



ON THE PATH OF SPIRITUALITY

BY TRILOKI NATH DHAR 'KUNDAN'

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Introduction

Dear reader,

From the very young age truth, purity and piety attracted me. I never liked falsehood. I never liked shabby, untidy and unclean surroundings. I liked flowers, dawn, the spring season and the small children. I would never lie nor liked people speaking a lie. The spotless white colour enthralled me. So did the religious songs and hymns sung in solo or chorus please me. I liked to go to temples shrines and sacred places. I liked to read songs and passages written in praise of God. The stories of Shri Krishna's childhood as narrated in Shrimad Bhagawatam fascinated me. In later years I was attracted to the poetry of Surdas, Meera, Rasakhan and others who wrote about the childhood frolics of Krishna. I liked to sit in the company of elders when the subject of their conversation was spiritual. I liked to go near holy men and would get fascinated by the radiance of their forehead and dazzle of their gaze. I did not know then that the seeds of spirituality were sown in my mind and these were slowly getting sprouted. As I grew I took Sanskrit as a subject for studies and this introduced me to the Hindu scriptures. During my college days I had an occasion to read the Bible and some connected literature relating to the Christianity. I came into contact with some knowledgeable persons who gave me an insight into some more literature relating to the Islam and other religious faiths. I developed reading as my hobby and this enabled me to make an indepth study of religious and philosophical literature. In course of time the study of the Gita became my passion.

When I grew up I realized that the opposites were the facts of life. Black came with white, falsehood with truth, shade with light, unclean with clean and dark with bright. I resolved to take all these in my stride and judge every single thing on its merits without denouncing anything as false or despicable. I became aware that God had given us humans a discriminating wisdom, a heart full of feelings and other faculties to choose our actions. It was up to us to choose the course of our life, make it meaningful and purposeful and imbibe spirituality to justify our existence. Accordingly, I chose the path of spirituality and tried to tread on it as steadfastly and truthfully as was possible in the face of the ups and downs that came my way. This journey on the path of spirituality gave me a variety of experience, physical, mental as well as spiritual. I developed an approach to life and its complexities. This became my philosophy of life in course of time. This philosophy is more practical than theoretical, more experiential than academic, more down to earth than ideological, more commonplace than intellectual and more heartfelt than superficial. Having been born in a family professing Sanatana Dharma, a slight leaning towards Hindu thought could not be avoided in spite of my conscious effort to remain unbiased.

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In my personal life I lived as a low-key poet, who remained away from name and fame, taking pleasure from reading and writing. I have so far authored more than a dozen books including one on the Bhagavad Gita. The other two books that give an insight into my views on religion and philosophy are 'Philosophy of a Common Man' and 'Exploring the Mysterious'. Even then I wanted to write a book, which would give expression to my feelings rather than only my views, my experiences rather than what I had studied as also to my own personality and being. I have, therefore, written this present book with this end in view and with the purpose of sharing all my experiences and feelings with you all. Sharing my experiences with you gives me an immense pleasure and utmost satisfaction. It gives me a sense of belonging to you all and the satisfaction of fulfillment, which I cherish.

You might ask me why did I choose this path of spirituality. My answer is simple that I did not choose the path but it came to me naturally. My upbringing has been such that I could not have chosen a different path even if I had tried my best. Some thinkers have explained that religion is a cage and the spirituality is a bird in it. I do not subscribe to this view. I have come to believe that religion is a creed but spirituality is the character, religion is a focus but spirituality is the foundation and where religion is our relationship with the Divine, spirituality is our relationship with the self. Religion gives us parameters of our existence and the spirituality inspires us to explore ourselves. To explore myself I had to journey through this path of spirituality. While doing so, I sometimes entered into a dialogue with myself, sometimes I engaged God in an intimate conversation and sometimes I remained still and silent and pondered over a variety of topics, a number of subjects and many different problems. The problem before me was to probe into all that was covered and hidden. I wanted answers to unsolved questions, solutions to intricate problems and needed to explore the mysterious. I tried to know the unknown, ventured to count the infinite and made an attempt to fathom the depths of a bottomless ocean and gauge the unending span of the skies. The task was stupendous and arduous but it did not deter me. Undaunted, I went on this journey and to date I am journeying relentlessly. Not that I did not stop occasionally; I did. I came across certain milestones but these were not my destination. Yet they re-invigorated me and gave me a further fillip and strength to continue on my journey. I have been a non-stop pilgrim on the unending pilgrimage to an unknown shrine.

This journey on the path of spirituality has been satisfying and joyous, as will be vouched by my fellow travellers, who are on a similar journey. While I am vividly conscious of the fact that every traveller has to tread this path himself and nobody can undertake the journey for him, yet I feel that reading an account of my journey may interest others. It may fascinate some and amuse some. Some of you may find the experiences more or less identical and congruent with your own experiences. Some may find them bizarre and far-fetched but all the same fascinating. It may inspire some of you to be resilient and keep on going. Some of you may feel disheartened with the account of my journey since it has still not reached its destination. Let me however assure you that if I have not attained the goal that does not mean that none of you will arrive at the destination. There might have been some

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sortcomings and drawbacks in my efforts or understanding that have affected the outcome of my travel. Your effort may be more realistic and your understanding may be nearer to the truth. That will ensure quick results for you and enable fructification of your sincere efforts. If you do not agree with the conclusions drawn by me from my journey on the path of spirituality and you laugh at these I shall still feel that my effort in jotting down these chapters has not gone in vain. For it has enabled you to take stock of your own experiences and compare notes with mine.

Often I have wondered whether the unknown I am after, is in reality knowable at all. If it is, how much more effort is needed to get at it. I have tried to know it from different angles, sometimes as a seeker, sometimes as a devotee, sometimes as an intellectual and sometimes as a layman. One thing is clear though and that is that I have never got disheartened. A beam of light has always kept me going in the form of a firm hope that one day I shall reach the ultimate truth. Here I am tempted to relate a Pauranic story. It is said that a sage was once engaged in penance under a huge tree, when suddenly he spotted Narada passing by. He saluted him reverentially and asked him where he was heading. On being told that he was going to meet Vishnu, the sage begged of him to find out from the Lord when He would grant him liberation. Narada promised to do the needful. When Narada enquired from Vishnu when the sage would be liberated, He replied that he would get liberated in years equal to the number of leaves on the tree under which the sage sat for his austerity. On his return, Narada tried to avoid the sage as he thought that he would be shocked to hear the reply but the sage was vigilant and saw him pass by. Narada had no choice but to tell him the truth on hearing which he jumped with joy and began dancing. Narada thought he had gone mad. He asked him whether he realized the implication of the Lord's reply. The sage said with elation, 'Revered Sir, so far I was not sure whether my effort and austerity would at all bear fruit. Now I am at least assured that I will get emancipation, in how many years is of no consequence'. Of course eventually the autumn set in and the huge tree shed all its leaves. Vishnu kept His promise and liberated him the same year.

My choosing this path of spirituality had another characteristics. My effort in seeking was open-ended and all-inclusive. It was never selective. It took me to persons of different faiths and different methodologies. I met all the Shankaracharyas. I went to Gurudwaras and listened to Guru Granth Sahib and Shabda Keertan. I went to Arya Samaj and joined in the Yajnas. I went through a course of Sudarshan Kriya conducted by a disciple of Shri Ravi Shankar. I went to Sri RamaKrishna Mission and studied literature brought out by them as also by the Divine Life Society of Swami Sivananda Saraswati. I read Kalyan and other literature published by Gita Press Gorukhpur, Bhawan's Journal and other literature authored by scholars associated with Bharati Vidya Bhawan, writings of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Chinmoyananda, Sri Arobindo Ghosh, Vinobha Bhave and other saints and sages. I read the translation of the holy Quran, writings of the Greek philosophers and some European thinkers. The works of Sufis like Maulani Rumi, Shams Tabrez and those of Kahlil

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Zibran also came by my way. My thirst of knowig more did not get quenched. In fact if anything, it increased day by day. I was attracted to the philosophy propounded by Kashmirian scholars, Vasugupta, Utpaldeva, Abhinavgupta and others but all the time I was vividly aware of what Kabir had said, '*Tum kahte ho kagad lekhi, Main kahta hun aankhan dekhi* – You are in the habit of saying what you read in booksand scriptures while I say what I see and experience'. I wanted, therefore to see and experience for myself and try to know what was the truth.

During this wonderful journey I found that there was no conflict and no contradiction in the different views explained by different people and different groups. The fact is that there are different ways of looking at the same thing and different possibilities of experiencing it and therefore, different ways of explaining it. Human nature and human likings and attitudes being varied, different viewpoints appeal to different persons. In this journey we reach different landmarks and different levels of understanding. Naturally, therefore, different viewpoints appeal to us at different times. The times change. The circumstances change. The measuring yardsticks change. All this necessitates that the same truth is enunciated and explained in a different way with emphasis on different aspects so that the divinity manifests in the thought, words and deeds of the people and the path chosen by them is one of righteousness. The Supreme truth eludes us and we see it sometimes as different from us and distant. Sometimes we see it no different from us and so near. Sometimes we see the truth and the self as two distinct entities, yet one and the same. With the change in the level of our understanding and the change in the stage of our seeking, the truth appears in different forms to us. That phenomenon in itself is the beauty of treading on the path of spirituality.

During this journey I experienced pain and pleasure, union and separation and hope and frustration. Sometimes I leaned towards believing in action and sometimes in destiny. Sometimes I thought knowledge to be of paramount importance and sometimes I found action as indispensable. I never lost faith in my devotion. I believe that we have to be devoted to what we seek to know and to that we adopt as our work and duty. I prayed to see for myself the power and the efficacy of a sincere prayer. I wandered in the wilderness of imperfection and limitations in search of perfection and limitlessness. I employed all possible tools of awareness and perception to reach the truth. All the time I was bewildered to see the nature and the order and the harmony of its working. Many times I was vividly conscious of the unseen hands of the Divine. This prompted me to ponder over the ways of God and His working methods. I saw the Divine in its different facets and the majesty and splendour of its various aspects.

