

MEDITATION:

Hindu-Christian Meeting Point



by

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PREFACE

Guests who come to Kurisumala, even those who come for a few hours, without staying for a retreat, often ask us about the practice of meditation. Throughout our day here, after each time of common prayer chanted by the monks in our church, there are some minutes of silence. Monks and guests are sitting cross-legged on the floor, in silence, their faces towards the curtain which veils the sanctuary. At early morning or in the evening, the church is in darkness, except for a few oil lamps. The only sounds are a bird outside, a cough, or some farm machinery in the distance. Yet this is just one of the times of our prayer of meditation. At other times, including during our work, peeling onions, digging, sweeping, checking the accounts, we have developed ways of meditation prayer.

At those times, nothing is happening and everything is happening. But where to start? Guests may find it useful to take away some notes of guidance from our first Abbot and Father, Francis Acharya, who passed to the other shore on 31 January 2002, aged 90 and after more than forty years of leading this Ashram. He is buried here and his spirit is still with us. He gives us the wisdom of the ages and the sages in his own direct words.

These notes were first published in the *Southern Chronicle* in 1982, in three parts in successive monthly issues. Since then, they have been available only to friends in photocopies. Now they have been edited and printed for the first time. We are pleased to share this gift of our other Father with our friends, past, present and to come. And we would always be grateful to have any suggestions or comments for a further re-print.

For those who would like to know more about Fr Francis, we hope to publish soon a short history of his life written by one of our monks in both Malayalam and English.

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December 2004

Editor's Note

In January 2000, when my wife and I had the privilege of staying at Kurisumala for a few days, Fr Francis generously gave us some of his time to talk privately about his life, work and writings. We spoke mostly in his native Belgian French. At the end of the conversation, he told me of his intention to publish his daily reader of the *Lives and Sayings of Saints and Sages of Asia*. He then asked me if I would be willing to check the text because, he said, his mother tongue was not English and he asked me to edit it where necessary.

I have been able to take up the welcome task of gathering and editing some of his writings only during the last year. This is linked to my doctoral studies with Vidyajyoti College, Delhi on the spirituality of Kurisumala, which is one of the miracle opportunities I have been given since taking early retirement from my job in London.

I am grateful to Mr and Mrs Mohan George of Rose DTP in Bangalore, for their so careful text scanning onto their computer. And I thank Fr Abbot Yesudas and all his brother monks for the joy of working here, and my becoming a kind of brother too.

Naturally, I have felt it my sacred duty to leave the text as near as possible as it was handed to me. I have made some very slight changes, only if the meaning was not clear. Occasionally, I have broken up a sentence or two when it was so long that I lost the thread of what it was saying. Sanskrit terms have been very kindly checked by Fr Sebastian Painadath SJ of the Sameeksha Centre for Indian Spirituality, Kaladi, Kerala in case they had got distorted in the scanning.

It would be most helpful if readers could send any suggestions for a future re-print to Kurisumala. Meanwhile, I raise a few questions in the Appendix.

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CHAPTER 1

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Humanity looks to the various religions for answers to the riddles of human existence, the ultimate questions. What is humanity? What is the meaning and purpose of human life? What is the cause of suffering and what purpose does it serve? Where and how can genuine peace be found? What follows death?

Such questions have been raised from ancient times. They are underlying the 75, or so, books of the Bible, and very specially the Books of Wisdom, many of the Psalms, and the Book of Revelation.

Such questions are also formulated quite independently, yet in almost identical terms, in writings as far distant in time and culture as the *Upanishads* of ancient India. Quotations show the similarity¹. The first is from the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

Though humankind today is struck with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the meaning of individual and collective striving and about the ultimate destiny of reality and humanity. ^a Therefore, this Synod proclaims the highest destiny of humanity and champions the godlike seed which has been sown in human beings.

The answers proposed by the Council are sought in the teachings of the Gospel, in the saving resources of the Churches under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and of Christ. They point boldly to the beyond.

Both the question posed and the answer proposed by the *Upanishads* point to the same beyond, but hold forth the way of meditation:

What is the source of this universe? What is *Brahman*? From where do we come? By what power do we live? Where do we find rest? Who rules over our joys and sorrows?

By the yoga of contemplation and meditation, the wise see the power of God hidden in his own creation.

In other words, answers to these questions evade the logical process of fact finding, analysis, and conclusions. They belong to another realm, to a deeper level of consciousness, that of intuition and of faith.

This helps to explain why the Council has given an altogether new orientation to the living faiths of the world. The Council calls for dialogue, and dialogue requires a mutual appreciation from the part of the dialogue partners. It recognizes the positive values and the spiritual treasures of the great religions. At first, in its *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church with other Religions* (1965), it mentions, as in our opening paragraph, a number of features common to all. Then it points to the particular charism of each religion. Religions awaken usually:

...with a perception of the hidden power which hovers over the course of things and the events of human life, a recognition of a Supreme Divinity and Supreme Father, too. Such a perception and recognition instil the lives of the people with a profound religious sense. ^a In Hinduism, human beings contemplate the Divine mystery... They seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetic practices, deep meditation and a loving, trusting surrender to God... Buddhism teaches a path by which humanity, in a devout and confident spirit, can reach a state of inner freedom, or attain supreme enlightenment.

The *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* (1965) holds the same views. It describes the mission of the Church as:

^amaking herself fully present to all human beings and peoples, ^a[and requiring] ...sincere and patient dialogue... a search for whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations as a secret presence of God... Religious institutes especially should carefully consider how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sown by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel.

One cannot be but impressed by this stocktaking of the values of the living faiths of the world. They all belong to the inner world, that is the sphere of spiritual realization to which we have access through meditation. With a view to entering into the deeper dialogue we intend therefore to ask ourselves a few questions. What is meditation? What is its real nature? Can we learn meditation and if so, how? How does meditation affect the life of meditators? Where does it lead them to? We

can ponder over these and propose brief answers in the light of both the experience of India and the biblical tradition.

THE NATURE OF MEDITATION

Meditation cannot be defined except by appealing to the experience of meditation. As the saying goes: The person who speaks of it, does not know. The person who knows does not speak. Nevertheless the nature of meditation can be conveyed in a number of ways. Meditation implies that we recognise two levels of consciousness, reflecting eventually two levels of existence. The lower level is the course of this world, the world of sense perception and rational knowledge, when this whole universe is perceived in the light of day-to-day existence, the world about which our communication media bring us information everyday.

In the Indian tradition this world is known as *maya*. Its knowledge does not lead beyond it but rather brings about bondage to it even in spite of much learning and proficiency. Such learning is held in little esteem. It is described as Subtle arguments.... mere weariness of the tongue. In contrast with this the higher knowledge, *vijnàna*, makes one adept, *sàkshàtkara*, as one who sees with their own eyes. In the Bible this world here below belongs to the sphere of the flesh either weak or sinful and opposed to the spirit:

It is the Spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit, they are life.²

To awaken to this awareness, to enter into this new sphere of existence, is to experience a decisive awakening, aptly called a new birth, through an act of faith which can be described also as an awareness of the real, of the ultimate, of the eternal: He who believes has eternal life.³ Such an awareness can be nurtured by an intense longing for it:

From the unreal lead me to the real. From darkness lead me to light. From death lead me to immortality.⁴

These three famous verses which are found in what is considered the most ancient *Upanishad* have been aptly described as a prayer for being initiated into the mystery of the Absolute, for being shown the path to *Brahman*, that is, to Divinity, to a sharing in the Divine

Nature.

In this light, meditation becomes central to human life. It is not simply a function among other functions. No other action expresses more revealingly our identity as when we realise the reciprocity that exists between God and us. The apprehension of the real which we obtain in meditation is the articulation of our existential quest. It effects a liberation from the ambiguities of life to the unambiguous realm of our ultimate destiny. It is an opening up to the salvific and healing power of the Holy Spirit. Though we have a potential infinity within ourselves, we experience our incapability at prayer. We have to transcend our finitude by being seized by the Holy Spirit, by the Absolute. The God to whom we pray is God as spirit, and the spirit who prays in us and through us.

In its full amplitude, meditation must be considered as a very creative approach to life and to external reality, even to the world of facts and events. It is indeed an appreciation through which whatever is happening outside or affecting the inner self is met in a creative manner. As such it brings about a distinctive quality of life, well described in terms of an intensity and a fullness, and felt as such by the artist within each one of us and recognized with delight. Those who have gone the whole way with it speak of awakening, enlightenment, a face-to-face with the..., realization liberation, etc.

He (God) is known in the illumination of an awakening that opens the door to eternal life.⁵

In the language of the *Upanishads*, as the father of *Svetaketu* reveals to his son:

In meditation we hear what has hitherto not been heard, we learn what has hitherto not been learnt, we come to know what has hitherto not been known.⁶

The biblical tradition carries a similar experience described in almost identical terms by the apostle Paul, but going back to the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah:

We impart a hidden and secret wisdom of God... which God has revealed to us through the Spirit, as it is written, What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.⁷

In a very true sense, meditation can be conceived as an anticipation, a foretaste of our ultimate destiny. And while we are on the way to that goal, meditation quickens in us the real life. The ego and this world are left behind and we reach out to the life of the real self. It awakens us to the divine source and fulfilment of all life, for we are called:

To know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, that we may be filled with the fullness of God.⁸

The world into which meditation introduces us is beautifully described in *Chandogya Upanishad*. It is a higher world of being. The whole creation is seen as existing in meditation while thinking belongs to the sphere of being, associated as it is with speech, reflection and decision making. The dialogue between *Nārada* and *Sanatsumàra* brings out this excellence of meditation, for *Dhyàna* is greater than thinking since it leads to *jnànam* and *vijnànam*:

Is there anything greater than speech? Anything greater than mind? Anything greater than will? Anything greater than thinking. The earth rests as it were in meditation. The waters and the mountains, the sky and the heavens, all rest as it were in meditation. Gods and men rest as it were in meditation. Whenever man attains true greatness on earth, he has his reward, as it were according to his meditation. On the other hand common people are quarrelsome, indulge in slander and abuse.. Revere meditation.⁹

In order to move into meditation, thinking must take on a new quality. It must transcend conceptual knowledge, definitions and decision making. It must take on the nature of musing and move into intuitive apperception. The *Upanishads* speak of:

a brooding over the world, and out of the brooding wells up *Aum*.¹⁰

In the 1980 s, twenty years after the Second Vatican Council, *AUM* is still a controversial expression among Christian believers. This may remain so for some time, as it is a question of sensitivity. However, more and more testimonies are brought of very positive experiences. In Kerala, south India, where the Churches are known as deeply rooted in their traditions, *AUM* is used, perhaps a little lightly as the introductory sound of hymns. These hymns can now claim a general and popular acceptance as they are sung by children at school, for example *AUM*, *Jagat*

Ishwara...

