the external world and the jiva should alike cease to be perceived by the senses. Let us rather understand it to signify that we should attribute to each one of the two terms a noble significance which corresponds in every way to its real nature. All that it implies is that there is nothing that is really to be done by us in order to attain our liberation. To take an instance, in the stage of deep sleep, and in other stages when memory vanishes, the objects of perception totally cease to exist.

It is on account of ignorance that we are immured within the prison house of the ego. Let us destroy this prison house of ignorance, for, it is out of this that we have to come out. Immediately thereupon the reality will reveal itself to us, and it is only then that we shall gain real knowledge. It is only then that the ego shall discover its place in the scheme of totality. There is no other path that can lead us to the ultimate truth. If we remain in ignorance, it is only because we have created

imaginary distinctions in the Reality which is entirely homogeneous.

It is by means of the regular practice of meditation that we will be able to accustom ourselves to concentrate and to approximate more and more closely to the ideal of perfection. In this way we will also be able to integrate, one by one, the various discordant elements of our personality.

*Bhakti-yoga* recommends to us that we should choose an ideal. On this subject, the Hindu spirit gives one more instance of its characteristic liberality. The same *ishta* may not be applicable to all persons. Every one of the great religions, *mata*, is a path, equally valid, towards the Divine. We are endowed with the faculty of choosing our personal ideals. We ought to exercise that faculty and remain faithful to it.

It may so happen that we may not be able to take an independent judgement, and it may be necessary that we should have recourse to the advice of a spiritual guide. One who would approach the great treasure house of the ideal and would fain take his chance, naturally feels perplexed in the presence of the many mighty personages by whom he feels drawn. In such a case the aid of a *guru* will be of invaluable help. The *guru* however does not impose his personal will upon the disciple; to do so would be contrary to the rules of spiritual life. The only part that he can play is to illumine the friend who hesi-

tates, and who appeals to his (the *guru's*) personal experience.

Be that as it may, one day or the other we will have to make our choice. It is in this way that we are presented as entrants to the spiritual life, and when once we have made our choice, it depends upon us to give a proof of our constancy towards the ideal of our choice, to which we have consecrated ourselves.

In India it so happens that there are some aspirants who do not make any special choice for years together. They come to a conclusion only after many years of inner examination, for they take time to discover the ideal that corresponds most closely to their inner aspirations. They keep on questioning until at last the *buddhi* illumines them; for, it is the *buddhi*, the superior reason or intuition, which ought to inspire our choice. If we should allow ourselves to be carried away by our feelings, all further progress will be barred until we come to realize at what stage it is that we have made a mistake.

Now, in Europe, one frequently comes across individuals who, in their quest of a spiritual life, have a tendency to choose an ideal merely because of its exotic character. *Mantras*, *chakras* and *yantras* as well as other symbolic figures exercise an irresistible fascination over them. The spirit of man is the eternal explorer. It has always a taste for things novel. From the spiritual point of view, I do not wish to recommend that the aspirants

of Europe should follow any such path. In spite of their apparent seductiveness, such paths will only lead to a blind end. Every one receives at birth a spiritual heritage which he has no right to deny. One can accelerate one's spiritual evolution only to the extent to which one's personal effort is directed in conformity with the tradition of the race to which one belongs. One should not uproot a human being. If you are in quest of a spiritual ideal, you should be on your guard against those works which place an exaggerated importance upon the *tantric* aspect, or which advises you to make use of occult forces.

In India, tradition distinguishes the six *chakras* or plexus, which have their different stages in our organism along the length of the vertebral canal. Three of these, the lower centres, preside over the functions of the organs of assimilation, evacuation and sex. Of the three higher centres, the first is situated at the region of the heart, the second at the throat, and the third at the forehead. Independent of these six centres, one speaks at times of a seventh, the *sahasrara*, the centre with its thousand rays, the lotus with its thousand petals which is situated in the anterior part of head. When the cosmic energy is elevated right up to the *sahasrara*, the aspirant enters immediately into the stage of *samadhi*. Now, there are some authors who recommend to the neophyte to represent each *chakra* in the form of a lotus and to

inscribe an appropriate *mantra* on each petal of the lotus. The people of Europe may not derive any kind of benefit from such an exercise. Their tradition is not at all in harmony with such symbols which are purely Hindu in character, and which have moreover a value which is entirely arbitrary in nature.

When I use the term *arbitrary values* I have specially in mind certain conventional figures under which these *chakras* are normally represented. Let us turn over the leaves of one of those illustrated works where each *chakra* is represented in the form of a lotus. Each one of them has a corresponding design and has special colour. Each lotus has a definite number of petals. On each petal a *mantra* is inscribed in a condensed form. It may be a key word like the word *Om*. This *mantra* is accompanied by a *yantra*, which again has its origin in our mythology.

If these representations possessed an indisputable reality, would it not be essential that there should be a rigorous conformity among them? But such is not the case. One could easily detect considerable difference between one work and another. On this subject, moreover, there are considerable divergences between the three great tantric schools of India, those of Bengal, of Kashmir, and of Malabar.

I have also seen many people who have received the esoteric teaching of the Kabbala. They have pointed out to me the design of their *chakras*. I do not wish to doubt

that the European tradition also, for its part, is aware of the six *chakras*, although the form which they assign to them appears foreign to our own conceptions. Every representation of the *chakra* has a subjective character, and to that extent, it is arbitrary.

It would, however, be quite a different proposition if we should regard the *chakras* as "centres of consciousness." It then becomes possible for us to attribute to them a certain amount of empirical value. We ought however to keep in mind that in the supreme realization such kind of distinctions entirely disappear. What remains then is but a homogeneous mass of consciousness which does not admit of any degree or division whatsoever.

The beginner would be perfectly justified in regarding meditation as a real science, and to study it as such. It is certain that there exists such a science. It is universal; consequently, it is not the monopoly of either the orient or the occident. The Hindu yoga consists of two elements, and it is essential that one should distinguish the one from the other. Let us not confuse the scientific aspect of the teaching, which all people could follow with profit to themselves, with the special aspect of it in which only the Hindus may find interest.

The choice of an ideal should ever be in harmony with our inner aspirations and should arise from the very depths of the spirit. If we are in need of a personal ideal,

there is nothing to prevent us from choosing as the resting point of our thoughts some grand personality, who has played a historic role, and whose realizations constitute the heritage of humanity. Such, for example, are the Buddha, Jesus and Sri Ramakrishna.

If the people of Europe should allow themselves to be led astray by an exotic ideal — it matters little whether it is Hindu or Chinese — such an ideal would be, as far as they are concerned, totally devoid of all practical value.

Subject to these reservations, there is always an advantage in meditating upon a *chakra*. We shall now explain the reason for it.

The question should be examined from a scientific point of view. The Hindu *chakra* becomes, for one who is an occidental, a “centre of consciousness.” All this talk of the different centres of consciousness is only from the point of view of the world of manifestation. All that is taken for granted, as when we say, “Today I feel indisposed,” or “I feel today elevated in spirit, and I feel an expansion of consciousness,” and so on. If in the course of our meditation we should feel a kind of exaltation of the spirit, or if it should so happen that some beautiful form unknown before should suddenly appear before our sight, or if finally we should feel within us the inner presence of the Lord, a sacred shudder would run over our whole body. At that point the spirit is about

to liberate itself from all limitations. The ego-consciousness fades away. It might even cease to exist. It is at that moment that we feel that a superior consciousness has suddenly presented itself to our vision.

If we should continue to identify ourselves with the *manas*, the inferior aspect of the spirit in us, we would only be caught in the whirlpool of trouble and turmoil. On the contrary, if the mind should be elevated to the higher level of consciousness, we will see the dawning of the life spiritual. Such is the universal aspect of yoga.

At this stage a question may arise. One may ask at what centre of consciousness does it actually reside? *Raja-yoga* speaks to us of the six *chakras*. It were well if we should neglect the three lower ones. Let us concentrate upon the heart, or what is higher still. It may not be possible for us to succeed in it unless we put forth hard effort.

On the other hand, it would be much more easy if one should try to concentrate upon some external object. That is why Patanjali recommends to us that we should have a "target" as the object of meditation. He advises us to choose some object or other, some image, which is, as it were, in space. To close one's eyes and call forth from within the image of the object — that is an exercise which is easy for all. In short, the question is one of concentrating upon an object which is external to us.

The task becomes more difficult if, this time, the centre is within ourselves. We have then to raise ourselves by a psychological effort. As soon as we have made our choice, let us try to see our ideal at this very centre. Let us imagine that our ideal has impregnated, by its presence, that centre within ourselves where we have established it.

Such an ideal could be either personal or impersonal. It is personal when we try to imitate some great spiritual personage who draws us profoundly. It is impersonal when we concentrate upon some abstract quality. It may be an idea or a symbol, as for example, the symbol of light.

Every country possesses innumerable symbols which are peculiar to it. Thus, in India we meditate upon Kali, Shiva, Durga and so on. The question here is not one of historical personages. These symbols represent only a metaphysical concept. They will have but little significance for an occidental however familiar he may be for generations together with the mythology and the symbols of the Hindus. Consequently I could hardly repress the smile that comes to me whenever anyone asks me in France, if he should meditate upon Durga, Kali or Shiva. "That will not be of much avail. You have the cross. If you are a Catholic, take that as a symbol. If you are a Protestant, choose the Holy Ghost or the symbol of light." Light is an impersonal symbol; it can, therefore,

be proposed as the common object of concentration for all aspirants.

If you prefer to have a personal ideal, take refuge in the presence of one of the great masters, the Buddha, Jesus or Sri Ramakrishna.