Literature has been my first love and strangely enough I looked for spirituality in the writings of every writer of repute. I came across an under current of spirituality in the writings of the 18th and 19th century English poets. I found spirituality in the compositions of the poets who wrote in Kashmiri, Urdu and Hindi. The Hindi poets of the Chhayavad era,

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Pragativad era and the Prayogvad era may not have been committed to spirituality as such, yet there is ample proof of their being spiritual in essence. I found spirituality in the poems of the romantic poets like Mirza Ghalib, in the writings of the politically committed poets like Iqbal and in the compositions of the poets and writers of all shades. I concluded that spirituality is an essential part of every thinker, every writer and every human being, who is conscious of his being and desires to justify his existence. I sometimes feel that knowingly or unknowingly every one of us is a traveller on this path of spirituality. We are in company but alone in this journey. We walk alone on this path but without our being aware, there are numerous others who are also simultaneously walking on this path.

The essential aspects of this journey have been the search for the self, seeking the creator, understanding the relationship between the creator and the creation. How far I have been successful in this endeavour is not important. What is important is that I have made an honest attempt in this direction. Besides, we have to remember that the spiritual truth, unlike the mundane truth, is abstract in nature. It is a perception, a feeling, an experience, which is indescribable. It is a flash of light, a momentary view and a dazzle lasting a fraction of the time taken in winking of an eye. Even so it leaves a lasting effect, a permanent imprint and an indelible impression on our personality. You may, therefore, find the account given by me in these chapters sketchy, vague or even repetitive sometimes. This has to be condoned. My intention is to carry you along on this path of spirituality and give you a taste of my experiences. If you are a fellow traveler you will compare this account with your own. If you are not a fellow traveller, which is unlikely to be the case, you may either be prompted to undertake a similar journey or read this account as a work of fiction. In either case you will enjoy travelling with me mentally.

Before closing this introductory chapter, let me make one more thing clear. This journey on the path of spirituality is unique. We have not to take even a step yet the journey is undertaken. We have not to put even a foot forward, yet the travelling is on. During this journey there is no darkness, nor any despair. There is all through a reign of light, harmony and hope on this path. The Sun illumines this path and the hope makes it smooth and straight. After undertaking this journey one talks of the light and love. The path is strewn with the flower petals of knowledge. The journey is one of awareness and consciousness, which eventually lead to joy and bliss. If we go outward, we have to return to the spot from where we started. If we go inward, the unknown vistas open before us and we arrive at the garden of pleasure and peace. We never feel tired on this journey and there is all through vigour, zeal and zest. At one point the path and the destination coincide, the effort and the result become one and the seeker and the sought-after get merged and we attain the transcendent elevated position where the vision is free of all barriers. A dot expands to become the universe and the universe shrinks into a single dot. Dear Readers, go ahead and enjoy the chapters that follow and please pray for me when you are in front of your beloved chosen deity. God bless.

T.N.Dhar

1.0 WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Quietly and calmly I have been trying to figure out the real meaning of the term spirituality. Like many other concepts, terms and terminologies this term also happens to be so abstract that it defies any clear-cut definition. Let me, therefore, do some loud thinking about this term with the hope that I may arrive at some clearer idea about it. At the face of it, spirituality has something to do with our spirit as opposed to our body, mind or intellect. Our body is the visible aspect of our personality. Our mind and intellect get manifested in what we think, say or do, which in turn reveal our real personality to others. The spirit is our hidden self, which remains by and large unobserved and unseen. When we try to enter the realm of our spirit, we tread upon the first step of the ladder of spirituality. When we try to know its reality and essence, we touch the second step and when we endeavour to fathom its depth and vastness we put our foot on the third step and thus goes on our ascent towards the unknown or perhaps towards the unknowable and indescribable supreme reality.

It has been said that 'the world is a manifestation of reason. The laws of the universe are simply an identification of this reason. The reason of the universe is none other than the reason of the self. Thus to know the self is to know the reality'. Spirituality is, therefore, a pre requisite for knowing the reality. The term has been defined variedly. Some say that 'Spirituality is being awake, getting rid of illusions and not being at the mercy of an event, thing or person.' Religion is intended to lead us there. When our life becomes prayer, spirituality overflows in whatever we do. There are things that we see and observe. There are things that we feel and perceive. There are things that we read and hear about. There are things that we imagine and conceive. It is well nigh impossible to put spirituality in any one of these categories. It is perhaps so because spirituality is something that cannot be separated from our overall personality.

Ritual has been described as the religion demonstrated in an external act. Spirituality can be defined as the religion demonstrated in an internal act. It is an exercise in which there is neither subjectivity nor objectivity and the seer sees himself not through eyes but through consciousness. It is a process of knowing one's being. When we get into the realm of spirituality, it is not required of us to sunder ourselves from anything existent but to raise ourselves to a consciousness of the pervasive character of the Reality that exists equally in the subject and the object. When the Bhagavad Gita speaks of detachment, it refers to flowering of wisdom in the form of the recognition of the omnipresence of the Supreme Creator. This may be treated as the high point of spirituality. Swami Vivekananda urges us to rise from animality to divinity and this could be termed as an exercise in the real spirituality.

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According to John Renard the religions based on wisdom and mystical traditions like Hinduism, stress inner experience and the realization of one's own spiritual nature. Dr. Radhakrishnan was of the opinion that these religions emphasize intuitive rather than rationalist thinking. It follows, therefore, that intuition plays a vital role in spirituality. It is this intuitive capability that enables us to feel and think infinite in spite of being encased in a finite body. This infinite is our soul, which is part of the universal consciousness and the possibilities of this soul can be visualized in solitude and silence. During these moments of mental solitude a vision gives us light and illumination, which enables us to fathom the reality, which is a mystery. According to Krishnamurti 'the mind and the world are in everlasting flux. There is only one fact, impermanence. The human mind clings to a 'Me' in the face of the insecurity of this flux. But the 'me' exists only through identification with what it imagines it has been and it wants to be. The 'me' is a mass of contradictions, desires, pursuits, fulfillments and frustrations, with sorrow outweighing joy'. In order to rise above this mass and get out of this quagmire of opposites like sorrow and joy, defeat and victory, loss and gain, we have to get into a state of spirituality. After all life is a school and we are all engaged in the process of growth and learning. The spirituality is an essential or rather a compulsory subject, which must be studied and indeed mastered in order to give meaning to our existence and make the life a success.

The study of this essential subject called spirituality needs solitude. According to Henri Nouwen solitude is 'the place of great struggle and the great encounter. In solitude the ills of our own heart are diagnosed and the seeds of wholeness are planted'. Andrew Murray has described solitude as 'the secrecy of the inner chamber and the closed door, the entire separation from all around us and an image of and so a help to that inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God's tabernacle, within the veil, where our spirit truly comes into contact with the invisible one'. It is this contact with the invisible that I am seeking. I am conscious that the world around me and the world within me have two aspects, formless and with form. If I feel satisfied with that which has form, like my own body and the material things around me, I shall be living a superficial life and shall miss the reality. Per necessity, therefore, I have to look for the formless, both within and without and this is all there is to spirituality. Human existence is meaningful only if there is a synthesis between the subjective and the objective. This is conveyed by the Vedic seer very crisply in the *Mantra*, '*Tat tvam-asi*' or 'Thou art That'. Once there is fusion between the subject and the object, the knower and the knowable, seer and the seen, the seeker proclaims with conviction, '*Aham Brahma-asmī*' - I am the Brahman, the Supreme'. Those who have perfected their breathing say 'So' and inhale and utter '*ham*' while exhaling. Thus constantly they declare '*So'ham*' - I am He' and none else.

To reach this position of poise, equanimity and balance our spirit has to struggle a lot for Swami Vivekananda has rightly pointed out the turbulence that the soul has to undergo. He says, 'The soul is like a tiny boat in a tempest raised one moment on the foaming crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of

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good and bad actions. It is a powerless helpless wreck in an ever raging, uncompromising current of cause and effect - a little moth placed under the wheel of causation, which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or the orphan's cry'. There is a way out and that is to live '*Padma-patram-iva-ambasa*- like a lotus pod in the water, unscathed and unstained. Lotus is the appropriate symbol for the way we can live a spiritual life. It lifts itself from the muddy waters, gazing heavenwards, pure and clean. It is always surrounded by its large green pods. The lotus buds point out to a blossoming future. The full-grown lotus indicates the present and the withered petals and seed pods speak of the bygone past. It has also to be kept in mind that the totality of the self is shrouded in a mystery. We often lose sight of the wood and see only a tree. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we shift our focus from the part to the whole. We cannot starve our spirit but before we cater to its needs we have to know it, discover it and recognize it. And the spirituality is perhaps the art and the science of knowing, discovering and recognizing the spirit. It is a science because we have to go about this task methodically, logically and rationally. That leads us up to a point but beyond that it becomes an art. In order to experience the thrill and joy of knowing, discovering and recognizing the spirit, we have to be artist of this wonder-world called spirituality.

Shakti Gawain has stated that human life comprises four aspects of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. The spiritual aspect is our inner essence, our soul, the part of us that exists beyond time and space. It connects us with the universal source and the oneness of life. Barbara De Angelis is of the view that the true heart is the pulsation of our spirit. It is the home of passion. Passion is an inner source of energy that is powerful, loving and benevolent. It is an energy which when allowed to flow into our life infuses each experience, each encounter with vitality, magic and meaning. Spirituality on the one hand gives meaning to our very existence and on the other gives us the thrill and joy of knowing ourselves, knowing the truth. During this exercise we have at times to face inner turbulence when we are tossed about and nothing is clear to us. We have to be resilient and wait till the situation is calm and gentle. It is then that we can see ourselves clearly and in its true picture. A craving for instant satisfaction will defeat our very purpose. We cannot afford to be superficial. If we do not deal with this quest honestly and patiently we will not know our reality. Dr Brahma Prakash cautions us when he says, 'the reality of your own nature should determine your speed. If you are restless, speed up. If you become tense and high-strung slow down. You should climb the mountain in a state of equilibrium'. He is perhaps conveying the message of the Gita, which says, '*Samatvam Yoga uchyate* - Yoga is nothing but harmony and equilibrium'. Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam has given another dimension of this self-evaluation. He rightly observes that, 'evaluating one's own progress is not an easy task. Here the student has to set his own questions, seek his own answers and evaluate them to his own satisfaction'.

In other words we should have a clearcut goal and this goal should all along be in focus while we are in the process of attaining it. This in effect is the creativity, which has been

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defined by Arthus Koestler as 'the type of learning process where the teacher and the pupil are located in the same individual'. As Gautama Buddha has said, 'to see what few have seen we must go where few have gone'. Spirituality helps us see this unseen and go to places hitherto not tread by anyone. It raises us to a pure and higher level of thinking and enlightenment and then sustains us there permanently. It creates a lasting harmony in body, mind and the spirit and enables us to find the depths of our soul. It enables us sense God's presence within ourselves.