However, *AUM* also finds its way into the sphere of more personal prayer, we dare say mystical prayer. Some have used it for quite some time in association with the Jesus prayer. Another testimony came to us recently from a priest of a Congregation. He is Indian, a scholar and theologian, who has been teaching in Rome for many years:

Long ago, before the inculturation wave hit India, while doing my theology in.... I devoted a week to the study of this mysterious symbol. I was so fascinated by it that for several weeks I stayed with it. It was one of the few periods of intensely satisfying personal prayer that stand out in my memory.

In the Bible the higher sphere of life is a matter of the spirit, *pneuma*, or of the heart, and Saint Paul enumerates these spheres of life in order of excellence. First, that of the *somatikoi*, those whose interest is in the things of the body or of this world. Secondly, that of the *psychikoi*, those whose interest is in the *psyche*, the principle of natural life. And, thirdly, the *pneumatikoi*, who put their interest in the things of the spirit or of the heart.¹¹

For the heart is considered as the seat of spiritual perception. In it are found the springs of true life. It is the heart that experiences the true joys and the sufferings which redeem, in hope and love. The love of God and men comes from a pure heart.

Love like brothers, in sincerity. Let your love for each other be real, for a pure heart.¹²

It is through the heart that a human being approaches God and through the heart that God reveals himself to human beings. The heart is also the organ of intuitive knowledge. God makes his light shine into our hearts and we know him through his light.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.¹³

And through knowing God and Jesus Christ our Lord...

We escape the corruption that is in the world and we become able to share in the Divine Nature.¹⁴

Meditation produces the spark which, when it touches the heart, fills it with light, the light of a new understanding of life resulting in conversion - conversion in the search for new values, with its accompaniments of

self control and freedom, peace and joy, patience and all goodness. We truly enjoy what is simply good, the life that the Spirit gives in the form of God's love poured into our hearts. Any perception, and awareness that quickens this life is true meditation, whichever way it comes to us. Indeed it comes in a thousand ways: especially the way of nature because..

...the creation is telling the glory of the Lord...¹⁵

and the events of daily life with its tensions and concerns, even its conflicts, but nonetheless its opportunities and joys. We read that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, thus treasured up in her heart the happenings of her life. The prophets' call to their ministry was received in meditation while their main task was to interpret for their people the deeper meaning of life, personal as well as social. The apostles urged the believers to do the same:

Be quick to listen.... Accept the word, the word that God plants in your hearts. In it is salvation.... Whoever ponders over the perfect law, the new law that sets man free, like the truth of God, looks into a mirror and retains the impression of what he has seen there. This man will be blessed by God in what he does.¹⁶

THE THREE 'BOOKS' OF MEDITATION

The Christian practice of meditation is much indebted to the fathers of monastic life. Many of them set their hearts on the quest towards unceasing prayer. They pointed to the three so-called Books which never fail to provide food for meditation: the Book of Creation, the Book of the Human Heart, and the Book of God's Word.

The Book of Creation is the whole universe with its order, with all its beauty and glory and mystery, seen as an *epiphany* (in Greek) or *darshan* of his invisible nature, his wisdom and his power. But it is also Creation that awaits, with eager longing and groaning, for God to be revealed and to reveal his divinity, especially in his children. Creation itself is to be set free from its enslavement to decay, so that it may come to share in the glorious freedom of God's children.

The Book of God's Word is divine revelation, as it has been received of old by seers, sages and prophets, and consigned in writing as the Sacred Scriptures, the source of wisdom which through faith leads to

salvation. God spoke in the past in diverse ways, through the prophets and sages of Israel, but also through those of the nations. Enosh, grandson of Adam by Seth, was the first to invoke the Lord by his name. Melchizedek, king of Salem known as priest of the Most High, offered the first Eucharistic prayer, calling God's blessing on Abraham the father of all believers. Through suffering Job was led to transcend the traditional religious morality of his time and to experience the mystery of God's transcendence in his own life. He speaks to God from his heart:

Then I knew only what others had told me, but now I have seen you with my own eyes.¹⁷

The Church's 1965 *Declaration on... Other Religions* (with which this essay began) acknowledges in them a divine revelation:

In Hinduism humanity contemplates the divine mysteries and expresses it through an unspent fruitfulness of myths and through searching philosophical enquiry. Hindus seek release from the anguish of our condition through ascetical practices or deep meditation or a loving, trusting flight toward God.

Thus the Church speaks of India as a nation that in the course of her long history has never ceased to seek God with a relentless desire, in deep meditation, in silence and in hymns of fervent devotion. Some of these, remarked the late Pope Paul VI during his historical visit to India - the first of a Pope - for the Eucharistic Congress of Bombay (Advent 1964), are filled with the same spirit of Advent, with a deep longing for God. He himself uttered such an ancient prayer written many centuries before Christ.

The Fathers of the Church who were the first to be confronted with the wisdom of the nations called such insights Rays of Light or Seeds of the Word. The Church holds that they were planted by God in ancient cultures and religions even previous to the Gospel. At the last Vatican Council when she opened herself to a new understanding of the great nations of the world, she asked all believers and especially those who live in contact with them to go in search of such seeds of the word. We should lay them bare and ponder over them in meditation and thereby reveal to the human family all the riches of our divine heritage and enrich

our own lives by assimilating their insights into our quest for God. Thus these riches are also part of a larger Book of God's Word.

The Book of the Human Heart reflects the two other books, for it is ultimately through the heart that we enter into communion or identity with others, that we become one with God. The heart is the seat of all inner activity. It is in the heart that we feel attuned to nature. The word of God must be received in the heart and can be understood and made to bear fruit only in the heart. In the Bible the heart rejoices, exults in the Lord. The heart is the seat of holy desires and of divine longing. Wisdom, discernment and knowledge are seated in the heart.

The process of cogitating at the deepest level takes place in the heart. There one meditates on the deep things of life. The heart is the seat of divine operations which transform our lives, liberating us from the bonds of slavery and raising us to divine freedom. God communicates himself to us when his love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. The hearts of the disciples are burning when, after his death, Jesus reveals himself to them on the way to Emmaus*. The spirit of wisdom and revelation and the knowledge of Christ Jesus enlighten the eyes of the heart. [*Luke 24:13-35]

Both traditions, Christian and Hindu, see the heart as the innermost spring of the human personality, of the inner self. It is the place of the experience of the self and as such it is directly open to God. God dwells in the heart, his light is seen in the cave, *guha* of the heart. The heart is the place of God, the point of contact with God. His presence in the heart is experienced as if the coming of rain from heaven. To heaven, His rain returns, after watering the very earth of our lives, and making it bear fruit, with crops which provide food for all whose hearts hunger and thirst.

If this is to happen, nature must be contemplated with the eyes of the heart and the word of God must be received in the heart. They who listen to the word and want to hear it must allow it to fall on good ground, the ground of the heart where God himself wants to plant it, so that it may bear fruits of salvation.

THE DYNAMIC OF MEDITATION: SOUND, WORD, SILENCE

The nature of meditation can be more deeply understood if we look into the dynamics of meditation, the force at work in it. This can be attempted by considering meditation at its origins. Meditation must be traced back to the earliest manifestations of humanity's higher consciousness. However, even if the nature of meditation is indeed to raise a person to a higher level of consciousness, the powers at work in meditation belong nevertheless to the common condition of all human beings.

Indeed the same powers are at work in the practice of all the human arts for which creativity is required. This is the case with literature (poetry and drama as well as novel writing), with painting and sculpture, with music and dance, even with science and the immense variety of handicrafts. Though these arts are cultivated and considerably perfected by training and exercise, real proficiency in them and achievement always requires a gift, a charism. How then can we gain some insight into the nature of the charism required for meditation? How can we learn the techniques to use in order to gain some proficiency in it?

SOUND

When meditation first appears, at its origins, it is associated with sound. In the Bible the Aramaic verb root for meditation is *hagah*.

This is a verb eminently poetic. Moreover, it is of onomatopoeic origin, being created from sounds observed in nature and especially the cooing of doves.¹⁸

This is the sound made by two birds interested in each other, aiming at attracting the other's interest or simply conveying happiness, well-being. It has of course no intellectual connotation. From imitating this sound continuously, we can gain a concentration of our whole being and consciousness.

In Arabic, which is very close to Aramaic, the word is now used for recitation in a low voice. In India and in the Islamic Orient, as well as Christian Orient, where this custom is preserved, the believer practises meditation while reading or reciting by heart the sacred text in a soft voice, muttering the words gently but earnestly. This

cooing of the sacred words often with repetition, helps concentration. It may be little concerned with their meaning, especially when devotion is intense. At that stage devotees rely more on sound, melody and rhythm. But it can also support their reflection, and this leads to the divine identification they seek. Thus through meditation animated by sound, devotees reach out to God and become one with him through devout concentration in which they are locked with God, in the heart, in their whole being.