As far as the beginner is concerned, what is essential is that he should learn to concentrate. Concentrate upon whatever ideal it is that you have chosen. Fix your entire attention upon that. That should be the sole destination of all your thoughts. Do not be afraid of putting on these blinkers, if one may say so. Remove mercilessly all foreign ideas that tend to distract you. Be on your guard against all mental impressions. Your spirit should be bracketed and be made to stay steadily upon a single object — your chosen ideal.

At this stage there is one danger to guard against. It might so happen that one might insensibly glide into a day-dream and imperceptibly fall asleep. One may be under the belief that one is meditating. In reality one might have passed two or three hours in some kind of an agreeably dazed condition. This happens more frequently than we may think. When the aspirant begins to meditate, he should be put on guard against such a disposition. When he comes out of meditation, he should ask himself what it is that he has experienced. If one is subject to such torpor one should make it a rule to get up after a few minutes of meditation and walk a few

paces. It is essential that one should fight against this *tamasik* tendency. If such a tendency should become implanted in you, you would have very great difficulty in getting rid of it. Moreover, such an attitude has in it very little that is spiritual. It might even lead one into certain dangers of a psychological nature.

When we have succeeded in confining our attention upon a given object, we will be able to concentrate, at will, either upon a person or upon a symbol or, at long last, upon what is impersonal. These three stages are referred to under the following terms: They are respectively known as *sakara*, that which possesses a body, the personal aspect; *akara*, that which has a form, that is to say, a symbolic aspect; and *nirakara*, which is the formless or impersonal aspect. Follow your special inclinations and adopt one of these aspects. The *sadhaka* will not fail to discover, as his personal heritage, a spiritual conception which corresponds to one of these attitudes.

It is by means of meditation that the subject, that is to say, the aspirant, attempts a rapprochement with the object that he has taken as his ideal. He desires to be united with it. Such an effort will find its justification in the metaphysical concepts which he should take pains to cultivate.

By means of this exercise one does not attempt to suppress the world and the ego-consciousness. The only question is how best we can isolate the *buddhi* from the

ignorance that envelops it and thereby lift the centre of our consciousness from where it actually is. It is only in this way that we can cease to confer the place of primacy to the world of multiplicity. As we are at present, we are yielding too much to a constantly changing world. We regard this moving flux as the very expression of reality, and our attention is exclusively directed towards the transitory aspect of things. We forget that there exists something else, viz. the aspect that never changes. By participating in meditation according to the rules of Yoga-Vedanta, we prepare ourselves for complete union. The subject and the object, the interior and the exterior, progressively tend towards unity. If ever we should realize this unity we would have at the same time attained the the point of silence, *mauna*.

Silence is not the ultimate reality; it is only a part of it. The external world forms the complementary part of it, but if we should have known what silence is, even though it be but once, the world of manifestation will assume for us an entirely new significance.

That which is true from the external aspect is equally true from the internal aspect. Let us carry our investigation to its very limit. We will find that it is the same with the ego also. As soon as the mind has been purified, we will find that the *buddhi* illumines the individual soul that is making its return journey to the universal spirit.

In the stage of *savikalpa samadhi* there is but a single vibration. Even this vibration soon comes to an end; what remains thereafter is the grand silence of *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

On the basis of his own personal experience of it, Swami Vivekananda has described in a celebrated poem the different stages of spiritual progress ("The Hymn of Samadhi," *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 4, p. 498):

Lo! The sun is not, nor the comely moon,  
All light extinct; in the great void of space  
Floats shadow-like the image-universe.

In the void of mind involute, there floats  
The fleeting universe, rises and floats,  
Sinks again, ceaseless, in the current "I".

Slowly, slowly, the shadow-multitude  
Entered the primal womb, and flowed ceaseless,  
The only current, the "I am," "I am."

Lo! 'T is stopped, ev'n that current flows no more,  
Void merged in void — beyond speech and mind!  
Whose heart understands, he verily does.

This time the problem concerns itself with the metaphysical nature of experience. At this level, there is no longer any distinction between subject and object. It is

not a state of consciousness brought about by anaesthetics, nor is it a pathological condition. It is by means of knowledge, *jnana*, that the union of the subject and object is effected. The One alone exists, and nothing more than the One.

According to Vedanta, the concept of the many is the result of ignorance. Consequently, it is of value only for those who have not got the sight of the universal substratum. If we should, without break, investigate this spiritual basis, the ultimate reality will not fail to reveal itself to us in the sum total of all manifestation as distinctly as it does in every appearance.

One may conclude from the foregoing that if we know how to concentrate all our thoughts upon any one given object, it will become possible for us, by virtue of the inner illumination, to identify ourselves completely with it. As we proceed along these exercises, step by step, it becomes possible for us to identify ourselves with whatever object it is that we meditate upon. In every case the difficulty lies in our not being able to rise above our individuality. By surmounting that obstacle, we arrive at a point where our individual consciousness merges in the object upon which we meditate. It may be that we meditate upon the Buddha, Jesus, or Sri Ramakrishna, or on the symbol of light, as the case may be.

Little by little the individual resistance becomes weakened. The limitations of the ego vanish; a day will

come when, as a result of all the obstructions having been removed, we come to realize our real nature. In reality we are at all time one with *Brahman*, and we have been one with *Brahman*, even when we were plunged into the depths of ignorance.

The experience of *samadhi* may be attained in different ways. Each should approach the problem after taking into account the special nature of one's disposition. What matters is that one should realize the supreme goal.

Spiritual life brings about a profound transformation within us. But it is indispensable that we should resort to spiritual observances with perseverance if we wish to accelerate our progress. In this way we will be able to strengthen our will day by day. What is essential is that we should acquire this will-power and allow it to keep pace, step by step, if we wish to know the truth. That is the reason why meditation plays such an important role in the spiritual life. It is during the time of meditation that we create and store up within us that spiritual energy, which we call *ojas* or *tejas*.

As we have already seen, the cosmic energy resides in every individual. It is that which manifests itself through the entire scheme of evolution. It has its seat in one of the lower centres of our organism. As we continue to observe the moral rules with greater and greater severity, we would be able much later to make use of, without

any loss whatever, of all those forces which, in our day-to-day life, find expression upon the plane of externality. At long last we come to realize that *ojas* is nothing but that same energy that has been purified, transformed, and sublimated. It is only when we have brought the task of purification to successful culmination that it will also attain its highest intensity.

All the great religions have recommended fasting, the mortification of the flesh and the like in order to avoid the scattering of this energy. Vedanta does not favour extreme measures. On the other hand, it recommends to us that we should proceed wisely, and without going to violent extremes, to the task of the progressive reduction of our physical appetites. This effort, if persistently carried on, will culminate in liberating the whole of the spiritual energy within us.

One occasionally hears in India of some aspirants who totally abstain from all food, and we hear it said of one of them, "He is a man of very great *spirituality*. He never eats and never drinks." There are others, who, half naked, expose themselves to very low temperatures. Others there are who sit for days together upon ice. All those who submit themselves to such tests merely attempt to increase their capacity for resistance. In our opinion, one merely dissipates one's energy thereby, without deriving from it any spiritual benefit. The entire energy of the mind should be directed and

concentrated upon one object only, that upon which one meditates.

There are several aspects of *shakti*, energy or force, as we may call it. At the causal state it is called *iccha*. We may call it virtual energy, the power of the will. When it is translated into action, it takes the name of *kriya*. When it seeks expression in the form of knowledge, it is known as *jnana*.

The term *jnana* is used to designate this energy in its static aspect. The two other terms represent it in its dynamic aspect. If one admits the pre-eminence of knowledge, it is only because that in order to arrive at knowledge it is essential to have at the same times the power of the will, *iccha*, and power of activity, *kriya*. It is knowledge that puts us in a position to understand everything and, by consequence, to avoid error. It is only where knowledge is defective that error appears and, in consequence, we fall into ignorance.

The beginner frequently finds himself face to face with psychic manifestations. It may be possible for one to have experience of clairvoyance or clairaudience. Those among his friends who too follow a spiritual path, at times brag of their experience of such phenomena and he may himself sometimes be prone to feel proud of such experiences.

It is essential that we should give up all these manifestations if we wish to practise real meditation. One of

the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had developed, in the course of his meditation, some of these psychic powers. When he made it known to the Master, Sri Ramakrishna felt grieved. Immediately thereupon he took him to the temple and prayed to the Divine Mother to remove all such temptations from the path of the disciple.

The aim of meditation is that it should break the resistance of the ego. In our daily lives, the sentiment of "I" is sufficiently active. New psychic powers will merely increase the inner tension. The realization of truth and the investigation into psychic phenomena are mutually incompatible.

In order to test Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna offered him the eight *siddhis*, supernatural powers. Vivekananda asked him, "Will that help me to realize *Brahman*?" "No" said Sri Ramakrishna, "but thanks to it, you will be able to accomplish miracles, and you will be able to draw large crowds." Swami Vivekananda replied, "If that is all, I do not want it."

What is the conclusion that we may draw from this illustration? It is that we ought not to think of psychic powers. Let us concern ourselves with the task of breaking the resistance of the ego. Let us firmly push back all those things that contribute to the growth of the ego-consciousness. The real spiritual life is incompatible with the exercise of such powers. The entire teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita* turns on the ideal of

renunciation. Arjuna tells Krishna (VI, 34-35): "The mind verily is, O Krishna, restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate. The restraint, thereof, I deem quite as difficult as that of the wind." And Krishna replies, "Doubtless, O mighty-armed, the mind is hard to restrain and is restless, but by practice, O son of Kunti, and by non-attachment, it may be restrained."