2.0 NOUNS & PRONOUNS OF SPIRITUALITY

Noun is defined as the name of a person, place or thing. Pronoun is any word that represents or refers to a noun. God is given a number of names, some describing his specific facets, some describing his splendour and majesty, some referring to his characteristics and some giving his unbridled powers. All these are nouns. We call him *Bhagavaan*, the one commanding all the luck, *Ishwara*, the possessor of prosperity, *Paramatma*, the supreme soul, *Shankara*, one who bestows peace, *Rama*, the one who pleases all, *Krishna*, one who attracts, *Prabhu*, the master, *Mahadeva*, the great Lord and so on and so forth. All these names that we have coined for this unknown and unknowable are the product of our imagination but at the same time an expression of our love and devotion towards the Lord of the Universe. Then we have coined different names for the energy aspect of this absolute Master, *Maha Kali* for the eternal time, *Maha Laxmi* for the wealth, *Maha Saraswati* for the knowledge, *Maha Maya* for the great illusion, *Bhagavati* for the source of good luck and *Bhawani*, the mother Goddess. This again shows the reverence, affection and esteem that we have for the Divine. This shows how close we hold Him to be and how much faith and trust we repose in Him.

These nouns emanate from our love and affection but there are people who fear him and have coined some names out of fear and scare. In their opinion God is something to be afraid of who punishes us for our sins and rewards us for our virtue and good deeds. This description of God seems to be faulty for it places him at par with the mortal human beings who suffer from narrow notions of love and hatred, who favour when made happy and go against when made angry. Those who love him consider him benign, kind and benevolent. They see him as compassion and kindness personified. He neither hates nor punishes. Then the question arises why do we suffer at times and why are we happy at other times. The answer is not far to find. We at once arrive at the theory of '*Karma*' or actions. Once we gloat over being the masters, the doers and the enjoyers, we get tied to the cycle of cause and effect born out of our actions. Good actions please us while we do them and bring us happiness and good luck when we execute them. Bad actions create a sense of guilt in us while these are being executed or make us vividly aware of our compulsions born out of our desires and once we commit them the guilt mania and a sinner syndrome engulf us. We are bound to meet with reward and punishment as a matter of routine laws of nature. The sooner we realize that all this is of our own making, the better it is for us to rise above this vicious circle. When we are out of this cycle we become deserving recipients of the divine grace and everything else falls into its proper position.

Until we do not reach that stage we are caught in a cobweb of pronouns. We suffer from an acute sense of ego and refer to ourselves with pride as 'I' or 'We'. Anything that happens around us we say with all the force at our command, 'I did it, but for me this could not have

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been accomplished or I conceived and created all this'. When the nature favours us with its bounties and provides us with a number of good things, once again we are blinded in a set of pronouns. We say with a conceited authority that, 'this is for me or that these are for us or that all this is for our enjoyment'. We get a false notion of possession and proclaim, again in terms of different pronouns that, 'this is mine, these are ours, this belongs to me or these are ours'. These pronouns bring doom to us because they carry us away from the nouns, the vital names.

The Pronouns can never take the place of the Nouns. Pronouns are the poor substitute for them. They are our greatest enemies for they make us forget the nouns, the real substance. It is very difficult to know the nouns or realize their real significance if we dabble with some pronouns imagining these to represent them. Do we know the reality of the 'I'? Do we recognize the real 'He'? Is anything mine or ours? Is it I or we who enjoy in reality and are they the possessors or masters of all that there is? Do we have any idea of the relationship between 'I' and 'He'? Are we clear whether the two are two or one in essence? All this confusion and chaos is due to this jungle of pronouns that we are lost in. If we come out of this dense forest of pronouns and seek only the singular noun, things are bound to be easier and clearer for us. 'I' and 'He' can become important but for that we have to find the Nouns that these two pronouns represent or refer to. In other words we have to come out of this quagmire of abstract and undefined pronouns and reach, know and understand the true 'Nouns'. This can be achieved by contemplation, devotion and spiritual exercises.

If we scan through the scriptures and religious literature we will find innumerable examples where spiritual seekers were lost so long as they were caught in these pronouns of 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine'. Once they were face to face with the Nouns, they reached the eternal truth. Buddha saw disease, decay and death and thought that these inflict us. He was perturbed and ran after the truth. Had he known from the beginning that this 'us' was not the reality but only referred to the body, he would not have got lost in the darkness of ignorance. He came out of it only when he was able to see the real light, a noun representing itself and none else. Prahlad could see the singular entity called 'Brahman', which his father was unable to see. Vibheeshana could see the Divine in Rama while his brother, the great king Ravana could not. The illiterate village lasses of Gokula, the gopis were able to recognize God in Krishna but the king Kansa, his own uncle could not and this inability to recognize him spelt doom for him. The great devotee Dhruva had the loving name of the Lord all along in his mind and he was immortalized. Draupadi called Him by His name and so did Shabri, Yashodha, Ahalya and they were liberated. The great sages, seers and saints called Him by His name and He was always with them. Meera and Chaitanya addressed Him by His name. Nanaka retained the intoxication of His name day and night, '*Nam khumari Nanaka chari rahe din raat* - The intoxication of His name, O Nanaka, remains unabated throughout the day and night'. The saints have known Him by His Vedic name, 'OM' and have chanted this name all the time, while inhaling and exhaling. Devotees have given Him name and form and worshipped Him as their deity. They have seen Him sometime with a trident and a

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small hand-drum, sometime with a bow and arrow, sometime with an axe and sometime with a flute. They have identified Him in the rising Sun, blowing winds, raging flames, running rivers and what not, but always by some name. Whomsoever has gone after a pronoun has got lost.

Udhav was also lost in the jungle of pronouns. He tried to convince the gopis of Gokula that 'His reality was this and that and that He was attainable by this practice and that, etc.' This argument full of pronouns did not and could not appeal to the heart of the gopis, which was full of love for Shri Krishna. They knew and recognized Him by His name, 'Shyama', the dark coloured Beloved. That is why they rebuffed Udhav in these words, '*Udho man nahin das bees. Eka huto so gayo Shyam sang* - Udhav, we do not possess multiple hearts. We had one and that has gone with our beloved Shyama, when He left Gokula. They were firm in their conviction because unlike Udhav they were attached to the noun and the name. It is perhaps for this reason that the philosophy preached by the International Society of Krishna Consciousness founded by Bhakti Vedanta is that we must deal directly with the Lord and no intermediaries are needed.

The Sanskrit word for Noun is '*Sanjna*', and it is this Noun that gives '*Sanjnana*' or cognition, cognition of the reality, truth and essence of our existence, of the entire creation and of the mutual relationship. It helps us unravel the secrets of the cosmos. It leads us in our quest and exploration of the unknown but knowable, exploration of the mysterious but understandable, exploration of the unseen but identifiable. The pronouns 'I' and 'My', 'Mine' and 'Me' mislead us and take us astray. We must give them up and hold on to the Noun proper. These pronouns entice us, attract us and create delusion and illusion in our mind. But the Noun is direct, clear and candid. There is no scope for doubts, diffidence or any uncertainty when we are wedded to the Noun, the singular Noun. It gives us access to the root of the truth and essence of the existence. It gives us enlightenment and illumines our minds. It enables us to go from without to within. It opens windows to our intellect, ventilators to our mind and doors to our souls.

It is said that Shams Tabrez once saw a Sheikh looking into a trough of water and seeing the reflection of the moon therein, according to the custom prevalent in their community. He asked him what he was trying to look at. The Sheikh replied that he was gazing at the Moon. Shams Tabrez is reported to have remarked that unless he had some problem with his neck he should raise his head and gaze at the Moon directly on the sky. The reflection of the Moon in the water is the pronoun and hence unreal and the Moon up at the sky is the Noun, the reality. Let us, therefore, take care that we too are not lost in the jungle of pronouns. Let us hold on to the nouns, or perhaps the singular Noun, identify it, recognize it and place it firmly in our hearts and souls. We will surely go from the visible outer world that we know to another inner world talked of by Jalaluddin Rumi, which is limitless, vast and unfathomable. Then and then alone we shall come out of the dark ignorance and awake in the dawn of light and freedom.

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I once saw a quotation from R.Buckminster Fuller, which said, 'I am not a thing – a noun. I seem to be a verb, an evolutionary process – an integral function of the universe'. Some people see themselves as verbs. I would still go for Noun because verb also emanates from noun and not the otherway about. Noun is the source and the entire creation is the manifestation of the noun itself.

3.0 I IN CONVERSATION WITH I

'How have you spent your life so far?'

'Very nicely and it has been quite satisfying.'

'Meaning?'

'It means that I have lived reasonably a noble, truthful and pious life. I have tried to be honest, active and helpful. I have tried to shun ego, hatred and envy. I have been happy in what I got and never bothered about or grieved for what I could not get or achieve.'

'That means you must have done a lot of good deeds in your life.'

'To tell you the truth, whenever I was able to do some good I thanked God who was actually the doer for giving me credit for the deeds which actually were His doings. I was all along aware that I was only a means. So where was the question of feeling bloated or egoistic about all these acts?'

'What about the bad deeds and the acts of omission and commission?'

'Well there I must take full responsibility. Has He not given me a heart with feelings and a discerning head capable of discriminating between right and wrong? That being so I must always be careful in deciding what I should do and what I should avoid doing.'

'What about good and bad that others might have done unto you?'

'This is a good question. As an honest man I have always felt a sense of gratitude towards those who have done me good or have helped me in the hour of my need. It is their goodness, magnanimity and greatness that they have been good to me. There have been people who have guided me in my career, encouraged me in taking bold steps and given me a good counsel in taking the right decision whenever I found myself at the cross roads. There have been people in my life who have given me love, affection, respect and regards. People have appreciated my poetry and writings and this appreciation of theirs has given me fillip to write better and more. I must be grateful to all of them and pray to God for their well-being.'

'And what about those who have harmed you or been unkind to you?'

'Before I answer this question, let us first understand what actually can be considered bad. All of us are ambitious and, therefore, have a lot of expectations from our lives. The facts of life are not always on the lines of our expectations. The variation between what we want and what actually we get is the cause of trouble and grief for us. So why blame others for all that which we consider as bad? As regards others being kind or unkind to me, well my view has been to seek kindness, blessings and grace from Him rather than from fellowmen. The Divine grace is all that has been important to me. Of course that has come at times through some blessed noble persons.'

'For instance?'