In the *Upanishads* where early testimonies of meditation abound, meditation is associated with the primeval sound, *AUM*. *AUM* is what is first heard of God when he manifests himself out of the primordial silence. It is also the seminal sound which expresses our higher consciousness of the Real, or when we awake to the mystery of the Divine, to God-awareness. It must be sounded repetitively, as hunters use their arrows until they hit their target. The target of *AUM* is God-realization:

AUM is the bow. The arrow is the *Atman*. *Brahman* is the mark. By an undistracted mind is it to be penetrated. One should come to be in it, as the arrow in the mark... With the *AUM* as his firm bow the wise man, free from fear, attains the All-highest, tranquil, ageless, immortal...¹⁹

As the seminal sound of human languages, it contains as in a seed the secrets and mysteries of the universe. It is the symbolic expression of totality, of the all inclusive reality. The most sacred of all symbols for our Hindu brothers, a formula of praise and adoration, it is used for invocations, and for blessings at the commencement and termination of prayer, of meditation and of work. It is praised as a theophany in the form of a phoneme, the monarch of all sounds, the mother of vibrations and the key to eternal wisdom and support.

WORD

In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God.

Thus the Gospel according to the apostle John, echoing almost exactly a verse from the *Rig Veda*:

In the beginning was *Brahman* with whom was the word. And the word

was truly the supreme *Brahman*²⁰.

The word belongs to the sphere of signs. As such it manifests the Real. The word of God manifests him and thus makes him intelligible to humanity. The word of God enlightens. Yet at the same time, when we receive this knowledge, it comes subject to the limitations of the human mind. Therefore, the word has to lead meditators beyond themselves; even when the word recedes, its power is at work. The most important function of the word is an awakening as experienced by our seers and prophets whose faith in God, or their response to his call, was awakened by the coming of his word. The word comes to them with power. It is given to them as food:

The Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth and said: Behold, I have put my words in your mouth .²¹

Even when it is given to the prophet on a scroll it is to be eaten.²² On other occasions it purifies the prophet as in the case of Isaiah's vision of the Thrice Holy in the temple. The apostles were able to build a whole economy of salvation centered on the word. They tell how God brings us forth by his word of truth. Consequently we are born of the word, of the living and enduring word of God.²⁴ The word of God is alive and active. As the Spirit joins with our spirit to make us aware of our divine sonship, the word of God pierces through the place where the soul - the principle of natural life - joins with our spirit, which is the locus of our encounter with God, and lays our hearts bare before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.²⁵

Sound and word are intimately associated in meditation. Sound may be the first awakener, as it was with Teresa of Avila (1515-1582 CE, in Spain), known as a great doctor of the mystical life even beyond the confines of Christianity. She tells how when prompted to meditate she would walk down to a little rivulet in the garden and listen to the sound of the flowing waters. The *Upanishad* already advises the *yogi* to look for

a quiet retreat where the sound of the waters and the beauty of nature help thought and contemplation.²⁶

The word brings the sound to life. It is a revelation of the sound. In the *Upanishads*, the most sacred syllable and the seed-word, *AUM*, is

used as the expression of the creative and revealing word.

SILENCE

Yet the word belongs to the sphere of conceptual knowledge. It has to be transcended in the encounter with God. Once its function of revelation is fulfilled, the word has to recede and leave the meditator in silence.

There are two ways of meditating on *Brahman*, in sound and in silence. By sound we go to silence. The sound of *Brahman* is *AUM*. Once deeply absorbed in *Brahman* as sound, the meditator goes on to *Brahman* beyond.²⁷

The power of silence in meditation, as on the path of realisation as a whole, is a constant theme of the *Upanishads* NŷTI! NŷTI! (Not so, not so).²⁸ The *rishis* early experience of *Brahman* or the Absolute is that it can be found only beyond what the mind can conceive, beyond whatever can be said. In the *Upanishad*, when one of the two brothers who had returned home after completing their years of *gurukul* speaks abundantly of all that he has learnt, his father remains pensive. But when the other son reveals that he can share the fruits he has gathered only by remaining in silence, the father rejoices and encourages him on this path.

All along its quest for the higher life and for God, the East and India very specially, has been drawn to silence. An ancient adage found in all the great religions says:

Those who know do not speak of it. Those who speak of it do not know.

And the *Upanishad* says:

He comes to the thought of those who know him beyond thought, not to those who think that he can be attained by thought.²⁹

Hence the concern for devising methods for entering into silence and resting in it. These are pursued at various levels related to the surroundings, to the body, to the mind, to the whole being. The *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali can be described as a code of inner silence, as exemplified in the second *Sutra*:

yoga is the arresting of the fluctuations of the mind.

The same quest for silence is found at the origins of the monastic movement:

Once a man has come to know him he becomes a *muni*. Monks leave their homes, desiring Him alone.³⁰

The word *muni* designates the hermit or the mendicant monk dedicated to the quest of the Absolute in silence. The word occurs already in the *Rig-Veda*, where the way of the lonely hermit who has withdrawn from the villages to the forest or taken the life of a wandering pilgrim is extolled. Its Sanskrit verb-root, *man*, means to think, to meditate.

In Christianity, Antony of Egypt who is venerated in East and West as the Father of all monks, held a similar view. He was a great solitary who could preserve his solitude while being the light and the model of thousands of disciples. And he is best known for his practice of unceasing prayer.

In the initial stages of his withdrawal into the desert Antony had been made to learn that this could not be achieved by sheer mental concentration. It was rather an inner disposition. This could even be improved with manual labour. Inner prayer he called perfect prayer, beyond common consciousness and beyond words. He was heard saying:

That is not a perfect prayer wherein a monk is aware of himself and understands the words which he prays.³¹

Of course, the Bible is essentially the revelation of God, the revelation of the personal God, One in Three. And it witnesses essentially to a religion of the word where God makes Himself known in his commandments and ultimately in the person of his Son, the Eternal word of God. However, two reasons lead the believer into inner silence.

The Bible conveys a deep sense of God as mystery. This is recalled by God Himself and experienced by the believer. An example is when Moses was unexpectedly confronted with Yahweh at the burning bush. Out of sheer necessity for the fulfillment of the mission just entrusted to him, Moses enquires about His name. The only answer he receives is:

I am what I am.³²

This can mean only that man can never find a worthy or adequate name for God. God is transcendent. Yes, the God of the Bible does reveal Himself in word and deed as the All Compassionate, the All Merciful, and He is Love. Nevertheless He remains the wholly Other - hence the Latin expression *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans* [Mystery

tremendous and fascinating or perhaps awe-inspiring and utterly captivating , Ed]. As the prophet Isaiah proclaims:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of armies
The whole earth is full of his glory.
The foundations of the threshold shook at the voice...
and the temple was filled with smoke...
Seek the Lord while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near....
Our God who is gracious, rich in forgiving.
The Lord himself says:
My thoughts are not your thoughts.
My ways not your ways, says the Lord.
As the heavens are higher than the earth
so are my ways higher than your ways,
my thoughts above your thoughts .³³

At the end of a long discursive meditation, made more discursive by the opinions of his friends , Job experiences this mystery and is led into silence:

I know now that you are all powerful:
what you conceive you can perform.
I am the man who obscured your designs
with my empty-headed words.
I have been holding on matters I cannot understand,
on marvels beyond me and my knowledge...
I knew them only by hearsay
but now I have seen you with my own eyes.³⁴

The second reason for the Bible's openness to prayer of negation (or apophatic prayer, as it is known) is that God's self-revelation to humanity demands self-transcendence from the believer. Although we are human beings fashioned from the dust of the earth, we are called to share in God's life, in his divine nature. This can be done only if we commit ourselves to go beyond our own horizons and enter the world of faith, through a proper rebirth.

The new life we thus obtain brings us into active intercourse with the living God. The earthly being which we are by birth becomes a heavenly being, spiritual, moved by the Holy Spirit given to us at our new birth. Thus the community of believers, those who are born anew of water and the Spirit, comes to be known as the fullness of God, while that community has yet to grow until God is all in all.

Hence the Hebrew psalmists and prophets as well as the apostles,

especially those among them who were seers, bear witness that silence alone is the true praise appropriate to the Ineffable One:

The Lord is in his holy temple - the temple of his creation - let the earth keep silence before Him.³⁵

And in the climax of the heavenly liturgy:

When the Lamb opened the seventh scroll, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.³⁶



NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. The two texts we have chosen are : *Svevasvatara Upanishad* i.1 and the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, no 4 of Vatican Council II.
2. Jn 6:61 and 3:9
3. Jn 6:47
4. *Brahadaranyaka Upanishad*, i. 3.28
5. *Kena Upanishad*, ii.4
6. *Chandogya Upanishad*, vi. 1 3
7. 1 Cor 2:6-9
8. Eph 3:16
9. *Chand. Up* vii. 6,1
10. *Chand. Up.* ii.23.3
11. 1 Cor 2:10-14
12. 1 Tim 5:1-5; 1 Pet 1:22
13. Mt. 5:8
14. 2 Pet 1:2-3
15. Ps 18:1
16. Jam 1:19-25
17. Job 42:5
18. Fr. K. Luke. O.F.M. Cap., Letter to the author, Jan 20, 1981
19. *Mundaka Upanishad*, ii. 2,4; *Prasna Upanishad*, V.7; Abhishiktananda, *Prayer*, ISPCK, Delhi, 1967, p.59
20. Swami Prabhavananda & Christopher Isherwood *How to know God: The Yoga Aphorism of Patanjali* Signet Books, New York, p.39
21. Jer 1:9
22. Ezek 3:8-33; Rev 10:8-10
23. Is 6
24. 1 Pet 1:23
25. Heb 4:12-13
26. *Svetasvatara Upanishad* ii. 10
27. *Maitri Upanishad*., vi. 22
28. *Brh. Up.*, ii. 3,8
29. *Kena Up.*, ii. 22
30. *Brh. Up.*, iv, 4,22
31. Saint John Cassian, *Conferences*, ix. 31
32. Ex 3:14
33. Is 6:3; 55:4-9
34. Job 42:2-5
35. Hab 2:20
36. Rev 8:1

CHAPTER 2

THE THREE PATHWAYS OF MEDITATION

CHAPTER 2

THE THREE PATHWAYS OF MEDITATION - *Yòga, Upàsana, Nàmajapa*

Up to now this essay on Meditation as a sphere of Hindu - Christian Meeting Point, has led us to ponder first on the nature of meditation. While it is unknowable and ineffable, it can nevertheless be an experience of awakening, of enlightenment. The three as if books of meditation: the Book of Creation, the Book of the Word of God and the Book of the Heart have been described as the ever available springs of meditation. The dynamics of meditation have given us an insight into the powers at work in meditation: sound, word and silence. Our next section deals with the traditional approaches to meditation, its pathways.