When we begin to meditate, we will have to keep our spirit under restraint. That is the first difficulty that we will have to overcome. Let us not allow ourselves to be discouraged. Let us persevere. We will be able to increase the time that we spend in meditation only gradually. In the beginning ten or fifteen minutes per day ought to be sufficient. We will have time to make our mind calm, to make an analysis and to examine our conscience; let us fix our attention upon our ideal and let us try to attain a sufficiently high degree of concentration.

Let us not forget that every act that we perform in our day-to-day lives, every thought to which we yield, deposits in us a new layer of ignorance which will be added to the sum total of our heritage. Let us take pains to reduce the inner tension which represents the legacy of the past. Let us not add anything which will tend to make the veil of *maya* thicker than before.

In order to arrive at the goal of our task, it is essential that we ought to cultivate in us the *iccha-shakti*. It is only by the strength of the will that we will be able to reverse

all the obstacles. But that is a question of time. Let us not imagine that we can achieve this task with any degree of success within a short time.

It is doubtless true that we find in the lives of the mystics of the East and the West instances of immediate realization, of instantaneous conversion, but such instances are few and far between. Let us not vainly imagine that such will be the case with us also. It will be unreasonable to calculate upon the possibility of a sudden metamorphosis; for while we follow the path, we have at the same time to live in the age in which we are. There is no magic formula which will throw open to us the portals of the kingdom within.

According to Shankara, who had attained the highest degree of realization and who was a perfect *jnanin*, it is absolutely essential that we should constantly practise our spiritual exercises. That is the one path that will lead us to *samadhi*, and in order to arrive at the very end of our pilgrimage, it is essential that effort should be continued for many years.

That is the error of the neophyte who desires to transpose into the spiritual life the rhythm of practical life. Is he not accustomed to put into immediate action every project that he has come to formulate and not allow any delay in the fulfilment of his desires? It will not be sufficient if one has practised more or less at leisure a few religious exercises in order to have a right to the

genuine mystic experience. Truth cannot be acquired as though it were a commodity to be purchased. It is indispensable that an inner transformation should take place within us even though the travail that is incumbent upon us can be accomplished only slowly.

Time is one of the factors that we ought to take into account. The man who lives in the country has more patience than a town-dweller. After having given to his field or his vineyard all the labour that is essential, he waits with confidence the hour of harvest. He regulates his effort according to the rhythm of the seasons. The ripening of the harvest is a process over which he has no control. Such is the case with the spiritual life. No forced growth is possible.

Little by little let him withdraw, by reason (*buddhi*) held in firmness; keeping the mind established in the Self, let him not think of anything.

— *Bhagavad Gita*, VI. 25

In fine, it is the inner purification alone that matters. No useful purpose is served by restricting our effort to the few minutes that we reserve every day for meditation. This effort should be pursued even during the course of normal life. Little by little we create a continuous current of thoughts, all of which converge towards the same ideal. It is only in this way that we may approach Him, and it is only thus that we can attain the state of *Brahman*.

We ought to learn a lesson from the kangaroos that we find in the zoological gardens. As soon as the young one feels threatened, it runs close to its mother. It takes refuge in the pouch, and there it feels secure. Let us imitate its example. Every time that danger threatens, let us seek an inviolable asylum at the centre of our own consciousness.

Let us exert ourselves in order that a new rhythm may be born in us which will be in unison with our ideal; and for this reason let us practise *japa*. But let us take care that it does not become a mechanical exercise. In the course of such observance, whether our ideal is personal or impersonal, let us never forget that every ideal has a vibration that corresponds to it.

In the world of manifestation, everything has a vibration. In the final analysis, matter and vibration are equivalent terms. Even spiritual things have their vibration. These vibrations are indissolubly fastened to every spiritual personage and to the sacred syllable Om; and these vibrations have at once an objective and a subjective value.

It is specially recommended that we should constantly seek to regulate our individual vibrations in conformity with that of the object which serves as the aim of concentration. It is only in this way that we lift the centre of our consciousness. The regular practice of *japa* will produce in us vibrations of the same intensity as those of

our *ishta*. In this way we come to be in harmony with our ideal and imperceptibly we come to be in harmony with the spiritual life. That is how our psychological transformation takes place; our mind will become purified, and at last the light of knowledge will shine. Thus our whole inner life could become renovated by means of *mantra shastra*, the science of *mantras*. The only condition that is imposed is that we should seek to make a proper application of it.

The ideal which you have chosen for yourself is not an illusion. That ideal is not meant to deceive us. Offer your sacrifice to it, body and soul, and in this way you will carry on the re-education of your being. If you wish to take advantage of every favourable opportunity that presents itself, do not neglect the heritage of many ages which you carry with you.

If you should fall back from your enterprise, you run the risk of descending to a lower centre of consciousness. It is by proper exercise of the will-power and by tenacity of purpose that you make your way towards the light, towards the ultimate reality, towards immortality.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE VALUE OF THE GREAT SILENCE

In Europe, when one speaks of philosophy or of metaphysics, one has a tendency of seeing therein nothing more than a mere play of the intellect. One tends to think that pure philosophy has nothing to do with spiritual life, and that it does not lend itself to practical application.

In India, however, we have an entirely different conception. Each system of philosophy is called a *darshana*, which means an *insight*. Similarly, the term yoga also signifies at once both a certain comprehension and the application of the necessary means in order that the aspirant might realize for himself the truth of it by his own experience. The Hindu spirit does not separate theory from practice or the goal from the means.

When a sage contemplates the static aspect, he knows that the ultimate reality is beyond all change. Manifestation appears to him as a flux of moving phenomena and

the arena of continual changes. The word *jagat*, by which the universe is signified, implies in fact the perpetual movement of things. They constitute a current of forms. It is, therefore, towards the central reality, the static aspect, that the aspirant ought to direct his investigation.

If after the attainment of the supreme goal, the sage permanently remained in the stage of *samadhi*, he would cease to live. But the moment he returns to the empirical plane of consciousness, he is compelled to concede to the world of manifestation a sense of relative value. At that moment, he cannot possibly affirm that everything is illusory. He has, for once, reached the *point of silence*. Such a person is endowed with an enlarged vision. In every aspect of the phenomenal he perceives the full expression of the infinite. He rediscovers, behind every object of manifestation, the static aspect which he has realized in the course of his experience.

When we lean upon the authority of what the great sages have said, we find that there is a remarkable agreement between them all on one point, and we may on that basis make bold to say that the empirical life is a combination, or rather, a union between the manifestation and the Absolute.

The true *jnanin* is a realized being, who has the faculty of comprehending simultaneously both being and becoming. He embraces in one total vision both static and the dynamic aspects.

If we should hold on to only one aspect, the static, it would follow that *samadhi* in which this is realized is nothing more than an individual exploit. We now realize the special value that the discipline of yoga has for us. The reason for it is that it is the path that leads us to realization. The moment we succeed in attaining the ultimate point, the world of manifestation takes a new significance for us. Henceforth every act of perception becomes indissolubly bound to the notion of the infinite.

Our knowledge of the external world is based upon the interplay of contrasts and of opposites. How is it possible for us to gain an adequate notion of manifestation if there should exist only manifestation and nothing else? The term "manifestation" can be correctly comprehended and defined only when we know its counterpart also.

In our normal day-to-day life we distinguish that there are three distinct levels of consciousness. They are the stage of waking, the stage of dreaming and the stage of deep sleep. Without our experience of deep sleep, we cannot have any idea of either the stage of waking or the stage of dreaming. Every experience of deep sleep is in turn limited by the other two stages of waking and dreaming. In effect, these two stages permit us to perceive the world of manifestation. They have that property in common, namely, that of offering to us two categories of existence that are in juxtaposition. In the

one as in the other, we distinguish ideas on the one side and objects on the other. On the contrary, in the stage of deep sleep ideas and objects alike disappear. Nothing is affirmed or denied in that state.

The man who has no experience of *samadhi* can have no knowledge of the value of that state where the mind has ceased to function and all thought has been suspended. This state of silence thus stands in opposition to the world of manifestation, and it is upon those who do not know as yet how to grasp the integral value of the present moment to examine separately each one of the three stages of consciousness across which our life unfolds itself. These stages of awareness lie open to every one of us. Let us look at all of them from a single point of view, and let us concentrate our attention upon the present moment. When we take stock of the world of manifestation, we find that in the final analysis it resolves itself into ideas. Some appear in the universe of three dimensions; they are the objects. Others take birth and die very quickly; they are our thoughts.

In tropical regions we often see a cyclone raging with prodigious velocity round a static zone. That is equally true of our mind. Between two successive ideas that take place in the mind there is an intervening void. If we should suppress this zone and this void, we would suppress at one stroke the storm and the ideas. In that case it will no longer be possible for us to know anything

whatsoever; for it is possible for us to take cognizance of things only when we are struck by the contrast of two antithetical terms.

We would discover a similar phenomenon in the physical world also. If we should study in a laboratory with the aid of modern instruments any given object of the physical world, we would discover that in the body of any given object to which we attribute mass or resistance, there is not the same homogeneity at the very core of the atoms of which it is composed. We would also discover that between the central nucleus and the constituent elements, there exists an interstellar void.

We ought to make use of a similar process in order to isolate that interval of silence which separates two successive waves of thought. It is this void that gives to what is expressed its entire significance.

As long as we have not discovered the presence of this interstellar void, whatever effort we might make in order to escape from being dragged along the current of our thoughts would only end in failure. It is in this context that we see the significance of the discipline of yoga.