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'For instance a well known sage once gave me some sugar candy and blessed me by saying, '*gatsh tse apaer achhar lagaen* - May you learn even the unread letters'. This blessing has stood me in good stead. My own uncle, the elder brother of my revered father, entrusted me the duty of daily '*Pooja*', worship when I was still in school, which has been my daily routine all these years. A holy man at Anantnag advised me to be honest and earnest in whatever I do and another holy man in the famous Nishat garden instructed me to be methodical, organised and clean in my dealings. Once while travelling from Delhi to Meerut, a fellow passenger in a bus, an old man asked me to be self-reliant and avoid depending on others. My teachers, both in the schools and colleges have been kind to me and their guidance has given me confidence, inspired me and encouraged me in many ways. All this has been Divine grace through some noble persons that has come by my way during my life.'

'Any unseen hands?'

'A number of them, I had not seen many saints but have had the occasion of receiving some divine grace through them many a time. You know that I have written the biography of Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji. I had never had his darshan during his lifetime but being able successfully to undertake the task of writing an account of his life and message was simply the divine grace through him. There has been similar unseen divine support to me whenever I participated in some spiritual study circle, seminar or conference and of course in all my writings on spiritual subjects, which appeared in journals or in the form of some books that I have authored.'

'You must be very lucky in your life.'

'Of course, I have been very lucky. When I see myself, I realize how ordinary I am and when I see what all I got I feel how favoured I have been. I am confident that God has been kind and indulgent in my case. He has given me more than I desired or deserved. He gave me a life where I got understanding companions, abundant love and affection and a lot of prestige and respect.'

'Surely you must have prayed for all this'.

'Oh no, not even once. If my memory does not fail me I have not demanded anything from Him at any time. I have always left it to Him to decide what He wants to give me and what He considers beneficial for me. Whenever I prayed I said, '*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramayah, sarve bhadrani pashyantur ma kaschit dukh bhag bhavet* --Let all be happy, let all be devoid of grief. Let all meet with favourable things and let no one suffer'. One thing I have prayed for always and that is, '*Ma vidvishavahai* - Let us not hate anyone' because I feel fear and hatred are the roots of strife in families, societies and indeed among nations.'

'What about fear?'

'Well to be honest I am not altogether devoid of fear. Although I have tried to be fearless, bold and brave, occasionally I have entertained fears of known and unknown things, at times fear of very trivial things, which I have subsequently felt ashamed of. Yet I make an effort constantly to conquer both fear and hatred. I used to hate people cheating, lying or

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deceiving others. Now I no longer do so. I have resolved to put my house in order and leave such people alone and pray that good sense prevails in their case also. I have no right to sit on judgment on others. They may have their own compulsions for the manner they behave or the manner they act.'

'What about your own family?'

'God has given me a good family, a very intelligent and wise wife with a noble and compassionate heart, very sensible, loving, honest, hardworking and straightforward children and equally loving and caring grand-children. I am grateful to Him for this kind favour. I couldn't do much for them but they helped me do whatever little I could for their health, education and in the matter of inculcating good moral character in them and training them to be good citizens. I am proud of them and see my triumph in their achievements.'

'How come?'

'I am convinced of the dictum, '*Atmaiva-jayate putrah* - One takes rebirth in the form of one's progeny'. So I feel their achievements are my achievements and whatever I could not attain in my life they are doing it for me and giving me a sense of fulfillment. Take it as my selfishness or consider it my mistaken notion but that is the way I feel and that is why I am contented and highly satisfied.'

'What about your career?'

'Well taking a worldly view of my life, I started from a modest beginning, tried hard and rose to positions of better status. I worked in different capacities with varied job patterns and different financial benefits. But neither did my official status ever bother me nor was the pay packet a problem for me at any time. In the financial matters my wife managed the affairs ably and spared me the worries that otherwise I would have faced with. All the time I was myself, confident, important in my own way and full of self-respect. I never suffered from any sense of inferiority nor did I consider anyone inferior to me in any way.'

'That is worldly view; what about a higher and a spiritual view? Have you anything to show in that direction?'

'Nothing perhaps, except that I am on a voyage, a journey of constant search and self-analysis. I am a non-stop traveller in search of myself, looking for the ultimate truth and trying to know the reality of God. In the Gita it has been said that three things are needed to know the truth, '*Pranipata, pariprashna, seva* - surrender, inquiry and service.' Although I have not served any master as such in order to know the truth, I have bowed before some knowledgeable ones and made inquiries from them and taken recourse to '*Swadyaya* - self-study'. Yet my curiosity has not been met. I am still on the way looking for the goal.'

'Any achievements?'

'None as such, like I said, I am still travelling with the hope that one day the desired will be achieved. I will know myself; I shall know Him and I shall find the truth. I may not be able to describe or narrate what I see for one thing is certain that the ultimate truth is indescribable and cannot be put in words. But one thing I want to make clear that this search, this journey is very satisfying, pleasant and soothing by itself. How satisfying the

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goal shall be is anybody's guess. A mere thought of it gives a unique thrill. I have said in one of my Urdu poems, '*Mile ya na mile voh gham nahin hai. Khushi is justuju mein kam nahin hai* - I do not bother whether I find Him or not but the search is no less pleasing and full of joy.'

'Are the three, knowing yourself, knowing Him and knowing the Truth, not one and the same?'

'That will be known in due course. Why bother about that? We call God as '*Sat, Chit and Anand* - Existence, consciousness and Bliss'. It is the consciousness that exists and also gives bliss. We call Him '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* - Truth, Benevolence and Beauty'. Coming to think of it, what is truth is also benevolent and beautiful. All the three are one and the same. Let us see!'

'Well, God be with you in your endeavour.'

'Thanks.'

4.0 IN CONVERSATION WITH GOD

God, I want to talk to you today not to ascertain whether you exist or do not exist but just for the fun of it. I am told that there are two ways to find out the reality of anything. One is to suppose that it exists and then proceed to find out whether it is really so. The second is to proceed on the presumption that it does not exist and then explore whether the presumption is true or false. I prefer the first method for it is expedient, rewarding and conclusive. On this basis I have all along believed in your existence and found my belief to be well founded and correct. Your existence is beyond doubt for how could one think of you if you were non-existent? You have said in the Bhagavad Gita says '*Naasato Vidyate Bhavah naabhavah vidyate satah* - Non-existent cannot be thought of and what cannot be thought of cannot exist'. Mankind has conceived you since time immemorial. In fact I will not be wrong if I say that you, the world and we are inter-related, inter-dependant and co-existent, without any beginning. Is it not so?

You may ask me why I want to talk to you. The answer is simple. I can talk to you in silence. No language, no vocabulary and no words are needed. You will know all that I have to say without my having to move my lips. I will hear all that you say even with my ears closed and plugged. What a wonderful conversation between the two of us and the beauty of it all is that no third person will know what transpires between us. Even if I wish to reveal I cannot give expression to or put in words this dialogue. Secrecy and confidentiality are the essential traits of this mutual talk. There are innumerable thoughts in my mind, which others do not understand. There are so many ideas I express, which no one can figure out. But this is no problem when I talk to you for you being omniscient know everything, feel my ideas and fathom my feelings. I on my part can assure you that I have my own way of getting to know your message, realizing the purport of what you say and reaching the bottom of your suggestive un-uttered words. So the conversation can go on ad infinitum.

There has been a lot of debate about your having a form or being formless, whether you are '*Saakara*' or '*Niraakara*'. This debate has never bothered me. How does it matter whether you have or have not a form? Even in your formless state I have always felt your presence around me. I have perceived you on all sides, in all places and at all times. Had not that been so, how else could I have desisted from doing anything undesirable, avoided committing a sin and pulled myself from going the wrong way? Your presence has always guided me on to the right path and steered the boat of my life towards the desired goal. As for your various forms conceived by innumerable devotees the world over, I have enjoyed imagining you in each one of them. I have seen your immortal 'OM' shape in the figure of Shri Ganesha, the son of Goddess Paravati born of her wish. I have seen your benign face in your ascetic Shiva form, so easy to please and so enchanting to meditate upon. I have obtained the joy of my life from the innocent conversation you had as a child Krishna with

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your foster mother Yashodha. The melodious sweet tune of your flute has always fascinated me. Your incarnation as Rama has given me the lessons of my life, made me aware of my duties and taught me to take delight in executing my jobs with care and compassion. Whenever there is wind blowing I perceive the immortal Hanuman, as the devotion personified. I see all your different facets in various Vedic gods, Indra, Agni, Aditya, Mitra, Varuna, Savitri *et al.* I see you coming with the dawn and going with the dusk and yet you are all the time with me and around me.

Similarly there is a heated discussion on whether you are '*Saguna* or '*Nirguna*' with or without attributes. For me this discussion also is futile and meaningless. When you are in your '*Ananda*' highest bliss form, an absolute entity, you have to be '*Nirguna*, '*Nishprapancha*', without any qualities or attributes. But then you manifest through your inseparable energy form and then pervade the entire cosmos. Through this very energy aspect of yours you engage in creation, sustenance and destruction. This aspect of yours, which we call Mother Goddess has to be '*Saguna*', full of attributes. As Mahakali, it represents the eternal time, as Mahalaxmi it represents prosperity, as Saraswati it represents knowledge and as Paravati it represents love, care and compassion. These forms fascinate me and all the time I feel your presence. I perceive your unseen hand in all that happens around me. Sometime I wonder how you carry out your own desire and implement your own wishes through innumerable agents and visible instruments and mediums. You have established a flawless cycle of cause and effect. You have designed a harmonious and orderly management system in all that you have created. Yet you remain behind the scene leaving me bewildered, astonished, awe-stricken and wondering.

Of course I am awe-stricken. You have encaged me in a body, the functioning of which is a marvel. You have sent me into a world full of mysteries. The lofty mountains, running brooks, vast sky, endless oceans, shining Sun and Moon, twinkling stars, flora and fauna, the animal kingdom, flying birds and swimming aquatic creatures, all present a mysterious phenomenon to me and I am engaged in fathoming the secrets of all this. This exercise of mine to unravel the secrets presented by you has given birth to a number of disciplines of knowledge, the sciences, the philosophies, the humanities, the religions, faiths and beliefs. I have been a patient listener to all your messages sent through seers and sages, prophets and pioneers of various faiths. I know these are all relevant depending on the capacity, capability and receptiveness of an individual. Even then I am confused for I do not know what suits me and which path will be smooth and sure in my case. In my own country different ways and different routes have been suggested. People talk of the paths of knowledge, action, devotion, contemplation and yoga. Who is there to tell me which path is beneficial for me according to my capacity and acumen?