YOGA

The word *yoga* is derived from the root which refers to the act of yoking. Like the Aramaic word *hagah* it transfers to the realm of man's spiritual behaviour an action of daily life. The root *yuj* has given the word yoke in English. The range of meaning in *yoga* extends from harnessing (or concentration) to joining (or union). The harnessing stands for the five lower limbs of the *ashtànga yòga* of Patanjali, up to *pratyàhàra*, and the joining for the upper three strands: *dhàrana*, *dhyàna* and *samàdhi*. In the *Upanishads* where *yoga* is already firmly structured, it is described with the allegory of the chariot. The chariot with its very sensitive horses represents the psycho-physiological vehicle in which the human person rises on the paths of life. We have it in *Katha Upanishad*, Chapter 3:

Know that the self is the rider of the chariot
and the boy the chariot itself.
Know the spirit as the charioteer,
and the mind as the reins.

The senses, say the wise, are the horses
and the roads they travel are the paths of desires.
When the self is integrated with spirit, mind and senses,
he is called, One-who-knows-what-is-joy,

He who lacks discrimination, *viveka*,
whose mind is uncontrolled *ayukta*
is like a bad driver with wild horses.
he remains immersed in mundane life.

He who has right understanding
and for reins a controlled mind.
he it is that reaches the end of the journey
the tranquil Self, the spirit that holds all things together.

Svètasvatara Upanishad Ch. 2, describes in a refined manner the technique of *yoga* and puts it forward as an effective way for human beings in pursuit of fulfillment. It is *Brahman's* own raft to cross over the ocean of life:

With upright body, head and neck and chest in line, with senses and the mind withdrawn into the heart, let the wise cross over on *Brahman's* raft, cross over all the rivers of this life so fraught with peril. Breathing slowly and deeply, with movements well controlled, let them be free from distraction and hold the mind in check, for the chariot of the mind is drawn by wild horses, and wild horses have to be tamed. Let them find a quiet place for the practice of *yoga*, sheltered from the wind, level and clean, free from rubbish and smouldering fires and all ugliness, where the sound of waters and the beauty of the place help concentration and brighten contemplation.

The first fruits of *yoga* are: health, little waste matter, a fair complexion, lightness of the body, a pleasant scent, a harmonious voice and freedom from greedy desires.

Even as a mirror of gold covered by dust, when cleansed, will shine again in full brightness, so too will we even in this body

Once it has seen the truth of the Self, *Atman*, we are one with him, we attain the goal, liberated from sorrow.

Then our soul becomes a lamp by which we find the God of truth.

Then we see God, the pure-holy the unborn, everlasting.

And when we see God we are free from bondage, free from all fetters.

To Patanjali - probably some time before Christ - goes back the codification of *yoga* in the *Yoga Sutras*. This is not a handbook of *hatha yoga*, the most popular form of *yoga* today, consisting in postures and breathing control. The *Yoga Sutras* have only a few lines on *àsana* and *prànàyàma*. They deal at length with meditation, and offer a most comprehensive exposition on the subject, one that has penetrated deeply into the core of all the religious and spiritual movements which India has witnessed in the course of its history. Though experienced first in India, *yoga* like AUM has a universal dimension and has been assimilated by all the eastern religions.

The *yoga* body of Patanjali has grown into eight limbs: *Yama* and *Niyama*: restraints or controls and observances and practices

°sana and *Prànàyàma*: bodily posture and breath control

Pratyàhàra: withdrawal of the senses from their usual objects

Dhàrana: Concentration

Dhyàna: contemplative meditation

Samàdhi: union or merging (divine communion to use a Christian thought-pattern)

The restraints, *yama*, are five:

Ahimsa: non-violence

Satyàgraha: the adherence to and love of the truth

Astèya: Non-appropriation, freedom from coveting

Brahmacharya: temperance or chastity, continence

Aparigraha: restraint from acceptance of gifts

The observances are also five:

Saucham: cleanliness

Santòsha: contentment, even-mindedness

Tapas: austerity in life

Swàdhyàya: the study of the sacred scriptures

swara pranidhàna: the love of God in utter devotion to the Lord

While *yama* and *niyama* stand for the ethical foundation of *yoga*, *asana* and *prànàyàma* constitute the physiological aspect. They refer to body demeanour as conducive to meditation. *°sana*, the posture, should

be both firm and relaxed so that it may be maintained for a considerable length of time without disturbing the concentration of the mind and rather helping it. *Prànàyàma*, by regulating the breathing which is so sensitively connected with all inner emotions, contributes perhaps even more than posture to ensure the inner stillness truly vital for meditation.

With *pratyàhàra*, the fifth limb, we reach the strictly psychological sphere of yoga. *Pratyàhàra* is the bridge that allows one to cross over the stream or torrent of *vrìttis*, that is the ongoing movie film of the mind, into the firm land of meditation. By closing the eyes, the usual objects of the senses are removed. This helps to liberate the mind and to bring it to one point: *èkàgrata*, one-pointedness.

The sixth limb is *dhàrana*. It consists in holding the mind within one centre of spiritual consciousness, commonly by fixing it on a peg, such as a light, picture, sound or even a word.

The seventh limb is *dhyànam*. It is defined by Patanjali as the unbroken flow of consciousness, an inner movement towards the object of concentration.

The eighth limb, *Samàdhi*, is a state of meditation in which the harnessing of the earlier stages bears fruit in unbroken union, in identification with the object of meditation. This is a true merging, often called absorption, because the meditator who seeks oneness has become wholly absorbed within the object.

Turning finally to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the jewel of Indian spirituality, we are offered a *yoga* more humanised, more within the reach of the common seeker than that of Patanjali. In the *Gita* the central mysteries of religion, the tremendous facts of divine life shared by the believer, are *yoga*. This *yoga* is the realization of God through worship and entire submission to his will, with active participation in the furtherance of the cosmic plan.

The whole is a monument to the *yoga* of faith, both faith and love, but also faith and work, in *nishkàma karma*, selfless service. Its immortal value may be seen in the fact that while the author, the *Gitàkàra*, proposes to the devotee a very refined and articulated art of meditation, this is not made a condition of salvation to achieve an art of such high quality. Salvation is ultimately the fruit of faith and love:

Joy supreme comes to the *yogi* whose heart is still, whose passions are at peace, who is pure from sin, who is one with *Brahman*, with God...

He sees himself in the heart of all beings in his heart...

And when he sees me in all
and he sees all in me,
then I never leave him
and he never leaves me.

He who in this oneness of love,
loves me in whatever he sees,
wherever this man may live,
in truth this man lives in me.

And he is the greatest *yogi*, he whose vision is everyone, when the
pleasure
and pain of others
is his own pleasure and pain....

And the greatest of all *yogis* is
he who with all his soul
has faith, and he who with all his soul loves me.³⁷

Yoga, in its codification as well as in its more spontaneous pursuits, is undoubtedly the most comprehensive and the most articulate approach to meditation. It is indeed the Kingly Way, *Raja Yoga*. While it has lent itself to a variety of practices of meditation, like *Bhakti Yoga*, *Mantra Yoga* and so forth, the core of its teaching is rightly considered as the straight and narrow path to realisation, and so salvation. The main thrust of its practice is concentration on the self through overcoming all inner distracting movements.

As such it has no proper counterpart in Christianity. Yet its goal, *samàdhi*, union or merging with God, belongs also to the Christian spiritual heritage. It has been experienced all along the centuries by great seers, prophets and sages. It is taught by Jesus and his disciples as the mutual indwelling of God and man, the oneness with the Father, the life-communion - the vine and its branches, according to Saint John, and the oneness in the body of Christ, according to Saint Paul.

Great witnesses of this mystical tradition in the early Churches are Ignatius of Antioch and Origen of Alexandria. The *Philokàlia* preserves

such names as Antony of Egypt, Mark the Ascetic, Abba Evagrius, Ephrem the Syrian, Isaac of Niniveh, John Climacus of Sinai, not to speak of the Cappadocians: Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen. Later towering personalities are Maximus the Confessor, Simeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas and Gregory of Sinai in the 15th century.

In the West the great names are Augustine of Hippo in north Africa, Gregory the Great in Rome and Bernard of Clairvaux who initiated the mystical movement of the 12th century CE, carried to the four corners of Europe by the Cistercians and the Carthusian monks. After them we have Francis of Assisi in Italy with the Franciscans, the *Imitation of Christ* and the writings of Jan van Ruysbroek in Flanders, the mystics of the Rhineland, Eckhart and his school, so close to the *Advaita Vēdānta* of Sankaracharya in India, then the English masters with the *Cloud of Unknowing*. This stream culminates in the Spanish school of Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, which attracts our Hindu brothers and sisters as much as - even sometimes more - than ourselves.