To the extent to which we succeed, in the course of our meditation, in cultivating the growth of this intervening void, we succeed at the same time in arresting the current of our thoughts. There is the reign of silence within us. We take our stand at the static centre.

Although we traverse this centre at every instant of our existence, we do not even stop to ask if there is any such centre within us. The reason for it is that we are carried away by the whirlwind of ideas. We identify ourselves so completely with the current of ideas that we do not have the time to take cognizance of the interval of silence.

It is the discipline of yoga that gives us this awareness. It gives to us the means of eliminating the universe of ideas. Now the very first idea to arise in our mind, and which is constantly present in us, is the idea of oneself. The sentiment of self-complaisance is always associated with it. That is why it is called *ahambhava*, ego-centric attitude. It has been stated that all the waves of the spirit will be pacified as soon as the basic idea, "I", is re-absorbed in the static centre. It is only then that it will be possible for us to pass into the region of the unknown and to penetrate the heart of the "Grand Silence."

The *Chandogya Upanishad* proclaims that it is only by means of continence and by means of chastity that it is possible for us to realize *Brahman*.

This Self is the bund, the embankment, for the non-destruction of these worlds. Therefore, having reached this bund, one who is blind ceases to be blind; he who is hurt ceases to be hurt, he who is afflicted ceases to be afflicted. Therefore, when this bund has been reached even the night

becomes day; for this world of Brahman is lighted once for all.

— *Chandogya Upanishad*, VIII, 4.1.2

In the course of his commentary on the foregoing *mantra*, Acharya Shankara says:

The Upanishad here alludes to the vision of the sage who has had the experience of the non-manifest. And further because there are no days and nights on this bund, therefore, when the bund is reached even the dark night becomes day — that is to say, for the knower of Brahman everything reverts to the form of the one being, which consists of the pure light of consciousness, and, as such, resembles the day. Because the world of Brahman is lighted “once for all” — ever permanently lighted by its own nature.

The third *mantra* of the same Upanishad tells us by what manner it is that we shall approach the bund:

Those who reach this world of Brahman by continence, to them belongs this world of Brahman; for them is independence in all the worlds.

I should like to give here the commentary of Shankara upon the foregoing *mantra*:

Such being the case, those who, by means of continence, i.e. by renouncing all desire for women — reach this world

of Brahman, in accordance with the instructions of the teachers of the scriptures, i.e. realize it in their consciousness, to such people as are equipped with continence, and have a knowledge of Brahman, this world of Brahman belongs; and to no others who have a longing for women, even if they know Brahman. For these people there is independence in all the worlds. Therefore, continence is the supreme means for the knowers of Brahman.

It is the resultant of the forces of attraction and of repulsion that gives to each individual his characteristic traits. The individuality of a person is a bundle of likes and dislikes, of preferences and antipathies. It is by means of resistance that it particularly expresses itself. That is because the diverse forces gravitate around the consciousness of oneself which forms the fundamental note of our attachment to life. It is this attachment that becomes transformed at the physiological level into those imperious desires, which make one seek to assuage one's hunger and to satisfy one's sex instinct.

The essence of moral and religious discipline lies in progressive reduction of these desires and in sublimating these primordial tendencies. In this way, the ego-consciousness becomes weak; at long last it totally disappears. Thus, when ignorance is cast from the mind, the aspirant merges in the undifferentiated consciousness of *Brahman*. It is at this moment that the non-manifest,

which is the substratum of our existence, reveals itself to us in all the splendour of its glory. In Him it is that we have our existence, even when we apparently remain in ignorance. It is through him that we pass during every interval that separates two successive waves of thought, and during the state of deep sleep. Every individual passes and repasses through this state of peace that is silence without acquiring any kind of spiritual illumination whatever. In whatever manner one enters it, in the same manner one comes out of it. He remains an ignorant person. But if after submitting himself to a rigorous discipline he enters this region an ignorant person, he emerges out of it a sage. He has resolved the secret of manifestation.

It is this stage of consciousness which one attains by a voluntary reduction of the ego-consciousness that is called *turiya*. Unless we have practised absolute chastity, both in thought and deed, for a very long time, it will be futile for us to claim it. In the recent past, Sri Ramakrishna has recalled to us the capital importance of what the *Upanishads* teach us. "No one can have, at once, both yoga and *bhoga*. In other words, we cannot aspire, at the same time, after the life of the spirit and the pleasures of the world. Here, choice is imperative."

We thus see how important it is, from the point of view of Hindu philosophy, that we should consider the significance of the three levels of consciousness. But it

would all become inexplicable if our examination should be carried on only in the waking stage of consciousness. It is because we are at the present moment in the waking stage of consciousness that we are able to understand dream consciousness also. We are thus able to observe and say, "I have slept well; I have had such and such dreams." Similarly, it is precisely because the sage has a direct awareness of the stage of *samadhi* that he is in a position to understand the real significance of the waking stage. It, therefore, behoves us that we in our turn make use of the waking stage to observe and analyze the stage of deep sleep. By this diving into the very depth of our understanding, it is given to us to perceive the significance of the stage of *samadhi*.

Without spiritual discipline, it would at no time be possible for us to understand the stage of deep sleep. In fact, if we wish to understand anything in itself and in the way in which it ought to be understood, it is essential that we should be in complete harmony with the object of awareness, if our knowledge is to be either intimate or perfect. The subject and the object should form a single whole. When we examine the problem from this point of view and when we ask the question, "What exactly is the nature of the deep sleep?" the reply comes, "It is that stage of awareness where there is no diversity whatever." In that stage of awareness, where the waking consciousness and the dream consciousness alike vanish,

the ego-consciousness also ceases to exist. It is only as long as the ego-consciousness exists that we are prevented from attaining the perception of the void. It is comparatively easy for us to weaken the call of the external world and to resist the desire to live in mind over past thoughts and memories. But such is not the case with ego-consciousness. It will not be the less active unless there is complete peace. In order to give to the void of deep sleep its full significance, we ought to relax our internal tension. When the consciousness of "I and mine" is abolished in us, we would be able to realize the value of deep sleep, of *samadhi*, and consequently of the void and of silence.

The *Yoga-Vasishtha*, which is a work of Vedanta, refers to *samadhi* as "the void that is realized consciously during the waking stage." To use the Sanskrit expression, it is *jagrat sushupti*. It is that stage of homogeneous awareness where all distinction between the subject and the object is annihilated. It is only by means of a heroic effort of the will that one may attain that stage.

In this way we perceive what the most convenient method is for conducting the enquiry into our own inner nature. Such enquiry is called *vichara*. In this way, we elevate ourselves to that stage of integral comprehension, and when we have seen the truth with our own eyes, an inner transformation will take place within us. He who comes down to the plane of empirical consciousness,

after such an experience, will be an entirely different being.

It is by means of the psychological process of yoga that we attain the stage of silence and of the void, but let us not imagine that it is a question concerning the "zero" point of emptiness. It is not a stage of intellectual vacuum. All that we may say of it is that in that stage of awareness there is no object of comprehension. The very idea of comprehension implies both a subject who is the knower and an object which is the known. In such a case, all comprehension is due to the fact that the union has come to an end. The subject stands differentiated from the object only because it has come back to the waking stage of consciousness.

There is, therefore, a different aspect of life which we tend to forget every time we come out of deep sleep and when we resume our normal life. The world of manifestation forms only one of the phases of reality. The universe of silence forms its complementary aspect. It is only when we attain this latter stage that it is possible for us to lift the veil of ignorance that screens this other stage of consciousness, and this stage of consciousness comes within the reach of only those persons who have undergone a strict spiritual discipline. It is only then that it is possible for us to know the one as well as the other, for both these aspects are complementary.

We understand the real in all its plenitude only at that point of departure when both these phases of the real are presented to us.

It is not by means of the ordinary process of nature by which we pass from the manifest to the non-manifest that we attain any degree of inner illumination. At the biological level, it is merely the fatigue of the organism that makes us fall into deep sleep; but that is not the path by means of which we shall grasp the spiritual significance of the *avyakta*, the non-manifest aspect of reality.

It is not by means of the finite, the *alpa*, that we may ever attain the realization of the infinite, the *bhuma*. It is essential that by means of prolonged religious effort we bring about a transformation of our consciousness. That is a necessary preliminary step. When once this transformation takes place, we are at the goal, towards which all *sadhana* tends.

## CHAPTER VII

# THE TWO ASPECTS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE: BHAKTI AND JNANA

All the aspirants after spiritual life might be arranged under two great categories. On the one hand are those who are attracted by the unchanging aspect of the Eternal. On the other hand are those who are drawn towards multiplicity; but during the time when the current of multiplicity carries us onward, we are incapable of giving to manifestation its full value. In order that we might be able to maintain under every circumstance our sense of ultimate value, it is essential that at no time do we lose sight of the fundamental basis upon which all manifestation rests. It is only on this condition that the process of spiritual life can ever develop.

The discipline of yoga is always guided by reason. It never demands anything of us which is not accessible to us.

Are we attracted by the static aspect? In that case it advises us to make use of the process of analysis. That is the method of *jnana*.

Do we prefer, on the other hand, the dynamic aspect? Do we wish to hearken to the call of life around us? We are then directed to strengthen this urge by turning it towards that centre at the heart of which we have put our chosen ideal, our *ishta-devata*. In this way, the whole of our being will become unified by a central force. By virtue of this integration, we will attain success in our attempt to lessen the tension of our ego. That is the path of *bhakti*.