For this reason only I have ventured to enter into a direct conversation with you. They say that three persons live on this earth, he, you and I but I know that there are only two, you and I and may be in course of time only you will remain. Therefore, I seek your grace so

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that you are always with me, ready at hand. This will enable me to get unsolicited guidance and lead at all times, at all places and in all circumstances. I shall not deviate from the path of righteousness, truth and piety. I shall not suffer from mental diseases like ego, anger, fear and hatred. I shall work for you, on your behalf and at your behest only. Wouldn't you do me this favour of bestowing your grace? I got my answer. You are silent and that means you have very kindly agreed. They say that silence is the tacit acceptance. Thank you my Lord.

5.0 IN SEARCH OF THE SELF

There was a news item in the daily paper one day that a child was lost and his parents and relatives were out in search of him. It occurred to me that I was also lost and why not I go out to search myself. I was aware that this search could be conducted in absolute solitude. Henri Nouwen has rightly said that 'solitude is the place of great struggle and the great encounter, where the ills of our own heart are diagnosed and the seeds of wholeness are planted'. Andrew Murray has explained further that 'solitude is the secrecy of the inner chamber and the closed door, the entire separation from all around us and is an image of and so a help to that inner spiritual sanctuary, the secret of God's tabernacle, within the veil, where our spirit truly comes into contact with the visible one'. In one such solitude, the first thing that I began to ponder on was as to when I was born. Was it when my parents begot me? Did they in fact give birth to me or was it their own rebirth in my form? Was I born at all, for does the life have any beginning? I was conscious that unless I got answers to these fundamental questions I would not be able to find myself. I must identify myself first so as to be able to recognize the lost self and then claim to have found it. Unless I establish that I existed it would not be correct to say that I am lost and the search for my self would be futile.

I must be naive if I doubted my very existence. Hasn't Rene Descartes, the seventeenth century French philosopher given a logical proof of existence when he said, '*Cogito ergo sum* - I think, therefore I am'. Even our own thinkers have said, '*Pratyakshasya kim pramanam* - what need for a proof for something apparent?' I would go a step further and say I am, I think, I feel, I act and react and that establishes my existence beyond doubt. Having thus established my existence I have to figure out whether I am actually lost and if so why I am lost and to whom I am lost. That I am lost is without doubt because I do not know who I am, who has sent me here and what for I am here. My parents, relatives and friends have given me a name. This name together with my physical form gives me an identity, an external identity. My feelings, my thoughts and my discernment also give me an identity, an internal identity. These two make me what I am for the external world, my acquaintances and the world at large. They expect me to function and behave in a certain way and when I act in a different way I am lost to them. But to myself I am lost at all times, for I do not know what I am supposed to do and whether I actually act in that desired manner.

This self, which I refer to as 'I' has to be figured out before analysing why it is lost to me and how it can be searched and found. Immediately I look to my body for this purpose and it appears to me that I am looking at my reflection in a mirror, as it were. At once I know that it is my body, a possession and not my self. Of course this body gives me a figure and an access to its senses, both of perception and action, use of its motor organs and allows

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me to use it as an instrument for all activities of thought, word and deed. But then where am I? I make full use of this body for contemplation and action and even for meditation and spiritual exercise but do not know who the user is. The heart within this body gives me feelings, care and compassion. The mind within this body gives me capacity to resolve, the attachment, the moods and the power to enjoy. The brain within this body gives me a sense of discrimination, judgment and evaluation. The soul within this body gives me the lead towards the ultimate truth. Yet I am lost for I do not know who is the one who feels, makes resolutions, enjoys, judges and discriminates and treads on the path towards the Supreme Truth.

Sometimes I tend to believe that I am the sum total of all this, the body, the mind, the brain and the soul. As has been explained by Shakti Gowain, human life consists of four aspects. The first one is the physical aspect that enables us to survive and thrive in the material world. The second is emotional aspect that helps us experience life deeply. The third is mental aspect that gives us ability to think and reason. The fourth aspect is spiritual, the part of us that exists beyond time and space. But at the same time I see myself separate from all these and at a level higher than the level of these. I feel as if I am looking down from a height and observing these things as distinctly separate from myself. That tells me that I am something different and that different is lost and needs to be found. When I identify myself with the body and its internal and external organs I see my gross self and my subtle self and the real self, still remain to be discovered. How can I be satisfied with my gross self? Look at its limitations. Its functions of desiring, knowing and doing are very restricted. Its capacity to create, sustain and destroy is extremely limited. This certainly cannot be myself. I must look for my self, elsewhere. Scriptures tell me that I am without a beginning and without an end. They tell me I was never born and so shall never die. Even our own Yogini, Lal Ded has said in clear terms, '*Asi aesy tai asi aasav, asi dore kaer patavath*,- We only were in the past and we only shall remain in the future'. But I see this gross body being born. I see its gradual growth and then see it coming to an end at the hands of death. This fact again tells me that this is not 'I' that I am looking for.

Sages tell me that I am a part of the Divine. This baffles me. Firstly, the Divine cannot be apportioned. It is a perfect whole, which when added to or subtracted from still remains a complete whole, '*Poornamadah poornamidam poornat poornam udaichyete poornasya poornam-adaaya poornam-eva-avashishyate*'. Secondly, if in fact I am a part of the Divine in what way has this apportionment been brought about? If the Divine has a form, It cannot be divided. If It has no form, there can be no division. If I see the Divine in the form of '*Samvit*' or the Universal Consciousness and believe that I am a part of it, then indeed my real self is individual consciousness and, ipso facto, abstract. In that case I am justified in feeling that I am lost to myself, for how can an abstract entity be discerned and perceived? By the very nature of things, therefore, my search for my self has to be unending and I cannot be faulted for feeling diffident about the success of my search for the self.

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Yet when I think I feel that I am there, when I utter something I realize that it is I saying that and when I act I know I am present and engaged in that act. This factual position makes one thing very clear that I have not to go places in search of this self. I need not hunt for it outside and walk miles before I find it. I must look for it within. After covering a long distance I return to the same spot wherefrom I had begun the journey and then the cognition of the self gets underway. This self is a strange entity. It has no form, no name no identity. It is beyond description and cannot be explained. It is abstract and, therefore, at best we can narrate its attributes. It is indestructible, formless, and unfathomable and has infinite qualities. It can be at many places simultaneously. It can perform multiple functions at one and the same time and can traverse the universe without budging an inch from its position. It remains hidden so long as the veil of ignorance covers the vision or so long as the vision is only extrovert. Once the veil of ignorance is removed and the vision becomes introvert its existence becomes known. At this point the knower, the knowable and the knowledge get merged into one. In other words there is a fusion between the seeker, that which is being sought and the process of seeking, called '*Sadhana*'.

But all these attributes are also that of the Divine. He pervades everything. He is unborn, endless, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. Thus unwittingly when I am seeking my self I am seeking the Divine and reiterating the well-established principle of the one-ness of 'Jeevatma' and 'Paramatma', individual soul and the Universal soul. This principle is laid down in the scriptures. Sages of yore have enunciated it. Great Acharyas like Shankara, Ramanuja and Abhinava have reiterated it. Saints of our times, Shri Ramakrishna, Shri Aurobindo, Raman Maharshi, Bhagavaan Gopinath ji and Swami Laxman joo have realized and perceived this principle. Various philosophers and thinkers have described the same principle in differing ways and emphasized different aspects of it in their own unique way. This has given rise to different schools of philosophy and thought. And why not, after all the Veda says, '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti*'- Truth is one and the sages speak of it in different ways'. Thus it appears that this search for my self had given me spirituality in deepest terms. After all what is spirituality but being awake, getting rid of illusions and not being at the mercy of anything. When life becomes prayer spirituality overflows into what we think, say or do. When we remove the terms 'I', 'Me' and 'Mine' from our thinking, the result is liberation or emancipation.

Even emancipation or '*Kaivalya*' has been defined as oneness of the self with the Universal Self. '*yadatmanah paramatmani darshanan-tatah kaivalyam* - When one realizes the one-ness of his self with the Universal Self, one obtains emancipation. In fact the '*Jeeva*' or the individual soul is one with the idea of separate existence from the Supreme. Swami Yuktishwar Giri Maharaj has explained this position beautifully thus: '*Chit sakashad-anor-mahatvam tachchittam, tatra sad-adhyavasayah. Sattvam buddhih, tatastad-viparitam manah charam-abhimano-ahankaras-tadeva jeevah*'- The atom under the influence of *chit*, the universal consciousness forms the *chitta*, or the calm state of mind, which when

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spiritualized is called *buddhi*, intelligence. Its opposite is *manas*, in which lives the *jeeva*, the self with *ahankara*, ego, the idea of separate existence.

6.0 IN SEARCH OF GOD

I was born in a God fearing pious family and I inherited religiosity from my parents. As a part of my education I studied Sanskrit, which gave me access to the scriptures, mainly the Bhagavad Gita. I was lucky to have some erudite scholars as my teachers, who initiated me into a spiritual bent of mind. In my childhood I had occasions of meeting some holy men and visiting important shrines and places of worship in Kashmir. During my service career also I had to tour a lot, which afforded me an opportunity of seeing many holy places and pilgrimage centres. The fifteen-year period of my official career between 1980 and 1995 was particularly very important and auspicious for me. I was privileged to meet scholars of different schools of thought and philosophy. I had scores of meetings with these blessed persons during which I interacted with them and tried to gain some knowledge. During this period I came across a rich literature that put me wise and gave me an insight into Vedic and post Vedic fund of knowledge, different schools of Indian Philosophy, different interpretations by Indian and foreign scholars and some profound translations and commentaries. This prompted me and created an urge in my to set out in search of God.

Meetings with sage-scholars like Acharya Pattabhiram Shastri, Pandit Gauri Nath Shastri, learned philosophers like Dr. Kireet Joshi, Dr. Daya Krishna, Dr. R.R.Mukherji, Dr. Dandekar, innumerable traditional and modern scholars, Veda-pathis, Ghanapathis and Ashtavadhanis were not only informative but also refreshing, soothing and invigorating. These meetings opened my eyes, gave me an idea of the vast fund of knowledge, religious and philosophical and made me proud of being an Indian, who has inherited this rich tradition. I had interaction with scholars like Dr. Baljinnath Pandita, Pt. Nilkanth Gurtu, and had read some literature on Kashmir Shaiva philosophy written by them, as also by other scholars, Dr. J.C.Chatterji, Dr. Pandey etc. I had an occasion to read literature on other schools of philosophy and listen to brilliant exposition of Indian thought by some erudite scholars, particularly Nyaya, logic, Mimansa, exegesis and Yoga. All this increased my thirst to know more, read more and assimilate whatever was possible of assimilation by a person of ordinary prudence like me.