UPANISHADIC MEDITATION AND THE LADDER OF CONTEMPLATION

Both spiritual traditions, Hindu and Christian, have discovered in the early stage of their development a path along which spiritual attainment, the ascent to truth, is pursued along similar stages of a listening to or a hearing of the word. This is called in Christianity *Lectio Divina*, divine reading or the Ladder of Contemplation, and in *Upanishadic* meditation - or in a broad sense *Upāsana* - in the Hindu tradition.

The reading is called divine because it aims at bringing communion with God. For this, monks use a ladder of four rungs: Reading, Meditation, Petition and Contemplation. Reading is the intent and devout listening to the word. Meditation is the studious searching of the mind to find its meaning by the guidance of reason. Prayer is a petition for light and insight, made to God from the heart, to reach out beyond reason. Finally, Contemplation is the awakening of the heart to the Divine Presence and the seeker becomes one in spirit with God.

Thus, a similar path for the ascent of the mind to God has been discovered quite independently by the two traditions, the *rishis* in the

Himalayas and the Christian monks, several centuries later, in West Asia and Africa. This suggests that we have here a fundamental experience of humankind in her quest of God. The language root of *upāsana* is, of course, the same as that of *upanishad*. It means literally to come and sit near, as an expression of discipleship, with reverence and faith, and a desire to be enlightened. When applied to meditation it can be described as a sitting near the Lord, in reverence and adoration, to recollect oneself in relation to the Real or in order to have access to *Brahman* or merge in him.

Upanishadic meditation consists of four stages. Like the Ladder of Contemplation it is a four storeyed ascent to the Divine; *śravaṇa*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, *darsana*. The fourth stage, *darsana*, is not usually included in the list, but it is the universally acknowledged goal of the three, the goal of all meditation, the attainment of all *upanishadic* searches. It is given different names. We have chosen *darsana* because it is equivalent to the Christian word, contemplation. But it should be understood in its full and strong sense of vision, experience of the Real. Adi Sankara speaks of *samyagdarsanam*, intuitive experience. Other adequate words would be *anubhava*, or better still *paramānubhava* or *śākshātkāra*, making one see with one's own eyes.

Śravaṇa means listening or rather hearing. It is the reading or hearing the knowledge that vanquishes sorrows through the ear of the heart. Such knowledge in its highest form is called *śruti*; it is revealed knowledge. *Manana* refers to the *manas*, the mind. It is its natural activity, a searching for understanding, a process of assimilation through deliberation or reflection. It is the most active stage of meditation. It is sometimes called *svādhyāya*, that is the personal study for penetration into the meaning of the Scriptures or events or realities.

Nididhyāsana is a more profound meditation. It is *manana* at a deeper level. It is defined by Patanjali as the stream of consciousness of the one Reality, which we would call initial contemplation. *Darsana* is purely intuitive. It is the vision or the coming into the presence, the highest knowing or essential knowledge.

THE FRUITS OF UPANISHADIC KNOWLEDGE :

Like contemplation *upāsana* aims at creating higher mental attitudes, a refined consciousness leading to spiritual attainment, but affecting also daily life, social contacts as well as religious preoccupations. Its highest goal is the highest knowledge, the realization of unity or oneness. But it has distinctive and rich connotations. First, that of a secret thing not to be talked of, argued about or exposed, merely to satisfy one's urge to show off.

Further, *upāsana* is a mental approach which looks at things not for the sake of analysis, but in the light of their relation to the ultimate reality, the light of unity. This also is a common experience of God seekers:

A monk is one who feels himself one with all men, who sees himself in every man (Evagrius Ponticus, d.399, Egypt)

Thus *upāsana* brings about an inner transformation. The personality is elevated by an inner growth and expansion. Realization through purification and refinement of mind culminates in identification, in oneness. The light of contemplation expands the consciousness in God, as (Pope) Gregory the Great wrote of St Benedict of Norcia (6th century CE).

Such contemplative knowledge is often experienced as a fire or warmth in the chest, or as an inner light shining in the soul, which becomes thus the locus of God, the place of the vision of God who makes his presence known to the believer. This establishes him in his full self-realization, as the image of God. The Indian tradition speaks of the experience of pure light by concentration of the lotus of the heart, in the encounter of the self.

DIVERGENCE

There remains, it is true, a real divergence between the Christian and *Upanishadic* ascents: the third step of the Christian Ladder, prayer in the form of petition, and the *Upanishadic* third storey, *nididhyāsana*, which signifies a deeper penetration into the object. But even such a divergence does not affect the substantial affinity of the two traditions; it brings out their distinctive properties.

In the Christian tradition with its all-pervading experience of grace, the passage from discursive thinking to the intuitive perception in the

state of Contemplation is always to be related to grace. And the normal course for the devotee to obtain grace is to ask or pray for it, a prayer of petition. As the author of the Ladder explains:

Reading is the foundation that goes before and leads on to Meditation. Meditation seeks activity and with a deep thinking which is like digging deeply; it finds and shows the treasure. But since the meditator may not obtain it by one's own efforts, one turns to prayer that is mighty and strong. Such prayer rises up to God with all its strength. Ask and you will be given. Knock and the door will be opened, and prayer will obtain what it seeks. Thus comes contemplation which rewards the labour of the other three steps, through sweet heavenly dew that the soul drinks in delight and joy.³⁸

In the *Upanishads*, grace is not unknown, especially in the later ones. However, the core of the message is self-realization. And this of course is best related to a deeper penetration. And that is to reach into the cave of the heart through the intuitive thinking of *nididhyāsana*.

THE PRAYER OF THE NAME: NĀMAJAPA

Upanishadic meditation or *upāsana* - to come and sit near - evokes a homely and refreshing experience, like that of disciples sitting at the feet of the master under a shady tree to receive guidance from him. External circumstances, or our inner dispositions, may not always be conducive to *upanishadic* meditation with its arduous ascent of the mind towards a higher consciousness.

Upāsana comes to the aid of the seeker who fails to attain the one-pointedness and concentration of the strict yoga of Patanjali. The Prayer of the Name, *nāmajapa*, with its deeply affective quality - the prayer of the heart so dear to all devotees or *bhaktas* - comes to our help when the spiritual ascent along the path of *śravana*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana* proves to be too strenuous. In fact the rishis themselves suggest *nāmajapa* with the mantra of mantras, *AUM*, to be used as an arrow to pierce the darkness, that clouds the mind:

The body is the bow, *AUM* the arrow, the mind its tip. When it pierces that which is known as darkness, it enters the darkness, and reaches out to that which is not darkness (*Mait. Up.* vi.24).

Upāsana is the objective method of meditation, meditation which though strictly a mental discipline, makes use of various objects: word, image, even rituals. *Nāmajapa* is meditation by the medium of repetition of the divine name. As such it can be considered as an *upāsana: namopāsana*.

Yet the Prayer of the Name has grown into a distinctive path to spiritual attainment, a path open to all seekers, one which is also well established, both in the Bible and in Eastern tradition. The revelation of the Divine Name and the experience of its power are an integral part of the search for God in the Bible. At the start, this revelation marks the initial awakening of the seeker to a personal knowledge of God, as we understand of the prophet Enosh. He is remembered because:

This man was the first to invoke the name Yahweh. (Gen. 4:26)

However, with the prophets, psalmists and, later, the apostles, it develops into deep love, a relationship of intimacy and union. In the monastic movement, it establishes itself very soon as the most effective way to unceasing prayer. It becomes one of the great objectives of the monastic way of life.

AUM NĀMAJAPA AND THE JESUS PRAYER

One of the earliest and articulate, though brief, expositions of the *nāmajapa*, the prayer of the divine Name, is found in Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. It comes in the section of the first book dealing with *śhvara*. *śhvara* is the Lord, the Supreme Ruler of the universe: Creator, Sustainer and Dissolver. Like the *Kyrios* of the New Testament he can be the object of intense devotion, as we find in Saint Paul.

śhvara is also God manifested in *Prakriti*, Nature, Creation. In the manner of the *Sūtra* literature, Patanjali says tersely that *dhāraṇa*, concentration in meditation, can be attained through devotion to Ishwara. The word which expresses him is *AUM*. This word must be repeated while meditating upon its meaning:

Hence comes the knowledge of Atman and destruction of the obstacles to that knowledge, the knowledge which Maitreyi was taught to seek and promised to obtain through *śravan*, *manana*, *nididhyāsana*, is now gained through meditation sustained by the devout repetition of *AUM*.³⁹

However, appreciation for the word AUM as the name of God (in some respect comparable to the mysterious 'I am what I am' revealed to Moses) can come only through practical experience. This is best done by sharing the prayer of those who have made such an experience. However, the practice of repeating a name of God may seem to some a purely mechanical and empty practice. It can indeed be so if it is done without faith or love:

Not those who say, Lord, will enter the kingdom of God. But those who do the will of my Father.⁴⁰

Further, we are all inclined to flatter ourselves - despite our daily experience to the contrary - that we spend our time thinking logically. In fact, consecutive thought about any problem occupies only a very small proportion of our waking hours. More usually, we are in a state of reverie or, more exactly, a film is going on in our mind, a wholly disconnected movie made of a mixture of sense-impressions, irrelevant memories, nonsensical scraps of sentences from newspapers, little fears and resentments, physical sensations of discomfort, or excitement or ease.

The prayer of the Name, seemingly mechanical, can be a life-giving alternative to what we assume to be logical throughout, but which is actually this stream of random reveries.



NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

37. Bhagavad Gita (BG) vi. 27-32,47
38. Dom Guy II, *The Ladder of Four Rungs* 1926, London, p.22; Guigo II *The Ladder of Monks: a Letter on the Contemplative Life and Twelve Meditations*, 1981, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan
39. *Yoga, Sūtra*, i. 23-29
40. Mt. 7:21

CHAPTER 3

OPENING THE INNER EYE

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Unless we have a special purpose we tend to do nothing to control this constant movie film in our minds. It is largely conditioned by external circumstances: the weather is cloudy, so our mood is sad; the sun comes out, our mood brightens; a car is making a whirring noise and we turn irritable and nervous. Often it is as silly as that.