The majority of men feel this affective urge. They are carried away by the force of emotion. They are drawn by the external world. Those who know how to resist the attraction from without and who are interested in nothing but the internal analysis, which is the path of *jnana*, are very few indeed.

Whatever be the path that is followed; the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna enjoins that the *sadhaka*, the spiritual aspirant, should envisage simultaneously both these aspects. If we should go all out on the emotional plane, we would expose ourselves to the dangers of an excessive sensibility. If, on the other hand, we should isolate ourselves from the world around us, and if we hold fast to nothing except the analysis of our minds, we should become, before long, abnormal persons.

It does not however follow that an aspirant who has a taste for analysis should, by virtue of that, consider himself to be a *jnanin*. Every candidate to the spiritual life should accustom himself to examine all that transpires within himself, in order that he might acquire those qualities that are as yet found wanting. It is above all essential that one should diligently strive after one's own purification. In the absence of such purification, many of those who pass for *jnanins* are but distorted images, almost caricatures, of it.

Does anyone have the right to claim to possess a scientific spirit only because one knows how to run an engine, drive an automobile or pilot an aeroplane? In order that a man might be able to run a machine, it is sufficient if he has a certain amount of muscular strength in order that he might have control over his nervous system and be able to remain in a state of alertness. These qualities have nothing in common with the scientific spirit. One may be able to talk facilely upon the subject of *jnana*; one may be able to give one's opinion upon such a method; one may be able to cite passages from the *Upanishads*. But they are no more than technical or mechanical aspects. It does not lift one above mere mechanical knowledge.

It is for otherwise with the genuine scientific spirit. The savant is not one who seeks to obtain immediate result. He is not in quest of any personal ends. He notes

the points of difference, exercises his right of criticism, and seeks to discover the relation between things, so that he might establish laws that are constant.

In order to adopt the attitude of the *jnanin*, it is essential that one should undergo a rigorous discipline. It will not be permissible for us to say, except at the end of a very, very long period of discipline, *aham brahmasmi*, "I am Brahman," *tat twamasi*, "Thou art that." Our first preoccupation should be to build up a solid moral basis. It is only when that is accomplished that we acquire the truly philosophic spirit. The fact is, the world has recognized but a very few real *jnanins*.

It is possible for us to classify Swami Vivekananda as pre-eminently one of the *jnanins*. He had attained a very high degree of purification. He had imposed upon himself a very severe discipline and he combined in himself all the requisite conditions; for he possessed discrimination (*viveka*), renunciation (*vairagya*), the moral virtues (*citta-shuddhi*), and, above all, the ardent desire for liberation (*mumukshutva*).

It is absolutely essential that we seek to cultivate at least one of these virtues, that of discrimination. It is the cardinal virtue which inspires the entire discipline of the *jnanin*.

### *Discrimination*

What is essential is that one should discern the real from the unreal. It is only by means of discrimination that doubt of whatever kind may be excluded. Under no circumstance should the aspirant fail to see the real substratum which alone lends to all the appearances of the external world its semblance of existence. The aspirant should, therefore, seek to eliminate by continuous effort all names and forms. He thus comes to perceive constantly the omnipresence of *Brahman*. As long as there is the least uncertainty, he is yet to attain all the qualifications of a *jnanin*.

To take an instance, if we should choose the path of analysis, and if tomorrow we find ourselves in the hands of a false identification, it would be pure hypocrisy on our part to claim the title *jnanin*. Let us think of our own purification; that is the one thing that matters; everything else will be added unto it. That was why Sri Ramakrishna asked his disciples to repeat incessantly the name of the Lord.

### *Inner purification*

Let us assume, for instance, that on a particular day we have failed to practise *japa*. That would be proof positive of the fact that we still remain attached to the

empirical experience of the world. We have not yet dived deep. How can we claim to have integral knowledge so long as we do not discriminate between the real and the unreal during every hour of our existence?

One day a *sadhu* paid a visit to Sri Ramakrishna. He was repeating without interval "I am Brahman," "I am Brahman." Now, it so happened that this particular *sadhu* was an egoist. He was ever in quest of whatever contributed to his interest or pleasure. Sri Ramakrishna reprimanded him and said, "Why do you repeat this *mantra*? You are still attached to the world?" The *sadhu* recognized that he deserved this reproach, and if ever you should visit Dakshineswar, you would read the following words which he wrote on the walls in charcoal: "All that I said till this day is an error. Hereafter I shall be humble. I shall take pains to realize the Truth; and if ever I should succeed, I would keep it in silence."

If, however, the question is one concerning our personal discipline, and if we repeat the *mantra* in order to accelerate our purification and to renew our faith in this affirmation, we are at liberty to say *aham brahmasmi*; but it should be said in a very low voice, to ourselves; it will not be proper if some one else were to hear it. That is because, if it were otherwise, we render ourselves liable to a false affirmation.

That person who has known the Truth would observe silence. It is a meaningless expression to say in a loud

voice, "I have realized", for, the ego, the concept of "I" would fall of its own accord, like a house in ruins, on the very day on which we have attained the supreme experience. What avails it to speak of it?

In our own times, a certain mystic, who would fain remain anonymous, has written as follows: "When I see a cross in the church, I do not think of Jesus. To me it is no longer a mere incident in the passion, or suffering of Jesus. I consider the cross to be a symbol, and as the very essence of the spiritual life. To me it suggests the extinction of the self, the concept of the 'I'." We know how the first-person pronoun is written in English; if we put a bar across this "I", it becomes the symbol of the cross. The cross is, therefore, the symbol of the annihilation, the immolation of the ego.

The ultimate reality will remain beyond our grasp as long as we do not give our willing consent to the sacrifice of our own individuality. Now, the *Gita* gives us a method by which we might overcome this sense of "I," *ahamkara*. It gives us the following chain of reason along which we ought to proceed: Normally, as a matter of habit, we tend to think, "It is I who work." But in reality such is not the case. What is the nature of the power that expresses itself in and through this particular psychophysical organism? That alone is the true "I." It is not possible for us to localize it upon the external plane.

It is only when we arrive at the goal of our inner investigation that we will succeed in knowing what our real "I" is. In order that we might arrive at that goal, it is essential that we should discover the very basis of the sentiment of ego. Moreover, such is the advice that Sri Ramana Maharshi gave to all those who sought his advice. Every moment of our lives we ought to find out the very root of the sentiment of the self.

We ought to concentrate our entire attention upon the investigation of it; as long as we have not arrived at a conclusion, all other problems have only a secondary interest for us. The consciousness of the self is, so to say, the very hub of the wheel. It is essential that we ought to arrive at this very hub in order that we might go back to the very centre of our consciousness. It is only when we submit ourselves to some discipline of this kind that we gradually develop our courage and our will-power. Such is the advice of the *jnanin* even to those people who take their stand upon the varied spokes of the wheel of existence, and who have a tendency to proceed towards the circumference of the wheel and, to that extent, stray far and away from the truth.

It is only when we have accustomed ourselves by means of a prolonged spiritual practice that it is possible for us to look at the world of manifestation from this new point of view. It is only in this way that we may cull

the fruits of our industry, and it is only then that our meditation will become fruitful.

The spirit is ever as restless as the sea. At every instant there arise waves of thought, and as each wave rises and breaks, it is succeeded by a fresh one. Let us create the conditions for the reign of calm within us. Such a course of discipline will produce in us a strong will-power, and each one will be able to make use of that will-power in conformity with one's own temperament. If the religious aspect should hold out an attraction to us, we would say, "It is the Lord alone who dwells within me." If, on the contrary, the attitude of *jnana* should prevail, we would think, "That is the witness, the *antaryamin*, the *Atman*, *Brahman*." It is always essential that we should keep in mind the fact that in order that we might elevate ourselves to that level where the vision of the *jnanin* dawns, we should first of all submit ourselves to a severe discipline so that we might successfully accomplish the purification of the body and the mind. It is here that yoga begins.

In the course of such purification we come into contact with that inner force which binds together the body and the spirit. The beginner should proceed upon his task of empirical dichotomy; for at the present moment, there are two elements that are present in him. One is the body, which is matter; the other is the idea, the spirit.

This process of purification should be successfully carried on both fronts, so that both the constituent elements become the better for it. In fact, what is wanted is a technique of purification which will influence both the body and the spirit.

Generally speaking, people attribute an exaggerated importance to *pranayama* or the purification of the breath. It tends to create among the aspirants who practise it a false sense of superiority. It is essential that we should be on guard lest we should be caught in the toils of a false identification.

The spiritual life consists in weakening the sentiment of the ego. We would be going astray from the right path if we should seek to be above our fellow beings. One should resort to *pranayama* only for the purpose of establishing the equilibrium between the body and the spirit. But it would lead to injurious consequences if it should result in augmenting in us the ego-centric consciousness.

The progressive education of the breath will help us to understand that we form a part of the world around us. If we could not breathe the air around us for a few minutes, we would die of asphyxiation. That should teach us a lesson in modesty. During all the time that we breathe the air around us, let us also be conscious of the fact that we are bound to the world around us. It is the same cosmic energy that animates our individual perso-

nality. It is the air that we breathe and which fills our lungs that is transformed into *prana*. We direct this energy, according to our choice, either to the world that is outside us, or to the self that is within us. Consequently, it is not proper that we should feel proud, or allow vanity to arise, on account of the way in which we direct this energy either physically or mentally. Nor let us forget that the strength of the body and the power of the mind, of which we are so proud, might alike cease to exist at any moment. Two minutes without oxygen and it is all over.