In my younger days I had known a few religious persons of Sufi bent of mind. I had studied Christian theology by correspondence, as a student of an organisation called Voice of Prophecy. Later in my life I read a few books on Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Chinese, Japanese and Buddhist thought. I had a number of interesting meetings with Jain Muni, Vidyadharji Maharaj, who explained basic tenets of Jaina philosophy and underscored its Vedic source. This interaction with scholars and the study of all this literature gave me a world-view of the spirituality, religious thought and philosophical expositions. I also gathered a cursory knowledge about the writings and principles announced by the Greek and Western philosophers. This made me aware of the intuitive knowledge of the ancient

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seers, dialectical exposition of the Greek, logical principles of the Eastern scholars and the scientific outlook of the Western thinkers.

I had the unique privilege of meeting Shakaracharyas of all the Maths. I met the Paramacharya and the junior seer of Kanchi at Kanchipuram, Shankaracharya of Kanchi at Haridwar and Delhi, Shankaracharya of Shringeri at Mysore and Delhi, Shankaracharyas of Dwarika and Puri at their respective places. I heard Satya Sai Baba and attended a course of 'Sudarshan Kriya' organized by Shri Ravi Shankar Ji. As desired by the Shankaracharya of Shringeri, I translated their publication titled 'Dialogue with the Guru' into Hindi and His Holiness was kind to write a foreword to that book, in which he very kindly gave me his blessings. I had to organize, as a part of my duty, Veda conferences at regional and All India levels. This again provided me opportunity to know about the Vedas, different schools of Veda-recitation and various interpretations of the Vedic lore. It was very illuminating to know how scholars like Madhusudan Ojha have given scientific interpretation to the Vedas and how Scholars like Bharati Krishna Tirtha ji, the erstwhile Shankaracharya of Puri have deduced Mathematical theorems from the Vedic texts. One very humble and modest schoolteacher once met me. He had translated 'Shwetashwatar Upanishad' into Hindi. According to him this Upanishad contained many principles of the modern Physics including the atomic theory, structure of a cell and explained the existence of a nucleus, electrons, protons etc. All this was a revelation for me, fascinating and awe-inspiring.

In my childhood and during my student days I had visited important shrines in Kashmir, performed 'pooja' there, worshipped, prayed and done the customary circumambulation of the deities, idols and temples. These included the famous Hari Parbat, Tulamula, Khrew, Zeshta Devi, Rama temple, Ganapat jaar, Som jaar, Ragunath Mandir, various Bhairavas, Shankaracharya temple and some important holy springs. In my later period of life I had occasions to go to some very pious, important and holy shrines and places of pilgrimage. Some of these I visited a number of times. To name only a few, these holy places are, Hardwar, Prayag, Kashi, Mathura, Vrindavana, Tirupati, Puri, Dwarika, Guruvayur, Kanchi, Golden Temple at Amritsar, Gobind Ji at Jaipur, Mahakaleshwar at Ujjain, Kamakshi temple at Guwahati, Mahakali temple at Kolkata and many others.

I also read some literature brought out by organizations like Sri Rama Krishna Mission, Calcutta, Arya Samaj, Swami Shivananda Saraswati Ashram, The Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai and Kalyana Gorakhpur, Chinmoyananda Mission etc. and had access to some rich libraries of oriental collections. All these meetings, interactions, participation in seminars and conferences and the study of scriptures inspired me but did not satisfy me nor did these quench my thirst for knowing God. I was at times dejected and disappointed and thought that my search for God would remain unfulfilled. Sometimes I began to doubt the very existence of God and convinced myself that what did not exist could not be found. But then some inner voice in me reassured me that the search was worthwhile. I was reminded of an incident of my childhood. We had a family priest. It

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was a pleasant autumn in Kashmir and the time was Navaratra days when the Goddess Mother in her nine forms is worshipped on nine consecutive days. My father sent some medicine for the priest through me. I entered his room, saluted him in our customary way and handed over the medicine to him. He blessed me and before I could leave asked me to peep into his pooja-room that was adjacent to his sitting room. I removed the curtain of the door separating the two rooms and looked inside. I don't remember what I saw nor can I describe it but I can say this much that it was a glimpse of the Divine. This remembrance encouraged me to keep the search on.

Having failed externally, I had per necessity to look inwards. This decision to go within was also prompted and reinforced by the fact that God pervades everything and all that we see is nothing but the manifestation of the Divine. But then it was also not wholly true that I had failed externally to see God. As a poet and writer I had always seen a glimpse of the Divine in the rising Sun, running brooks, lofty mountains. I had seen Him in the vastness of the sky and the depth of the ocean, in the enchanting beauty of the valleys and the meadows. I had discerned Him in the smiles of the babies, chirping of the birds, in the love of the loving and compassion of the compassionate. I had seen Him in all that is good on this planet earth, kindness, charity, humility, brotherhood, care and concern. I had seen His hand behind the artistic works on the flower petals, in the order and regularity of the nature, in the arrangement within the fruits and vegetables of sorts. The awe and bewilderment, the mystery and unexplainable phenomenon had always shown me the Divine. My own existence, the existence of other species and the functioning of different elements were the clear proofs, if proofs were at all needed, for His being around me all the time.

Yet I made an effort to search Him within, in the calm recesses of my solitude. I eliminated a whole ocean drop by drop and said that this was not Him in the traditional manner of '*Neti neti*- this is not It, this is not It', until the ocean got exhausted and then suddenly I realised that the entire ocean was He. I acknowledged to myself that He was to be seen in totality and not in fragments. The waves in the ocean we can see but to see the ocean in the waves a discerning eye is needed. The seeds in the tree and in its fruits can be seen but to observe the tree and the fruits in a tiny small seed, requires a special vision. Again I found that the vision also was there but the circumference of its reach was limited and so what was needed was to widen this reach of the vision so that the whole could be seen in whole and not in parts. My search for God turned out to be an unending journey but then this journey in itself was and has been satisfying, interesting and joyous. My search is on but I am convinced that one day this journey will reach its desired goal and I will see Him, both within and without. Whether or not I shall be able to describe or narrate the attainment is a different matter altogether. I have to take into account the fact that if He is formless He would be indescribable and can be discerned through contemplation, yoga or through '*Jnana*', or knowledge. But then I have to develop a capacity to give Him a form with my devotion and faith and then try to see Him in that form. However, if I can see Him in myself and can see

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myself in Him, there could be nothing like that. My effort is there but then I need His grace to fortify my effort so that the result is achieved.

7.0 FROM I-EGO TO I-CONSCIOUSNESS

Sometimes I begin to wonder what after all spirituality is. On the face of it, it has something to do with the spirit of a person as opposed to his body, mind and intellect. That sounds very abstract and, therefore, is not easily comprehensible. We enter into the realm of spirituality once we begin to ask certain questions from ourselves. As stated by the Adi Shankara '*Ko'ham, kutah aayata, ko me janakah, ko me mata?* - Who am I, wherefrom have I come, who is my father and who is my mother?' The very first question sends a chill down the spine for we cannot answer this simple inquiry. We call everything ours but who is the possessor, '*Ishwara?*' We believe that we carry out all actions, but who is the doer, '*Karta?*' We derive enjoyment from the bounties of nature but who is the enjoyer, '*Bhokta?*' We ostensibly provide for our needs but who is the provider, '*Bharta?*' These queries baffle us and we begin a seemingly unending exploration into the mystery. We begin with the assumption that we are the possessors, we are the doers, we are the enjoyers and we are the providers. This assumption gives us I-ego or '*Ahankara*'. After sometime and some thinking and pondering we begin to realize that we are none of these, not the possessors, not the doers, not the enjoyers and not the providers. Then it dawns on us that we are only the means, in the words of the Gita, '*Nimitta-matram*'. And then the journey begins from this position of I-ego, '*Ahankara*' to a position where we realize the reality of the 'I', '*Aham*'.

When we start this journey of exploration into the mysterious, when we start searching answers to these questions and find that there are no easy and straight answers, our feet begin shaking from this position of I-ego. We learn that we were living in a state of delusion and ignorance. We comprehend that what we had believed in and what we had taken for granted were not true. What we possess is not ours and the Upanishad is right when it says, '*Ma gridah kasyaswid dhanam* - covet not what does not belong to you'. We may appear to be acting, performing various functions and undertaking some deeds but behind all this is the unseen hand of someone else. Even the inspiration to act, the strength to act and the motivation is provided by some hidden force. That is why Shri Krishna says to Arjuna, '*Nimitta matram bhava Savyasachina* - O Master of the bow, you have to be only the means'. We enjoy a variety of items and take pleasure in this enjoyment but it is so transient, so temporary that the real enjoyment eludes us and it appears as if someone else has enjoyed in reality. The Lord says in the Gita, '*Aham Vaishwanaro bhutva pachami annam trividham* - It is I who in the form of fire within the beings digests three types of diet'. We toil and put in a lot of effort in order to collect the things we need. Sometimes our efforts succeed and sometimes they fail and this uncertainty puts us wise that the provider of our necessities, comforts and luxuries is again someone who is not visible. Again the Lord promises, '*Tesham nityabhyukhtanam yogakshemam vahami-aham* - Those who have unflinching faith in Me, I provide with what they lack as also protection for what they already have.

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This shaking that unseats us from this position of I-ego is a blessing in disguise for us. It wakes us from the slumber. It removes the veil of ignorance from our eyes. It takes us away from unreality and falsehood and we are obliged to search for light, truth, reality and enlightenment. This search is an exercise whereby we have to go from without to within. This search makes introverts of us and we begin to seek answers to all our queries from within our own selves. In other words we enter into the kingdom of spirituality and become seekers of the Truth.

When we are in the state of I-ego we have the three faculties of desiring, knowing and acting. We do desire but these desires may or may not fructify. Our desires are selfish in nature and often we desire keeping in view our own interests notwithstanding the fact that these desires if fulfilled may affect others adversely. We have knowledge but it is restricted within the ambit of our vision. We cannot see beyond the horizon of our limited sight. All our senses have limitations of time and place. Although we are both teachers and learners simultaneously, these limitations make us teachers in certain spheres but learners in many other spheres. We see and perceive certain things but we are dependent on others and have to know what they see and perceive. We can and we do act but again our capacity and strength to act is limited. We may have excellence in one area but we could be inefficient in other areas. This creates interdependence among people. We tend to be at once producers and consumers, producing some things but consuming many other things.