We can calmly, gently, put a brake on this film. We can introduce into this reverie the name of God out of love or a simple desire to overcome our self-centeredness and utter lack of control over our thoughts. Then, we shall soon discover that we can improve our moods, despite the unavoidable interference of the outside world.

Most of the time we tend to repeat words in our mind - often the name of a friend or of an enemy, the name of an institution that causes anxiety or of a thing we desire, and each of these is surrounded by its own mental climate. If we now repeat the name of God, our movie may very well stop or fade away; our mood may get changed. The name of God has power to change the climate of our mind, to give meaning to our life.

In the Bible as well as in the Hindu scriptures we often find the phrase: to take refuge in the Name of the Lord. This phrase may sound too pompous to modern ears. Indeed, some new translations of the Bible simply say: in the Lord. Yet the name of a person or thing refers to the inner reality and is therefore a vehicle of spiritual power. For instance, a person enduring great suffering will spontaneously utter the name of Jesus and draw comfort and strength from this.

Even when rational thought is impossible we can still repeat a name over and over. We can hold fast to that, throughout all the tumult, and once we have experienced the power of the holy Name we will rely upon it increasingly. Through constant practice, with faith, energy, recollectedness, as Patanjali puts it, the prayer gradually becomes spontaneous. It no longer requires to be willed consciously; it is self-

propelled.

Mere repetition of the name is of course not sufficient. Patanjali requires us also to meditate upon its meaning. One could add the need to take refuge in the Name and identify with it through faith, hope, love, joy etc. Except for those who are well versed in spiritual practice this concentration may not be maintained for long. The mind will slip back into reverie again. But it will be a higher kind of reverie, sometimes even a rapt musing, a reverie permeated with *sattwa*, light, rather than *rajas*, passion, or *tamas*. The Name repeated even in this state of reverie will be like a gentle plucking at our sleeve, demanding and finally recapturing our attention.

In India when an aspirant comes to a teacher for initiation or to become his disciple, they are given a *mantram*. The act of repeating it is called *Japam*: for this a *màla* or rosary may be used. Linking prayer with a physical action is one of the great advantages of all rituals and provides a small but sufficient outlet for the nervous energy of the body. Otherwise it might accumulate and disturb the mind. The rosary serves also to measure the amount of *japam* the devotee has resolved to recite every day.

Jesus himself used the Prayer of the Divine Name. We understand from the Gospels that it was his habitual practice. When he performed miracles in connection with his prophetic ministry, or when he withdrew from the crowds and from his disciples, he would spend his time in prayer. Invariably he used the Prayer of the Divine Name, the Aramaic *Abba* from which the Greek *Abba* was coined. It was the prayer he repeated in the Garden of the Agony, and his last utterance on the Cross:

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

This simple and fundamental form of prayer has a great power to help us to conform our will to God's will. The prayer of the Name also leads to absorption in God. At that level it is a mystical prayer culminating in oneness with God:

It is the Spirit that makes us sons, enabling us to cry *Abba* - Father. In that cry the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children.⁴¹

With the apostles the Prayer of the Name takes on new forms. The name becomes related to Christ, as Son of God and Saviour. In Christ and through Christ, the believer comes to realize their true identity, as a son of God. As St Paul says, the Spirit of God witnesses to our spirit and we address him as our Father. Similarly the apostles are sent by Jesus to proclaim God's kingdom and they soon experience the power of his Name, to heal all those who suffer in body or soul.

The biblical experience of the Name was carried along the centuries in the prayer life of the Churches through the constant and universal use of the Psalms. One example will suffice here to reveal the quality of the devotion to the Holy Name :

My spirit fails me, my heart is heavy.
I dwell upon the years long past,
upon the memory of all that you have done,
the wonders of your creation fill my mind.
To you I lift up my outspread hands,
I thirst for you in a thirsty land.
O God, come quickly and answer,
my spirit has withered away.
Do not hide your face from me...
In the morning show me your love,
I have put my trust in your Name.
Show me the way that I must take,
to you I offer all my heart.⁴²

Nàmajapa was intensely practised by the monks in the deserts of Egypt. It was their method to attain unceasing prayer. It has been in constant use among them in the Eastern Churches. It has spread to the West in the second half of the 20th century mainly through the publication of the account of a Russian pilgrim. He had found in it also the method for which he had been searching to attain unceasing prayer:

The Jesus prayer is a continuous interior prayer, an uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus with the lips, in the mind and in the heart, while forming a mental picture of his constant presence, and imploring his grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. One who accustoms themselves to appeal on the Name of Jesus experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always, that they can no

longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within them of its own accord... This frequent service of the lips imperceptibly becomes a genuine appeal of the heart, sinks down into inward life, and becomes a delight. It becomes as it were natural to the soul, bringing it light and nourishment and leading it on to deep union with God.⁴³

AN INTEGRATED PRAYER

The Prayer of the Name is an integrated prayer, a prayer in which is achieved an organic and harmonious merging of body, soul and spirit. Then all three sources and levels of human activity prompt our search for spiritual attainment. Such integration touches a number of points: the position of the body and the breathing, eventually in relation to the heart-beat. The mind is at rest, fixed on the Name. The will is relaxed in a disposition of forgiveness and love for all creatures, a disposition also of hope and trust, of praise and adoration, resulting in the believer being truly at rest in God.

There is no Question of mortification, or of seeking an easy posture that would make one feel comfortable. Instead, it is a question of using the body in the way which will best help to attain and preserve a fully awakened consciousness. Body, soul and spirit are being attuned, like the strings of the *tambùra* before the musical performance - not only with each other, but also with the whole created order of which they are part. Then they participate in the mysterious rhythm of creation, integrated by this harmonious regulation.

The silent prayer of the body, sitting and breathing in quiet, blossoms into a higher spiritual consciousness when the Name is uttered in acknowledgment of the believer within God. Prompted by vibration and modulations, if a melody is used, the mind becomes deeply integrated with the body and the whole being merges in Jesus.

THE WORDS OF THE JESUS PRAYER

The apostles experienced the Name of their Lord as the Name above all names. It became the source of their healing power and of all salvation. The Prayer of the Divine Name was also most naturally

addressed to Jesus. In its most traditional wording, the Jesus Prayer has been inspired by the prayer of the publican, who would not even raise his eyes to heaven and was beating upon his breast, begging for God's mercy. Yet it has become a prayer addressed to Jesus:

Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me.

Or, the Jesus Prayer can be a simple cry to the heart:

Jesus!

Or, it can take a longer form, with the name enshrined in a formula of praise and adoration:

AUM, Sri Yésu Bhagavatè, namah!

Otherwise, there are three traditional ways it could be used in India: *japam*, the simple repetition of the Name uttered or even written; *kirthanam*, the chanting of the Name; and *smaranam*, the pure remembrance of the Name.

As already explained, in the Indian tradition the supreme *mantra* is *AUM*, the *pranava*, the sound-symbol of *Brahman* itself. This was received when in the long pilgrimage of creation, consciousness first awoke to divine awareness and uttered the seed-word. Repeated chanting helps us first to withdraw the senses from external objects and their encumbrances. The mind then settles with intense devotion on *Brahman* symbolized by *AUM*, without any distraction from other ideas. Thus single-pointedness is attained, comparable to the steady flame of the lamp protected from the draughts of the wind:

Then my soul is a lamp whose light is steady. For it burns in a shelter where no winds come. Then the mind is at rest in the stillness of Yoga prayer. And by the grace of the Self sees the Self and therein finds itself.⁴⁴

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRAYER OF THE NAME

When you practice the Jesus Prayer first utter the words slowly with the lips. The mind may be distracted and restless, and the heart pulled with desires that conflict with your prayer. Yet the rhythmical and persistent repetition of the Name will gradually bring with it calm and harmony.

As soon as you become aware that some measure of integration is gained, take the prayer to the mind, fixing it on Jesus. This is often the fruit of what can be described as rumination of the words, a rumination aiming at a simple awareness of Him, rather than detailed and analytical.

When this is achieved, when you have attained inner integration, when mind, body and spirit are in harmony, lead the prayer gently into the heart, making it descend there from the head where it was concentrated. Hold it there, make it dwell there, ceaselessly calling on the name of Jesus. This location of the prayer on the lips, in the head, in the heart of the believer, is not a matter of mere symbolism, but of psychological awareness. The prayer is felt on the lips, in the head, in the heart, and this indicates the depth at which the prayer is operating, the level of the experience of the Divine Presence.

Prayer is then in the heart; and the mind is fully at rest and all the desires have been sublimated into the one desire of the Lord. It is a desire to be one with him and to be taken up in the light of his glory, as Peter felt on Mount Tabor. Such prayer is often accompanied by a sensation of physical warmth in the region of the heart or with the perception of an inner light.

In spite of this you may get tired of the repetition. Then change to a slightly different wording of the prayer or sing it to a different tune. However, do not alternate too often, and never out of laziness. When you notice thoughts arising and accosting you, as Gregory of Sinai says, do not look at them, even if they are not bad. Keep the prayer firmly in the heart, calling to the Lord Jesus and you will soon sweep away the thoughts. Saint John of the Ladder advises:

A monk should have memory of God in place of breath.... Let the memory of Jesus combine with your breath. Then you will know the profit of silence and why Paul could say: I live, yet not I, Christ lives in me ,⁴⁵

in this way acting and breathing Divine Life.

THE WAY TO UNCEASING PRAYER

The Jesus Prayer is not only a prayer of high spiritual attainment, a mystical prayer, it is also *sàdhana*, a discipline. It is a way, *màrga*,

leading to unceasing prayer, as the Russian pilgrim experienced it. It is a method in the sense that it may require certain conditions: a place, a time, a position, a rhythm, control of breathing, as well as a particular set of words.