Let us ever keep in mind that we are all the time in contact with the totality which envelops us and which permeates us. Let us rather consider *pranayama* as a system of discipline, thanks to which we are capable or unifying the *jiva*, the individual ego, with the *jagat*, the universe around us. We ought to resort to this exercise only for the purpose of establishing equilibrium between the body and the spirit. The spirit cannot by itself become agitated without at the same time the body also becoming agitated; nor could the body become agitated without the spirit also responding to it. It is only by the control of the breath that we will be able to establish harmony between the energy that works within us and the energy that works without.

The purification of the body is not in itself sufficient. Let us now turn our attention to the purification of the

mind. In India we set a high value upon religious belief and worship, as well as upon the observances of spiritual practice. That is because we find in them the means of working, by suggestion, upon the inner life.

If an aspirant should be endowed with a vivid imagination, he would tend to portray the evil tendencies within him as if they constituted an inferior personality within himself. It would then become possible for him to exorcise them by himself. There are some Brahmins who believe that by the power of suggestion, or by repeating certain *mantras*, it would be possible for one to exorcise this undesirable personality. Again, we find the same idea repeating frequently in the rites and symbols of religion. To take a few instances, we might take the dance of Kali, or the dance of Shiva, the legend of Durga or of Ganesha; in all these cases we find that there is an allusion to the death of some animal. Let us understand from it that man has the power of dominating the beast in him.

It may so happen that in the course of one's *sadhana*, the spiritual energy manifests itself according to the nature of the subject, either as the confirmation of one's faith in a superior power, or as a resistance to what is subconscious. Thus, it may be that one might dream that one is attacked by an animal. Let us not seek a Freudian explanation for it. Let us rather take into consideration that an inner tension is going on within us. The inferior

forces have assumed the form of an animal or a demon. The fight that we put up, and the trophy that we carry away, form a symbolic portraiture of the effort that we put forth in order to liberate ourselves.

When Sri Ramakrishna was young, he had, during the course of his meditation, a vision that was thoroughly characteristic. All of a sudden he felt that the whole functioning of his body had come to an end. The body lay like a log. But, nonetheless, the lucidity of his mind and the power of reasoning continued to function normally. He saw coming out of himself, one after the other, two beings, one dark, and the other, fair. There took place a fierce conflict between the two. The luminous being triumphed over the creature of darkness. The very moment when Sri Ramakrishna felt the bright being re-enter him, he regained the normal control over his limbs.

The folklore of every nation is rich in conflicts of this kind, in which the angel of light defeats and casts on the ground some mythological animal, whether it be a dragon, a hydra or a demon. It is in this way that humanity confirms its faith in the certainty of the victory of the power of the spirit over the forces of evil.

Christian theology has studied this problem of evil, and has tried to furnish an explanation of it. The presence of the darker powers within us almost seems to justify the concept of original sin. There is no place for

sin in the scheme of creation, still man is born in a state of sin! In India, however, we do not understand things in exactly the same way. In our estimation, if one should keep on harping upon the idea of sin, which has but a negative aspect, it would become even more difficult to imagine the positive aspect. Sri Ramakrishna felt surprised to find what great importance the Christians in India attached to the idea of sin. They spoke of nothing except sin and they thought of nothing except sin. How is it ever possible for one to deliver oneself from an idea with which one is constantly obsessed?

Sin, doubtless exists; but in the final account it occupies but a minor place. If we know that the *Atman* is in us, it is upon the *Atman* that we ought to concentrate. Let us not pay any attention which is out of all proportion to that which is inferior. If our hand should be sullied, let us wash it diligently, but when once the washing is over, of what avail is it that we should persuade ourselves once again it is not clean?

Let us repeat the name of the Lord. Let us practise meditation with perseverance, by allowing ourselves to be guided by our individual preferences. Let us take a spiritual bath, a purification of the spirit. We are free from all that sullies us. Henceforth it becomes possible for us to become, at will, all that we wish to be. It will be quite sufficient if we continue to think of the name of the Lord at all times.

Let us not trust mere wish-fulfilment. It knows how to take forms that are very seductive. It is by yielding to it that we come to have the pride of being a *jnanin*. But that is the path by which the spirit escapes us. That is a sign that the spirit is still drawn towards things external to us, and that the urge of our individuality is still directed towards the world of manifestation.

Whatever path we might follow, what is essential is that we should acquire inner purity, and unless we submit ourselves to a rigorous discipline, success is still far from our reach.

In India we celebrate the Durga Puja. In Europe this ritualistic ceremony is regarded as a cult of idolatry. But we regard it as a scientific means, a technique, which allows us to be clothed in purity. As soon as the ceremony is over, we cast the image that we had worshipped into the Ganges. It is for us only a method by which we employ our aesthetic sense in order to proceed on the task of our purification. As soon as the desired result is attained, the image loses all its value.

In conformity with local conditions, different methods are employed. They may consist of either sacred water, or *pranayama* or of auto-suggestion. What is common in all these cases is that one seeks to receive a spiritual baptism. By these means people have tried to give expression to the fact that in every part of the world, and at every age and under varying circumstances, there

is the need for one to lift oneself above one's environment in order to attain a high level of purity. It is only the power of understanding that will make us tolerant and make us recognize that under all the diversities of forms and of cults, whatever form they might assume, there runs a single common inner aspiration.

We are apt to imagine that the vibrations emanating from certain places and persons are impure, and that they are likely to endanger us. But that is a mere superstition. Let us try to resist it.

Talking on this subject, I have frequently come across a wrong comprehension of things Indian, which has contributed to the circulation of very dangerous ideas. There are innumerable works that make much of these. They speak of some maleficent influence that haunts such and such a person, or such and such a place, and of "auras" of different colours that accompany different individuals. The consequence is that quite a large number of Europeans have become obsessed with such ideas.

It is quite likely that some individuals who are endowed with a very high degree of spirituality might have supernormal perceptions. But certainly such cannot be the case with a mere beginner; and such a person would do well to concentrate his entire attention upon his own spiritual advancement and to ignore the study of occult phenomena. Let him hold fast to the point of view of *advaita*. Let him put to use the wise advice of Shankara:

It is only when desire is augmented by thinking about sense objects and by doing selfish actions that it leads to transmigration. The way to destroy these three — selfish work, dwelling on sense objects, and hankering after them — however lies in looking upon everything, under all circumstances, always, everywhere and in all respects, as Brahman and Brahman alone. Through the strengthening of the longing to be one with Brahman, these three are annihilated.

— *Vivekachudamani*, 315-316

Let us then accept the fact that we are at all times surrounded by a spiritual atmosphere. While we meditate, let us imagine that all things evil have been once for all cast out of us. Let us incessantly affirm the faith "I am pure," "I am pure," and we would really become that. When any member of the nobility is brought to trial before a court of law, it is always before a tribunal where his own peers are seated. In order to know things divine, it is essential to attain the divine status. Let us then repeat in a low voice, *Aham Brahmasmi*, "I am Brahman."

It is only by the assiduous repetition of the same *mantra* that it is possible for us to attain a high level of awareness. Each aspect of the divine has its particular *mantra*. If light should hold an attraction to us, let us think incessantly, "That pure light is in me." In all ages the great mystics have made use of identical methods.

The human spirit must necessarily resort to the same means in order to arrive at the same goal.

If I have cited to you certain illustrations that have been taken from Hindu technique, it is not because they should be followed to the letter. Exercise your faculty of analysis; take into consideration the method alone; let the sense of purity grow in you more and more. Strengthen your will-power, so that it might stand all shocks. If you should have this purity and this will-power, every condition will have been fulfilled, and you will unite with the cosmic energy.

To the people of Europe, when they begin to meditate, I would give the advice that they should regard themselves as the son, the child of God. If you wish to qualify yourself in order to approach the Lord, repeat to yourself mentally, "My God, I am your creature." It is to this aspect that you ought to hold fast; but it would not be efficacious unless you practise it for many long months. Give a proof of your patience. Your spiritual efforts will not go in vain.

It is easy to practise meditation: the only requisite condition is that you should conform to a rule of conduct. Certain things are, in effect, incompatible. It may not be possible for a person who returns from a cinema or a theatre to take to meditation as soon as he reaches home. The waves of thought which the scenes had evoked would continue to be felt in the sub-conscious.

The spirit may be troubled, or agitated. One who seeks to make the mind calm must first of all allow peace and purity to be established within oneself.

### *Sublimation*

During the hours of meditation let us try to create around us new "surrounding," a "spiritual climate." That is the second aspect of meditation. It is now essential that the entire affective energy, the power of the feelings, is sublimated. In our consciousness there may still linger a few traces of the lower aspect of our personality. It is essential that we make ourselves quite pure in all the emotions that are instinctive.

Let us not feel ourselves troubled if at the beginning we feel as though we are in the midst of a fog. It is the fog that hides from us the face of our ideal, our *ishta-devata*. Let us redouble our efforts. Let us concentrate earnestly upon our *ishta*. We will be able to pierce through the fog, however dense or grey it may be. A time will come when we will be able to master the course of our thoughts. It is only then that the night of the spirit will become transformed into light.

It would be an error on our part, if we do not avail ourselves of the energy that expresses itself in us in the form of aesthetic sensibility. We might divert it and make use of it in order to arrive at a spiritual goal. Let us be

diligent and persevering. Time works in our favour. Let us arm ourselves with patience. We will not fail to make appreciable progress. Little by little, the waves of the spirit will all become calm. If we should encounter any difficulties in actual practice, that would be merely an indication of the survival of the lower kind of feelings. It is these that we ought to purify. There exists a close spiritual touch between our ideal and the antagonistic forces. Presently, as the inner drama unfolds itself within us, the affective element in us will push out that which stands opposed to it, so that we might be able to attain the goal towards which we tend. Let us sublimate this urge, and the very power, which at lower levels was working contrary to us, will come to work along the current of our efforts; we would thus find in it, henceforth, a precious ally and helper.