Similarly in this state we have the necessary power to create, sustain, destroy, conceal and reveal but this power is circumscribed by all sorts of limitations. These limitations make us human beings that we are, removed far away from the Divine, whose part and parcel we are and, therefore, we begin to realize that a part cannot be equal to the whole. Within these limitations we are constantly engaged in the processes of creation, preservation and indeed destruction of various things. Sometimes in our judgment we conceal certain things when we feel it is not in our interests to reveal it. Sometimes we reveal what we think ought to be known to others. We create what we can. We preserve what is within our powers to protect and sustain. We destroy what we do not like and is within our means to destroy. If we are compassionate we conceal others' weaknesses and reveal their strengths. If we are not we reveal their weaknesses and conceal their strengths. If we are selfish and arrogant we advertise our good deeds taking care that our bad side remains under cover. If we are wise and humble we feel sorry and repent for anything bad we might have done and shun publicity of the good done by us.

Once we are conscious of these limitations our ego gets unseated. Immediately thereafter our '*Sadhana*' or spiritual seeking starts. We try to explore the reality behind our existence, the real essence of our existence and the reality of what hither-to-fore was but a mystery. The secret of our overall being, the bodily structure, the mental state, the intellectual acumen and the spiritual capabilities begin to unravel slowly and steadily and we begin to draw closer to the ultimate truth. The time taken to attain the truth varies from person to

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person. Some take refuge under some enlightened soul as their preceptor. Some toil themselves and try various paths. Some follow the scriptures. Some are favoured by the Divine grace and see the light. The capacities and the levels of perseverance differ in different persons and, therefore, some of them attain the truth in this life itself while others carry forward the results of their spiritual exercise of this life into their future lives and continue with their efforts till they reach the desired goal. The Gita says, '*Aneka janma sansiddhah tato yanti param gatim* - After perfecting their efforts through successive births one attains the exalted position'.

The seeker engages in this search and has to tread a long distance. On the way he comes across many a milestone. Some of the seekers stop at one of these spots taking them as the ultimate goal but the fortunate ones keep on the journey and one fine morning the reality dawns on them. This journey is very strange and unique. The seeker has not to take even one step physically. It is a spiritual journey and thousands of miles of thinking, pondering, meditation and contemplation are traversed while the seeker is physically at one place. These halts at intermediate spots have given rise to different schools of philosophy and all these are valid and true but for people of different acumen or for the same person at different levels of his understanding.

Slowly and steadily the seeker by his constant and resilient search reaches a level where he gets merged with the Divine. Just before this position is reached there is a level where he begins to realize that he and the Divine are one but the very fact that both he and the Divine are conceived as different, one the knower and the second the knowable, creates a situation of duality. But this position is the last step in this ladder of spiritual exercise. This step, nay the ladder itself has to be left behind and then the seeker, the '*Jeevatma*' or the human being becomes one with the '*Paramatma*' or the Supreme. He regains his 'I'-position, which hither-to-fore was hidden behind the veil of '*Ajnana*' or ignorance. He sees himself as the supreme I and this I-consciousness is one of the eight types of the lower nature of the Divine. The Lord has explained in the Bhagavad Gita thus: '*Bhumir-aapo-nalovayuh kham mano buddhir-eva-cha, ahankara-iti-iyam me bhinna prakritir-ashtadha*- The five elements of earth, water, fire, air and the sky and the three items of mind, intellect and I-consciousness are the eight types of my nature'. This nature of the Divine is lower and gross. The other nature, subtle and higher, is that nature which sustains the entire creation. The Gita says, '*Apareyam itastvanyam prakritim viddhi me param, jeeva bhutam Mahabaho, yayedam dharayate jagat* - The afore-stated nature of mine is the lower one and the other nature of mine is the higher one through which I sustain the creation.'

When the seeker attains this position of merger with the Divine, he realizes I-consciousness. In other words he achieves the cognition that he is none other than the Supreme Divine. At this stage, the high point of '*Sadhana*' or the spiritual exercise, he gets the awareness that he has the three faculties of desire, knowledge and action alright but these faculties are limitless and he can desire anything, he knows everything and he can do anything and

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everything. He comes to know that he has the powers to create, sustain and destroy and these powers are boundless without any limitation of time or space. He is vividly conscious of his omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. He regains his '*Swatantriya*', or freedom and begins showering grace, concealing, revealing, unfolding and enfolding at his will. Thus the spiritual journey is complete, the journey that began from the position of I-ego and ended at I-consciousness, the journey that began from 'I', circumscribed by all sorts of limitations and came to an end at 'I', endowed with freedom and limitless powers and faculties.

8.0 TOOLS OF AWARENESS

8.1 Language and Numerals

Sound came naturally to a man. Even now we see a newborn baby make certain sounds. In the beginning he cries, groans or shrieks when he is in pain, or is hungry or wants to attract attention. These sounds are peculiar and mostly in the form of vowels like *a, aa, i, ee, u, oo*. As he grows the sounds become different and form consonants like *ka kaa, ma maa, pa paa, da daa*, so on and so forth. These are in the nature of calling his parents or asking for something. The early man also must have produced similar sounds and constantly heard similar sounds from the birds, the running brooks, gushing winds and animals around him. Soon he learnt to combine these in different permutations and combinations to form words. From words he made fragments of sentences and full sentences and thus the language was born, which enabled him to express himself and communicate with his fellow beings. This exercise was basically an exercise in combining, joining, arranging and marshalling and giving a sequence and order to his ideas and thoughts.

In course of time, God knows after how many millennia, man felt a need to evaluate, quantify, differentiate, categorize, segregate and group various items and objects that had become part of his life. This need was fulfilled by the invention of numerals. Counting and calculation also came to man quite naturally. By observing nature and his surroundings, indeed his own body, he identified things in ones, twos and threes. In due course he invented numbers, learnt to see and describe things in numbers and quantities and discovered various methods of evaluation and calculation. He had to keep track of his flock of animals, keep count of his trees and take stock of his belongings of whatever little he had. Eventually he felt the need for figures to represent various numbers and this gave rise to a branch of Science called Mathematics. It is believed that the concept of Zero, counting by tens and the resultant decimal system are the brainchild of Indian sages. These numerals are not only tools and means for evaluation and quantification of things in our daily life but also help us in categorizing and classifying various concepts and characteristics and grouping the nature of men and material according to their peculiarities.

8.2 Division in Groups of Twos

It is a universally accepted fact that when we say one, at once a flash crosses our mind that by one is meant God, unique and unparalleled. One denotes not only uniqueness but also represents distinctness and singularity, which is the characteristic of the Divine. In the

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Indian mythology many concepts and traits have been categorized into groups of twos, threes and other numbers. In the Bhagavad Gita, however, we come across certain concepts divided into various groups. The basis of this division has been elaborated and explained at length. Let us first of all examine those concepts, which are divided into two groups each. At the outset we have to talk of the two '*Jeevatma*' and '*Paramatma*' described in the Gita variously as '*Deha*' and '*Dehin*', '*Kshetra*' and '*Kshetrajna*', '*Kshara*' and '*Akshara*' etc. At the beginning of the third chapter it has been stated that '*Nishtha*' or faith of a person is of two types. '*Lokesmin dvidha nishtha pura prokhta mayanagha, jnana-yogena sankhyanam karma-yogena yoginam*'. Those who belong to the Sankhya school of philosophy have faith in '*Jnana-yoga*' or the attainment of merger with the Divine through knowledge. Those who belong to the Yoga school of thought have faith in '*Karma-yoga*' or attainment of merger with the Divine through action.

Another concept divided into two groups is '*Prakriti*' or the Divine nature. This has been explained in the beginning of the seventh chapter, '*Aparyam-itastva-nyam prakritim viddhi me param*'. The first group is named '*Apara-Prakriti*' or the lower nature. It is eightfold and comprises, the earth, the water, the fire, the air, the ether, the mind, the intellect and the 'I'-consciousness. This nature is visible, gross and inanimate. The other one is '*Para-Prakriti*' or the higher nature. It is that aspect of the Divine nature, which sustains the entire universe. This nature is hidden, subtle but animate and vibrant.

Towards the end of the fifteenth chapter '*Purusha*' also has been categorized into two types, '*Dvavimau purushau loke ksharashchakshara eva cha*'. One is '*kshara*' or mortal and liable to die and the second is '*akshara*' or deathless and immortal. The visible material gross self in the shape of form and body is liable to die but the real subtle self or the soul of a being is immortal. It may change form and shape but does not meet with death. It is immortal and deathless. This so categorized '*Purusha*' is actually the individual soul circumscribed by all sorts of limitations of time, space and volume. No such categorization can be conceived of the Universal Soul or the Divine, indivisible, un-destructible, complete and whole. For the convenience of the common man sometimes the energy aspect of the Divine is also worshipped as Mother Goddess but it has to be noted that this energy aspect is inseparable from the Divine. Since He is absolute, it is through His energy aspect, which itself is inseparable from Him, that He manifests Himself in the form of the creation that we see.

Another important categorization into two groups has been explained at the beginning of the next sixteenth chapter. It has been stated that there are two types of people in this world according to their nature. The first type is called '*Daiva*' or divine. They are endowed with highest qualities of behaviour, mental attitude and habits, like fearlessness, truth, purity, compassion, charity, altruism, non-violence etc. The second type is called '*Aasura*' or demonic. Persons of this type are devoid of moral and ethical values. They are haughty, egotist, jealous, prone to hatred, violence and cruelty. The intention of giving this division is

to enjoin upon us that our endeavour should be to raise ourselves from animality to divinity so that divinity manifests in our thought, word and deed.

If we look at this number two more closely we will find that it actually represents the two sides of the same coin. Two comprises the absolute inert matter and its ever-vibrant force. This in 'Saankhya' school is called 'Purusha' and 'Prakriti'. In Chinese terminology it is called 'Yang' and 'Yin'. The two are complementary to each other. The Upanishad calls it 'Prana' and 'Raji'. One is passive and the other is active. In Hindu mythology we call the two as 'Shiva' and 'Shakti' or the Divine and its energy aspect. The two are in reality desire and action of the same entity. The two are inseparable. Kalidasa has likened the two to the word and its meaning, 'Vagarthau iva sampriktau – the two stand merged just as the word and its meaning'.