This does not mean that every one who sits at certain times in a particular position, controlling their breath and saying the proper words will soon achieve unceasing prayer. Spiritual methods do not work as mechanical devices. Unceasing prayer is the mystery of an individual's encounter with God, of their deification anticipated here on earth. For this, grace is required and grace is a free gift:

The Spirit blows where it pleases.

The saints themselves cannot explain how this happens. But at a given moment they are made aware, as others also are, that grace is at work in them.

Never, when he has entered into me have I perceived the actual moment of his coming. I have felt that he was present.... He has aroused my sleeping soul, stirred and softened and wounded my heart. He has begun to shed light upon the dark, to open what was shut, to fill with warmth what was cold.⁴⁶

Even if there is no mechanical method there is always a need for discipline. Yet the discipline must not be merely external; it must be interior. What matters above all is our inner education, our faith in God and our attitude towards others and all creation. This is the highest discipline that leads to unceasing prayer, the permanent presence of God in mind, in heart, in life.

It is a state of no prayers, no services, nothing but contemplation, a participation in God's life beyond the discursive possibilities of our work and our mind.

To this the *Bhagavad Gita* refers when it says:

The *yògi* whose mind is at rest, whose passions are composed.... who pure from sin ever prays in this harmony of soul, soon feels the joy of eternity, infinite joy of oneness with God...

...the *yògi* who attains oneness and who worships me abiding in all beings; he dwells in me even though engaged he is in works of all sorts.⁴⁷

At this stage, the Jesus Prayer is God awareness at the deepest level, for the heart is the centre of our being. According to the Indian tradition, the cave of the heart, the *guha*, is the place of the true self,

where the great realization takes place. Christians then rightly speak of unceasing prayer. Whatever be the posture or the movements of the body or the place, on the road or in the bus, in the midst of an anonymous crowd or in the company of friends, the prayer continues, always active in the heart.

Its conscious exercise may be interrupted by conversation or some other activity. Then the prayer goes dormant, only to start again, so to say of itself, as soon as the mind is disengaged. Indeed the words sometimes come to the lips as live water surging up from a spring. The prayer accompanies us in sleep at night, and is active again when we wake up, as if enkindled by the Holy Spirit.

TRANSFIGURATION

The Jesus Prayer or *nàmajapa* can be described as an incarnated prayer. It is closely associated with the body: in posture, through proper breathing and speech, with the mind and its subconscious activities. The Jesus Prayer at its deepest level becomes unceasing. It is no more interrupted, whether we rest or we are engaged in external activities, even conversation.

This incarnated quality of the Jesus Prayer, together with its transforming power, gives it a special significance for our ultimate destiny, for the transfiguration of humanity and of the whole cosmos. Created from dust, we are made for heaven. The prayer of the Name restores our old nature to its original splendour. We come to reflect the divine radiance of the Lord's transfiguration on the holy mountain.

Meditation on the word leads us to experience its liberating power:

The word will set you free.

This is communion sealed by the name of Jesus, the Saviour, transforming and transfiguring us devotees. As Paul writes:

Whenever we turn to the Lord, the veil from our eyes is removed. This Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. And we with faces unveiled reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord, We are transfigured into his likeness, from splendour to splendour.⁴⁸

The Jesus Prayer makes its devotees into citizens of heaven from where they can expect Jesus to come and transfigure this body of humble state and give it a form like his own resplendent body.

The Jesus Prayer is thus a concrete and powerful means of transfiguration. First we believers are transformed, as his innermost reality or identity, his divine sonship, is manifested. And we in turn approach all men and women with the name of Jesus in our heart and on our lips, wherever we meet others, in our relationships, or on the road or at work.

And when we pronounce over them the Name that is above all names - which is also their true name- through the Spirit of adoption - they too experience an initial transformation and transfiguration. And not only we human beings but the whole cosmos is to be transfigured in the likeness of the Lord by sharing in his glory.

The Jesus Prayer is also the prick of repentance, keeping the heart awake and guarding it against passions that assail it. It is a cry for help, generating humility in all life situations. It is a song of love, transforming each instant of time in an encounter with the Beloved. It is the sum total of the Christian faith, the sacrament that makes us share in the divine energy, while the body is made into a temple of the Name.

EVALUATION

It is time to gather together the meeting points we have encountered in this enquiry into the Hindu and Christian traditions. Such meeting points have occurred in all aspects of meditation: its nature, its source and animating powers, its pathways and its goal.

The first meeting point is found in the deeper aspirations of humanity, common to all great religions. Seekers are those who perceive the beyond as the ultimate reality and so feel prompted to relate themselves to it and to fashion their present life with a view to attaining immortal life.

In this search we do not find ourselves in isolation but rather as part of a whole. We have to grow in the awareness of that power which lies behind the course of things, behind the order or apparent disorder of the universe, behind the events of our life and behind our strivings after peace and happiness.

Such a relationship, even pursued up to oneness or identification, does not result in being lost in some unfathomable ocean. It reveals rather a closeness to our environment and to those with whom we live. In this intimate bond lies the mystery of self-transcendence, of the mutation of human life into life divine. What we call a bond is like a marriage, which is a union of freedom. We are part of the bond of liberated beings, set free by the truth, recreated by the perfect law of freedom, the law of love.

The message of the *Upanishads* is the supreme affirmation of the Spirit permeating the universe and humanity as the very essence of our consciousness and life. That Spirit is called *Brahman*. Its three properties, if we can use such a term, are pure being, pure consciousness, and pure joy. We are in the sphere of idealism. Only the Spirit of the universe truly is. All comes from him. Yet,

...The light that shines beyond all things on earth, beyond us all, beyond the highest, the very highest, heavens. This is the light that shines in our heart. There is a bridge between time and eternity and this bridge is Atman, the Spirit is man.⁴⁹

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the light of the *Upanishads* becomes faith and work, life and love. From the soul-stirring dialogues between seers and kings, between sages and earnest disciples, we come down to the word of daily work and its struggles of joys and sorrows. The *Upanishads* hold out only one way, the pursuit of sacred knowledge leading to the *Brahma-Loka* (the world of Brahma) and to full freedom in all states of being.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Arjuna protests his utter inability, in spite of enlightened teaching on meditation given him by Lord Krishna himself:

The mind is restless, impetuous, self-willed, hard to train. To master the mind seems more difficult than to control the mighty winds.

Krishna's answer is one of condescension and compassion, though also of high expectation:

Be thou a *yogi*, Arjuna. The true *yogi* goes beyond those who only follow the path of austerity or of wisdom or of work. The truly great *yogi* is he who with all his soul has faith and he who with all his heart loves me.⁵⁰

Lyrical as it is, the Gita has a somewhat philosophical cast. With the Bible, from the first pages, we move into a world of flesh and blood, the world of peoples competing for the possession of land - through famine, exile and forced labour and a forty years' march of liberation to the promised land. Then again comes exile, followed by the return to the homeland, where people find themselves always groping after an ever elusive freedom. The concentration of all hopes is found ultimately in a little remnant, a handful of people themselves awaiting the fulfillment of their hope from above.

A turning point is reached with the Gospel, where life comes still closer to us. John, the Preacher of Truth, wakens his people to the reality of God's Kingdom by a baptism of repentance. Another example is the Roman centurion, who is moved by the cosmic tragedy that accompanied the death of Jesus on the cross and cries out:

Truly this man was the son of God!⁵¹

We have a complete variety of men, women and children for whom the Kingdom is opened and then proclaimed by them to the four corners of the world.

These people are first of all the devout *anawim*, the simple people utterly dependent on God. They are also the sinners among whom Jesus moves habitually: like the woman who has a bad name in the town and the thief, the fishermen, the tax-collector and the doctor of the law who finds it hard to be born anew. All these Jesus meets at their own level and he raises them to the reality of God's kingdom - though some also do not hear his call. Yet he offers God's life to all of them, to be shared by his people and by the whole world.

Jesus truly lives in God and he offers his life in witness to his purpose of making the whole world live in Him:

That they all may be one, as you are in Me, and I in you, that they also may be in us.⁵²

This is His prayer to the Father. Jesus had very early in his life experienced the need of relating himself to the Father, hence his concern...

...for the things of his Father.

At home he attends weekly worship and yearly festivals. When he takes up his ministry he turns to fasting and prayer in the desert, in high mountains or enclosed gardens.

These prove to be transforming experiences. He is made aware of his divinity at his baptism in the river Jordan. He chooses his close disciples after a night of prayer in the mountains. He is transfigured and his divinity shines forth on them during prayer on a high mountain. In the garden, at Gethsemane, he goes through the dark night of agony until he finds himself able to utter the liberating word:

Thy will be done!

by which he identifies himself with the work of the Father who sent him.

During his missionary travels he untiringly awakens the people he meets to a similar awareness. Nathanael is made to recognize him as the Son of God. Peter recognises him as the Christ of God and this, he discloses, not by the power of flesh and blood but by a revelation of His Father in Heaven. There is a parallel in the Hindu tradition. Uddalàka °runi leads his son Svètakètu to the realisation of *âtman* thorough a graded series of questions of self inquiry.

Jesus awakens his people to the reality of the kingdom of God, here and now. At the village well in Samaria he very patiently lifts up a woman living in the throes of her passions to the awareness of the higher life, in spirit and in truth. He starts with a simple request for a drink of fresh water. As the exchange develops, finally she herself asks for the water that Jesus offers, that which becomes in the believer,

water welling up to eternal life.⁵³

All such encounters are genuine experiences of meditation. They centre on two levels of consciousness and eventually two levels of existence: that of the here and now and that of the spirit within. In all these Jesus proves himself to be a master of meditation. We say a master rather than a teacher. This is because he himself exercises his ministry by leading simple individuals or even great crowds to a higher consciousness and awareness of the demands of the Kingdom,

as the prophets had done before him. Yet he never actually teaches meditation.