This inferior kind of power makes itself felt in every one of us. All of us are interested in finding out the means by which we might attain success in our self-purification; it is only in this manner that we may free ourselves from our bondage.

Let us cease to identify ourselves with our thoughts. Let us make a sacrifice of them and leave them in the hands of the Lord, for that is what is called *manasa-puja*, mental worship. Let us choose that which forms the object of our meditation. In the course of meditation, the general form of the object will be deeply impressed

within us. Name and form alike disappear, but the universal substratum will continue to subsist. Along with it, the lower thoughts, the disagreeable remembrances which constitute part of our biological heritage, will also gradually lose their vigour and entirely vanish. Such is the teaching of *Bhakti-yoga*.

As long as we feel bound by what is finite, *alpa*, no salvation is possible for us. It is only in the infinite, *Brahman*, that we would discover the Real.

Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the infinite. Where, however, one sees something else, hears something else, understands something else, that is the finite. That which is infinite is immortal. That which is finite is mortal.

— *Chandogya Upanishad*, VIII. 24. 1

If we allow ourselves to be blinded by the emotions that are awakened by the instinctive reactions, our centre of awareness would continue to be bound by what is lower. Let us not preoccupy ourselves with sin. Let us know ourselves as we are and let us accept, once for all, our present condition. We would be able to measure the distance that separates us from our goal, towards which we are striving. If only we remain unshaken in our fidelity to our ideal, it will be possible for us to lift ourselves up to it.

In order to illustrate the method that I have tried to explain so far, let us assume that we wish to free ourselves from a particular instinctive reaction of the emotions, fear, for example. It is in one of the lower centres that fear takes its origin. It is possible for us to extend this sentiment and deprive it of its individual aspect, by endowing it with a general aspect, or with what is universal. It is in this way that we free ourselves from it. Thus it may so happen that we are often seized by the fear of death, when we are sitting alone in our room, cut off from the world. Imagination comes into play and accentuates fear by a sense of false identification. On the other hand, when it is a situation of danger, that threatens an entire community, as in the case of a war or an epidemic, the individual conquers his fear and faces death courageously. To the manifestation of every other violent passion, the same process might be applied.

We might, therefore, conclude that at no time would we be justified in giving a free field to our imagination, for it presents to us everything only in a deformed manner. The feeling that we are separate from the infinite, and that we are isolated, consequently gives full scope for the growth of the derangement of the imagination and the display of violent emotion.

Let us, therefore, make use of the imagination in such a way as to sublimate the forces of our instincts. We would then be able to master them. It matters little what

particular sentiment it is that we sublimate. It becomes for us a bond which unites us by means of the sentiment with the concept of the infinite, for in so far as we amplify that sentiment and universalize it, we give expression at the same time to a passionate dynamism, which will lift us to the Divine.

Let us then make a sacrifice to our *ishtha-devata* of all that subsists in us, whether it is the product of ignorance or of illusion. Do we wish to become *jnanins*? We will then be lifted to a very high level of intellectual consciousness. Do we wish to become *bhaktas*? The Lord, our *ishtha-devata*, will then appear as the very centre of all the forces that are at work within us and which, but for Him, we will not be able to conquer. It is the latter attitude that was adopted by St. Teresa of Avila. Let us follow the advice that she gives us: "Here is my life; here is my honour; here is my will-power; dispose of me according to Your sweet pleasure."

Let us renounce in spirit all that we possess. Let us keep back nothing. It is only in this way that we will be able to purify ourselves of all baser sentiments.

If base thoughts should still continue to arise from within the subconscious, let us push them out. Let us say to our *ishtha*, "These are not my thoughts, they belong to you." It may be very difficult for the people of the West to take such an attitude. For all practical purposes, the Christians admit that evil also has a well defined

territory of its own. But we Hindus regard good and evil as two complementary aspects, and we do not hesitate to make a sacrifice of all that we have to God, whatever might be its nature, whether good or not.

In this context, I should like to tell you a story taken from one of our mythologies, the story of Krishna and Kaliya. Once upon a time a terribly poisonous snake devastated the banks of the Jumna river, and the devotees of Krishna implored Him to exterminate this monster. Krishna jumped into the river where the serpent had his abode and, coming to grips with Kaliya, so seriously wounded him that he began to vomit blood. Kaliya must have been a great devotee in his previous incarnation with many meritorious acts to his credit, because he realized at the moment of his greatest suffering that he was in the presence of the Lord and surrendered at His feet. He feelingly told the Lord that he was offering at His feet the poisonous blood which He Himself had given him and regretted that he did not have anything better to offer.

The special significance of the story is that it is only by the total renunciation of all that we possess that it is possible for us to approach the Divine. It is, therefore, essential that we abandon all that belongs to us, both good and evil.

It so happens that among certain people, the idea of the good produces only a feeble impression; on the other

hand, anger, contempt and irritation awaken specially intense reactions within them. Let us be on our guard so that we might not get caught, by our negligence, in the violent display of emotions. Talking on this subject, one is reminded of a story that a devotee once asked the Lord how many times he would have to be reborn in order to realize the truth. The Lord replied that he would have to be reborn seven times as a devotee, but if he were filled with a sense of anger against the Lord, it would be sufficient if he were reborn thrice. It is not that I wish to encourage the temperament of irascibility. All that I wish to point out is that in order to be able to direct the course of our evolution, it is possible to make use of even the contrary forces, if they should be present within us. Let us not give way to despair, inasmuch as we can even make use of our shortcomings as concurrent forces in our spiritual progress. We could attain our ideal by setting in motion even the forces of antagonism. Let us then make use of our *buddhi* and re-orient our attitude to the flesh in such a way as to attain the object of our desire.

Let us not feel discomfited if, in the course of our meditation, disagreeable memories should crop up and cause agitation. Above all, let us not believe that we are either going back, or that we are remaining in ignorance and in sin. Let us call upon our *ishtha-devata* and let us say to Him, "You have given me all that I have. There is

nothing that I can claim as my own. Allow me to surrender to you all that I have." And more often than not, in this way, we transfer the heavy burden of our responsibility.

Every one should, while following the spiritual path, try to understand for oneself the secret of perfecting the purification of one's mind, and of sublimating one's lower nature. Let us, above all, avoid the possibility of unpleasant complexes being formed in the course of our effort. Doing so we shall increase the play of the instincts to work within us, and be turning our shoulders away from the goal that we pursue. Such people say, "What the ideal is, I know well enough; but as for me, what I do is just the opposite of it." It reminds us of a saying of Pascal that one starts by wishing to make an angel, and ends by producing a beast. If one desires to submit oneself to a discipline for which one is insufficiently prepared, one exposes oneself to violent reactions. If such were the case, let us take to meditation, let us turn back to the process of psychological analysis; we would then discover the exact point where we have deviated and we would be able to start afresh at the task of self-purification. The nervous system is not yet in harmony with the spirit. We would do well to re-establish this sense of harmony in us, cost what it might.

Sri Ramakrishna has told us the following anecdote: Once upon a time there lived a *sadhu* in front of a public

woman's house. His mind was preoccupied all the time with the sin the woman was committing. Another person who used to frequent this abode, felt ashamed of himself by mentally comparing himself with the *sadhu* for whom he had great respect. Now, when the *sadhu* died, it was the devil that carried him away; as for the other man, he attained realization.

It would not be sufficient if the process of purification should be confined to some superficial aspect of our individuality. What is essential is that our very imagination ought to be purified. Let us practise introspection, the art of looking within ourselves. Such an exercise would demand long continued effort on our part; but it is only by this path, riddled with difficulties, that we will be able to progress along the right direction.

If our imagination should continue to be sullied by impure thoughts, to that extent it would become impossible for us to know the real Self. However arduous this task might be, we are bound to arrive at the goal, and we would lighten the weary weight of thought, if only we would follow the appropriate method. Let us then conduct our investigation in the following manner: "This particular imagination that arises in my spirit, whence does it come, and how does it arise in me?"

Once a mother had a quarrel with her son. Another lady who was her friend advised her and said, "Put down in writing all the charges that you bring against your

son." At the very moment of her attempting to set down what it was that was the cause of her grief, the mother knew her own mistake.

When the imagination works without restraint, there is the danger of our falling into false identification. Our spirit has not yet the strength of being able to isolate itself from what it perceives. It is not yet strong enough to play the role of the witness.

It is, however, this state of awareness that we ought to have as our aim. Let us then divest ourselves of this duality. Let us consider the manner in which we work. Let us not identify ourselves with the individual who plays our part; as for ourselves, let us exercise the right of the critic. We would then have an exact idea of things. It is essential that we should orient everything in conformity with the proper laws of perspective. It is only then that everything comes out in relief; but in order to maintain this attitude it is equally essential that we keep ourselves in the background of our perceptions. Let us not make the mistake of identifying the unchanging witness with those ephemeral thoughts, which, without affecting the witnessing consciousness, are continually projected upon it. We ought to identify ourselves with the screen that is permanent, and not with the moving picture that is projected. The advice given here is in rapprochement with the technique followed by Jung. This great psychoanalyst has come to the conclusion that

a patient will succeed in curing himself if only he were able to describe his inner states. Every time he makes an attempt, the illusion in which he lives begins to weaken, and knowledge comes into play. Gradually, the witnessing consciousness disengages itself; the sick soul knows what was wrong; he had merely identified himself by mistake with a being who is a total stranger to him. He, therefore, comes to the conclusion "that is not I."

It is only by applying a similar method that the neurotic person can regain his equilibrium of mind; and similarly the aspirant who follows a strict spiritual discipline can lift himself to a super-normal plane of consciousness.

Let us add that there are, among writers and artists, cases where their own creative work has given them a fence of conversion. Many of them have realized the universal aspect of life after they have given the last touch to a work of art. It is by means of the creative effort of art that they have delivered themselves from the secondary personality, which they find within them.

With the disappearance of the attachment to the body and with the realization of the supreme Self, to whatever object the mind is directed one experiences *samadhi*.

— *Drig drishya viveka*, verse 30

## CHAPTER VIII

# CONCLUSION

### *Integral Experience*

The Hindu spirit has found out a psychological method by means of which it becomes possible for one to plunge from the finite and the limited, the *alpa*, into the infinite, *bhuman*. Moreover, this ideal is attained by following the most salient traits of an individual, and by applying them in conformity with the predominant disposition of one's character. According to the diversities of individual traits it may be that one has an emotional disposition, another volitional, and a third a cognitive disposition. Whatever be the path that one follows, it is a question of gradual development. It is only when one has attained the infinite that one realizes Integral Experience, i.e. gains *anubhava*.

We will now consider the pattern in which such experience will be brought out on the three planes of feeling, willing and thinking.

Let us first of all consider the affective plane. Here the practice of devotion allows the *bhakta* to sublimate his feelings and sensibilities. He deposits them as an offering at the feet of the Lord, who assumes for him the aspect of a personal ideal, as his *ishta-devata*. By giving a free expression to one of the five principal sentiments, the aspirant breaks the bonds of the world of relative experience, which a human sentiment imposes upon him, and it is in this way that he arrives at his ideal of union with the divine.

Yoga does not try to explain the nature of this fusion. No great importance need be attached to the analysis of this sentiment of union where the devotee, according to the measure of his ardent desire, tastes the presence of the Lord. It may be that the devotee guards jealously the sentiment of the individual self; others there are who perceive the sentiment of identity with a difference, while it is possible for some others to attain absolute identity. What interpretation one gives depends upon the nature of the aspirant. Moreover, such interpretations belong only to that later stage when one comes down from the plane of experience and tries to describe in words what one has lived through and felt. But the devotee does not trouble himself with such problems. To him they are devoid of all interest. It is to the analytical philosopher that he leaves such problems.

Let us now turn to the volitional plane. If an aspirant seeks to attain integral experience upon the volitional plane, he would not fail to attain that same sense of plenitude by enlarging his horizon of awareness by a persistent effort of the will. At long last, the Cosmic Energy will awaken in him. In the fourth chapter we have already explained the manner of the ascent of the *kundalini*. This experience also leads to Yogic *samadhi*.

We have passed in review over the different solutions that might be offered or accepted concerning the problem of meditation according to Yoga-Vedanta. Whatever be the discipline that one follows, it has always but one aim, that of awakening one's *anubhava*, when one attains a direct and complete experience of the Divine which is in us. As long as we remain in ignorance, *maya* holds us prisoners. It is mystic experience that confers liberation upon us. In this way we go beyond the frontiers of the empirical world and attain our freedom, and thus consummate our union with the Lord.

The ego-consciousness is but a particularized centre that isolates us in the midst of manifestation. This consciousness of "I" is covered by five sheaths, which we call in Sanskrit by the name of *koshas*, and which lead us, step by step, from the gross to the subtle. To put them in the proper order, they are the physical sheath, the vital sheath, the mental sheath, the sheath of intellect and, finally, the sheath of bliss.

Our real personality lies in that static and unmoving centre which we tend to ignore, because we tend to identify ourselves, out of our error, with the one or the other of these five sheaths. In order to realize God as identical with the Self, the *Atman*, it is essential that the disintegration of our individuality should be carried to the very limit. It demands of us a grievous sacrifice. It becomes essential that we should make a sacrifice of the predominant aspect of our character. In fact each individual expresses himself as a particular character; and by virtue of our dispositions, every one tends to express oneself on one of these three planes — the emotional, the volitional, or the cognitive.

The high road of spiritual practice, and the path of perfection that a particular individual takes, depends upon the manner in which the individual tries to realize integral experience; but the law is the same for all the aspirants. Every one tends to give full expression to one's principal disposition. We attain the goal and we become aware of the union the very moment when our daily experience transcends the limits of the normal zone and rises to its very zenith. As long as we are confined to the realm of empirical experience, we are limited on all sides. To that extent, it is finite. Let us enlarge the horizon of our experience; let us make it as all-inclusive as possible. Everything that is individualistic would then vanish, and the individual self

would then make its return journey to the Universal Self.

If we should examine carefully our experience of the relative world, we would find that it rests entirely upon a gradation of pairs of opposites, *dvandvas*. By way of illustration, let us take the pair of opposites, joy and sorrow. We feel a sense of pain because the reflex action of body and mind record a particular sensation. In order that we might feel the sensation, it is essential that the experience of it should be within well defined limits. To that extent, it is partial and finite. If it should transgress that limit, the subject, the experiencer, totally disappears, and he becomes identified with the object of experience. The sense of pain is no longer there, because all the reflex actions that constitute the apparatus of individuality have broken down and there has been a cutting short or fainting of all consciousness so that it has become pure and homogeneous. The same will happen if joy also should attain the same intensity within us. When it is felt with the same keenness and the same violence, it would break the bounds of individuality. Unity is then realized.

The vital energy manifests itself but feebly, when it is led along the canals of *ida* and *pingala*. But it is possible to tame the instinct of self-preservation and to submit it to a scientific treatment. It would then cease to manifest itself on the external plane and would take a new

direction. It would take us up to the very source of cosmic energy. At that moment the aspirant transcends the bounds of human experience. The moment he steps out of all human limitations, the Divine Mother, whose presence it is that constitutes the Universe, would then reveal Herself in all the splendour of Her glory.

The third and final plane of cognition is the intellectual. At the cognitive level also the same phenomenon repeats itself. At this level, it is by the dispersion of the One that it reappears simultaneously as the subject or the knower, the object or the known, and as knowledge, which forms the connection between them. But this dispersion is nothing but *maya* itself.

One cannot claim to have had the integral experience of the *Atman* so long as one's consciousness is attached to name and form, *nama-rupa*, and so long as it assumes a tripartite nature, *triputi*. It would then seem to have split into three constituent elements. They are respectively known as *jnata* or the knower, *jnana* or knowledge, and *jneya* or the object of knowledge.

Now, there is a special technique or discipline which allows knowledge to be detached from its three points of application and restored to its primitive unity. This method consists of sharpening the critical sense and refining the *buddhi*. But the *sadhaka* who desires to follow this method should have, at the outset, the following qualifications. He should have the faculty of being able

to discriminate between the real and the unreal. He should renounce totally all desire for enjoyment, here and hereafter. He must be endowed with all the moral virtues. And, finally, he must have an intense desire for liberation.

It is by following this path that the aspirant attains the realization of the Self, attains *Atmajnana*. In this way he is united with the non-manifest. It is the metaphysical experience of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, and rare indeed are the aspirants who are capable of following this method with success.

When we use the term "meditation" it should be understood to designate the experimental method of *Raja-yoga*, which is the characteristic of the second method. It is of live interest to us, both from the psychological point of view and from the physiological point of view. The reason for it is that the *sadhaka* operates under conditions that are identical with those of a scientist working in his laboratory.

If we should hold fast to this method as the very basis of all our efforts and, if in addition to it, we bring to bear upon it, at least partly, the first aspect of disciplining our sensibility and sublimating our emotions, and also partly the third aspect of developing our reason and, consequently, the ability to scrutinize our intentions and judge all our actions, there is nothing to prevent us from establishing a harmony between the different parts of our individuality.

It is only on this condition that we will make, from the spiritual point of view, any perceptible progress. It is essential that our development should not be one-sided. If we should develop only one aspect of ourselves, the ego-consciousness will not fail to seek refuge elsewhere. In order that we might eradicate it from us, all in all, our attack should be carried on simultaneously on all the three phases of our nature. If we should set to work in any other manner, we would run the risk of compromising the equilibrium of our psychic organism.

The path that we have to follow is "steep, slippery, and hard to traverse." Only a guide who is sure of the path can help us to arrive at the end of our pilgrimage. Let us not, however, give way to despair. Sri Krishna has proclaimed in the *Bhagavad Gita*, the charter of promises, which, out of His bounty, He has granted to all mankind: "Know for certain, O Kaunteya, that My devotees will never be lost."

Sri Krishna is the symbol of the spiritual principle; and this principle is universal. In whatever manner and under whatever form He may be adored, and in whatever language it may be that we express our prayers, we should always make an effort to draw closer to the Lord. This effort, if it should be sincere, would awaken His mercy, for the last resort, it is upon the grace of God that our deliverance depends.

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The mind is the only instrument which is at our disposal. It is our bounden duty that we seek, above all, to attain inner purity. Later on, it may be possible for us to achieve perfection; but it is necessary, as a first step to it, that the world should cease to hold out any attraction to us, so that we might use in an integral manner all the power of our spirit. It is only by means of the mind that we know the world around us, and it is therefore our duty to make the mind as perfect an instrument as possible. Whatever be the path that we might choose, the assiduous practice of meditation will furnish us with the means of obtaining the fullest control over the organism of the mind.

— The Author

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