On the other hand, teaching meditation has been the charism of the Indian seekers. From the beginning with the *Upanishads* and later with the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Yòga Sùtras* especially, they set themselves to build up a science of meditation. It was a meditation in life, life itself bringing out its nature, its methods and its fruits.

How Jesus drew others to the truth within shines out most beautifully in the account of the meeting of Jesus with the two disciples, Cleopas and his companion, on the day of his resurrection. They were apparently going home, leaving the group of the disciples. While walking they were talking about the future of the...

Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.⁵⁴

in whom they had put their trust to set their people free. The frustration left them so utterly sad that it could be read on their faces. They had been unable to put any faith in the news spread by some women that he was no more in the tomb. They disbelieved. When Jesus drew near to them and walked with them on the road ...

Their eyes were kept from recognizing him.⁵⁵

This is the common level of consciousness, that of a person's natural condition following the course of this world, living in the passions of the flesh, ruled by the desires of the body and the fluctuations of the mind. At this level the crucifixion and death of the one on whom their desires had been set could be only a stumbling block. It is from this disposition that Jesus leads them into meditation, *Lectio Divina* or *Upàsana*.

Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interprets for them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.⁵⁶

Referring to this later on, they would acknowledge that

Their hearts were burning within them while he talked to them on the road.⁵⁷

Meditation, in its first stage, can thus rightly be described as a warming up of the heart. But it has still to reach its culminating stage, as it happened to the two disgruntled disciples. When he was at table with them, and took the bread and said the blessing and broke it and gave it to them,

... their eyes were opened and they recognized him.⁵⁸

The whole process of meditation is thus to lead us from one level of consciousness to another: from the ordinary level, the level of much of our conversations and discussions, when eyes are kept from recognizing the Jesus at our side, to the opening of the inner eye, when we recognize him as the Risen Lord.

In this sense meditation is rightly described as an awakening of the heart. Its fruits, or we should say, its power is made clear in such situations as that of the two disciples. After a full day's journey on the road, they had entered the inn, extremely tired. Yet, on the spur of the moment, at that late hour, they made their way back to Jerusalem to proclaim their faith to the company of disciples whom they had abandoned earlier the same morning. Now they set out to share their experience with the part of the world allotted to them.

THE PROSPECTIVE MEANING OF MEDITATION

The relevance of meditation in these days appears in a different historical perspective. The natural sciences have steadily gained supremacy over the last few centuries. They have seemed to establish themselves to be the starting point for any question or aspect of life. They seem to set their own boundaries and be used according to their own criteria.

On the other hand, over the last fifty years, there has been an unexpected change of direction. This has resulted not from some new challenge from any other branch of knowledge but from an inner development within the sciences themselves.

The mechanistic universe of Newton has started to give way to the expanding universe of Einstein - a consequence of the theory of relativity and quantum physics. These have given new insights into the philosophy of science. To repeat the phrase of the scientist Sir James Jeans, the universe has started to look more like a great thought than a great machine. To quote Michael Talbot in his book *Mysticism and the New Physics* (1980):

Our concepts of time and space, the very structure of the universe

are more intimately related to the problems and the phenomenon of consciousness than we have seriously suspected. The most outstanding transformation of world view that the new physics has undertaken is this, the recognition that consciousness does play a role in the so-called physical universe.

A more popular confirmation of this view may perhaps be seen in the annual exodus from the affluent countries of thousands of seekers, who cross the globe, often repeatedly year after year. They come from a life ruled by science and technology to the so-called Third World countries of Asia. They are searching for a dimension of life of which they find a seed in their hearts. Yet they do not know how to make it grow, for lack of a favourable climate or environment. There is, as saint James tells us...

...the implanted word, sown in our hearts which can bring salvation if we act upon it and find ourselves clothed with that perfect law, the law of liberty.⁵⁹

The meaning of meditation for humanity and its future must be sought also in its very nature. Humanity is a compound being, unique in creation. We should not view human beings as some incidental mixture of matter and spirit. We should view their unity as something essentially human. This is far more significant than any diversity in activity where matter and spirit are separated. Present day science confirms the view of creation as a history of evolution towards new and higher forms. In this process human beings transcend matter.

Any view of human destiny needs to include not only spiritual perfection but also that of the body and the cosmos. We need to see matter and spirit as essentially related to each other, and meditation as the most articulated agent to animate this relationship and to lead it to further advances and eventually to fulfilment.

Indeed meditation leads us to a basic experience of ourselves, to an existential awareness of what we are. We realise ourselves as unique beings. Our nucleus is that inner self, the *âtman*, the spirit. Its organ is the inner eye, called in the Bible, the eye of prophecy, and in the Indian tradition the third eye. Through meditation we become conscious also of existing in an unbroken, continuous relationship with the Absolute, with the whole of reality, humankind and the creation, and their one source,

God.

Humanity's consciousness of reality, and our relationship with reality are mutually enriching. For Reality is as much a process of becoming as it is of being. That process leads to fulfilment in God. For humanity is called...

...to be filled with all the fullness of God... ...the God and father of us all who is above all and through all and in all,

while the Church, the congregation of all people and the body of Christ-God is called...

...to be the fullness of him who fills all in all.⁶⁰

Meditators do not realize the object of their meditation in all its entirety. But in the awakening, in the realisation of meditation, they possess themselves more fully and yet are taken up into the Absolute, into the Real, into the Divine Mystery. It is when we open up to the Mystery and receive it longingly as it touches us, that we experience true freedom, liberation, *moksha*, eternal life - even here below.

Within an evolutionary vision, meditation exercises a key function in the process of matter evolving towards spirit. Human beings know themselves first as flesh and blood. We discover ourselves as strangers before the otherness of those with whom we live and of the world at large.

Meditation helps us, while becoming conscious of ourselves as individuals distinct from the rest of reality, to bridge the gap of this distinctiveness through this reaching out to the ground of all being. Meditation leads to a reconciliation of matter and spirit, closer and closer until they become one. Such a reconciling is one stage in the dynamic history of the consummation of all things in God, who is ever all, through all, and within all, in whom we and the whole cosmos are to find ultimate fulfilment.

This idea of meditation is an awakening to an actualisation of Divinity. In a very strict sense, meditation is a perception of the divine communication of God's very self. God is apprehended as our innermost life principle. Our spiritual transcendentality is our freedom realized in love, in peace, in joy, in knowledge, in compassion. It is the authentic

core where God's self communication is received and experienced.

Meditation hastens the process of matter evolving and developing towards spirit. A true evolutionary dynamism does not consist of pure mutation from one form to another on the same level of reality. Meditation brings about an increase of reality, in the sense that reality is being perceived anew: it effects an actual perception of greater fullness of being, of *sat*. That is the real significance of the *upanishadic* prayer recalled and recommended by Pope Paul VI, at Bombay in 1964, at the first visit of a Pope of Rome to India:

Asatò ma sat gamaya
Tamasò ma jyòthir gamaya
Mrtyòr ma amrtam gamaya.

From the unreal lead me to the real.
From darkness lead me to light.
From death lead me to immortality.⁶¹



NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

- | | |
|---|--|
| 41. Rom 8:15-16 | 49. Chand. Up., iii. 13 |
| 42. Ps 143 | 50. BG vi. 34-36 & 46-47 |
| 43. <i>The Way of the Pilgrim</i>
translated from the Russian
by Rev. R.M. French,
ISPCK Delhi, 1957 | 51. Mt 27:54 |
| 44. BG vi. 19-20 | 52. Jn 17:21 |
| 45. Gal 2:20 | 53. Jn 4:15 |
| 46. St Bernard, <i>Sermons on the Song of Songs</i> , Sermon 74 | 54. Lk 24:19 |
| 47. BG vi. 27-31 and iv. 16-24 where we see that such liberation is enjoyed even in the midst of work. | 55. Lk 24:16 |
| 48. 2 Cor 3:16-18 | 56. Lk 24:27 |
| | 57. Lk 24:32 |
| | 58. Lk 24:31 |
| | 59. Jn 14:20 |
| | 60. Eph 1:23 |
| | 61. <i>Brahadaranyaka Upanishad</i> 1:3-28 |

A Malayalam edition has also been published in 2005

Editor's Appendix

It is not clear why Francis Acharya did not have his articles on Meditation re-printed. He certainly thought the material important since parts of it appear in his other writings, here and there. Perhaps he was intending to revise the whole prior to re-publication, but he had to give priority to other work.

Some readers may wonder that Fr Francis used the same title *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point* as his friend and colleague Abhishiktananda had used for one of his own books. Both men had taken part in the 1960's in the dialogues in North India which the earlier book starts from. Abhishiktananda had died in 1973. I believe that Fr Francis thought the earlier work had its emphasis on theory and needed something about the practice of spirituality.

On the other hand, strangely, there are some aspects he does not mention. For instance, there is so little on the prayer of silence from the Syriac tradition which Fr Francis loved so passionately; no mention of the *Maranatha* formula of Dom John Main now used by the Christian Meditation Movement; no actual mention of Jesus' own advice: 'when you pray go into your inner room and close the door' (that is, your mouth); no references to the works of his friend and colleague at Kurisumala for ten years, Dom Bede Griffiths, which mention meditation.

However, Fr Francis was always single minded in his purpose. Above all, his concern was that the main message would not get obscured with too many allusions. If readers would be interested in following up these points, please contact me for details. In a re-issue, I could add a longer appendix, with some sources of information, perhaps so as to make it even more of a manual of meditation.

BK

Cover

The landscape at Kurisumala Ashram, our part of the Book of Creation , with Francis Acharya on the Meditation Rock , a favourite place for guests too.

Inside Front Cover

Silent meditation in the Ashram church is part of our regular prayer seven times during each day and night.

Inside Back Cover

Meditation is part of our days work; our life is part of the Divine presence.

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