8.3 Division in Groups of Threes

In the third chapter of the Gita, towards the end mention has been made of three types of attributes called 'Guna'. These are the attribute of truth, wisdom and light, 'Sattva', attribute of vigour, zest and fire, 'Rajas' and the attribute of ignorance and darkness, 'Tamas'. In fact throughout the Bhagavad Gita these three types of attributes have been elaborated and it has been explained how these govern human thinking, behaviour and actions. All actions, intentions, aspirations, habits et al are either light oriented 'Sattavika', or have fire and impatience in them 'Rajasika' or these are covered with darkness and are ignorance oriented, 'Tamasika'.

In the sixteenth chapter three reasons for the downfall of a person have been enumerated. These have been identified as the three doors opening into the hell, symbolizing downfall and degradation. These are 'Kama, Krodha, Lobha' or lust and indulgence, anger and short temper and greed and coveting. These destroy a person physically, mentally, intellectually and indeed spiritually and must, therefore, be shunned.

In the seventeenth chapter the three prominent names of the Supreme 'Brahman' have been stated as 'OM', 'Tat' and 'Sat'. It has been prescribed that all our actions whether connected with sacrificial fire, penance or charity should start by uttering His name "OM". The name 'Tat' meaning He or That reminds us that everything belongs to Him. He is the possessor and the enjoyer and we should, therefore, perform our actions only on His behalf so that we attain liberation. As for the name 'Sat' it denotes both existence and benevolence. It is also used for good deeds. Spiritual seekers who contemplate refer to the Divine by the name 'Om', the devotees refer to Him as 'Tat' and the knowledgeable identify Him by 'Sat'.

Again in the eighteenth chapter it has been explained that there are three types of inspirations for us to act, '*Jnata, Jnan, Jneya*' or the knower, the knowledge and that which needs to be known. The knowledge, the actions and the doers have further been divided into three groups each based on their respective attributes and characteristics. All other things and concepts are similarly divided into three groups as some are governed by the light in them, some by the fire in them and some by the darkness and ignorance. The entire world is thus categorized into three distinct classes of people and that accounts for diversity and indeed the strife seen at every step.

According to the Hindu mythology the Divine is '*Sat*', being, '*Chit*', consciousness and '*Ananda*', bliss and is engaged in three main functions of '*Srishti*', creation, '*sthiti*', sustenance and '*Samhara*', destruction, represented by '*Brahma, Vishnu* and '*Mahesha*', respectively. The three are collectively called '*Trikarana*'. The Divine has a threefold capacity of '*Jnana*', knowledge, '*Ichha*', desire and '*Kriya*', action.

8.4 Division in the Groups of Fours

According to the Manu Smriti, we are governed by '*Varna-ashrama dharma*'. In other words our society is divided into four categories of intellectuals, warriors, tradesmen and others, according to the capacity and deeds of a person. These are called four '*Varnas*' of '*Brahman, Kshetriya, Vaisha* and '*Shudra*'. The Bhagavad Gita says, '*Chatur varnyam maya srishtam, guna karma vibhagashah*'. Similarly the life span of an individual, estimated to be of one hundred years, is divided into four '*Aashramas*' or periods of celibacy, '*Brahmacharya*', householder, '*Grihasta*', forest-dweller, '*Vanaprastha*' and ascetic, '*Sanyasa*'. During the first period an individual is required to pursue studies, both mundane and spiritual and acquire knowledge. During the second period he is to earn, bring up and sustain his family and contribute to the common wealth of the society. In the third period he is to strive for his own spiritual elevation and in the fourth period he has to guide and serve the society in a detached manner so that divinity manifests and piety and purity prevail.

Worshippers have been categorized into four groups in the seventh chapter of the Gita. They are all virtuous but worship because of different reasons. The first type of worshippers is called '*Aartah*' or those in distress and difficulty because of deprivation. The second type is called '*Jijnasu*' or those eager to gain knowledge. The third type is called '*Artharthi*' or those seeking wealth and riches. The fourth section of worshippers is known as '*Jnani*' or those imbued with knowledge and wisdom. They all worship the Divine, some to acquire mundane riches, some to get rid of calamities, some to know the reality and those who are knowledgeable and wise worship Him as a matter of their creed.

We go through four states of wakefulness '*Jagrat*', dream '*Swapna*', deep sleep '*Sushupti*' and the fourth called '*Turiya*', which is different from all the rest. The seed syllable '*Om*',

which we chant and utter before every '*Mantra*' has four component sounds, '*Aa, U and Ma*', denoting three levels higher, lower and middle and the fourth nasal one transcending the remaining three.

8.5 Division in the Groups of Fives

In the Indian mythology Shiva has been depicted as five faced Lord. Some scholars have interpreted this depiction as symbolic of five dimensions known to early Indians. Shiva's five faces are Ishana, Tatpurusha, Aghora, Vamadeva and Sadyojata. They represent the five directions of North, South, East, West and the Centre. In the eighteenth chapter it has been stated that there are five factors to accomplish anything according to the Saankhya School of philosophy. These are '*Adhishthanam*' or the body, '*Karta*', the doer, '*Karanam*' or the senses, '*Cheshta*' or the desire of sorts and '*Daivam*' or the Divine. Thus we have to understand that our body and our senses are only the tools, our desires provide the impetus and the unseen hand of the doer performs and the Divine controls, manages and directs all that is done by thought, word or deed.

Our existence shows many aspects in groups of fives. Take, for example, our body structure. It is made of five sheaths, physical, vital, mental, intellectual and blissful, respectively identified as '*Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, Anandamaya kosha*'. These are also described as matter, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness, the seat of eternal joy, which in their totality give us our identity. Then we have five different senses of perception called '*Jnanendriya*' and five different senses of action called '*Karmendriya*'. Naturally, therefore, there are five types of perceptions and five types of actions linked to these senses.

8.6 Division in the groups of Eights

It has been stated earlier that the nature of the Divine is of two types, subtle and the gross. The gross one is eightfold and this has been elaborated in Chapter seven. This manifests in five basic elements of earth, water, fire, air and the ether '*Bhumi, Aapah, Anala, Vayuh*' and the three internal elements of mind, intellect and I-consciousness '*Manas, Buddhi, Ahankara*'.

It is interesting to note that Patanjali has enumerated eight stages in yoga. These are '*Yama*', things to be avoided, '*Niyama*', things to be adopted, '*Asana*', physical posture, '*Pranayama*', breath control, '*Pratyahara*', withdrawal of senses, '*Dharana*', concentration, '*Dhyana*', meditation, '*Samadhi*', spiritual enlightenment. Lord Shiva is also described in

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mythology as having eight distinct forms called *Sarva*, *Bhava*, *Pashupati*, *Ishana*, *Bhima*, *Rudra*, *Mahadeva*, and *Ugra*. Some scholars identify these eight forms with five basic elements of Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether, and the three Sun, Moon, and the Jiva (the being). This in effect suggests that all the elements and the entire creation is Shiva's manifestation. This is corroborated in *Ishavasyopanishad* in these words: '*Ishavasyam-idam sarvam*' and in the *Bhagavad Gita* in these words: '*Vasudevah sarvam-iti*'.

Thus we have seen that in order to understand the human life, the surroundings, the cosmos and the nature, in fact anything that we see or perceive, our sages have categorized these in various groups and thus made it easier for us to understand and visualize things better and clear. Knowledge by its definition, is unlimited as has been said, '*Ananta vai Vedah* - Vedas are unlimited'. Therefore, this list can be stretched ad infinitum. Suffice it to say that our endeavour should continue to add to our knowledge and widen the scope of our awareness. Such divisions and categorizations as have been briefly detailed above, will no doubt help us in this endeavour.

9.0 ABSTRACT PERCEPTION

Perception and experience are the main sources of knowledge. These are called '*Pratyaksha*' or the visible source of knowledge and need no '*Pramana*' or proof to establish what has been perceived or experienced. Perception is an abstract feeling. When someone pricks us with a pin and we get pain, we can see the pin but the pain experienced can only be perceived but not seen and, therefore, cannot be explained. When someone offers us a fragrant flower and we get joy, we can see the flower but cannot see the joy experienced and, therefore, cannot explain it. A simile often given for such occurrences is that of a candy given to a dumb person. He can see the candy; he can feel the sweet taste of the candy but cannot describe the sweetness.

Perception of the Divine also is an abstract feeling, which can be experienced but not explained. Logic, reason and description are in the realm of mundane and physical life of the human beings. Perception of the Divine, on the other hand, is in the realm of their spiritual life. It is, therefore, illogical and unreasonable to measure the spiritual experiences with the physical and mundane yardsticks. This dichotomy leads to people becoming atheists and non-believers in the existence of God.

In the Bhagavad Gita there is both an audio and video description of the Divine in his majestic splendour. Although the entire discourse of the Gita emanates from the refusal of Arjuna to fight, which was his bounden duty, yet the Lord in his magnanimity dwells on multifarious subjects including the secret of His existence, His immanence, His omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence. No wonder Bhagavaan Gopi Nath has made a very important statement that 'any one shloka of the seven hundred and odd shlokas from the Gita can be the preceptor for a person'. Incidentally the controversy about who his preceptor was is, in my view, absolutely uncalled for. In this connection I am reminded of an old incident. Way back in 1970, when I was in England, a couple of gentlemen called on me and asked me whether the Indian Christians also believed that Christ was the son of God and whether they observed Sabbath on Sunday or Saturday. While I told them that being a Hindu it was difficult for me to answer their query, I posed a counter question and asked them whether the message of the Christ was important or his parentage and whether worship was important or the day when it is performed. They admitted that they had realized the folly of asking such irrelevant questions. We should also refrain from asking unnecessary questions about Bhagavaan Ji and concentrate on his message and teachings.

A very interesting feature of the Gita is that the Lord has described Himself in great detail. He has stated and illustrated that He is the seed of the creation '*Beejam mam sarvabhutanam viddhi Partha Sanatanam- VII.10*'. He has made it clear that He is the creator, the sustainer and the One in whom the whole creation subsumes. He has also

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explained that He pervades the entire universe and that everything whether animate or inanimate, is His manifestation only. Later He also demonstrated His glory and Splendour by appearing before His beloved Arjuna first in His gigantic form and then in His benign human form. The gigantic form of Shri Krishna made Arjuna awe stricken and spellbound. The benign form of His mesmerized Him with the result that he was on his knees and could do nothing but surrender before the Lord. How many of us can be lucky to see the Lord in His human form? Shri Ramakrishna could converse with the Divine in His Mother form. Our Bab Bhagavaan was the one who could see and make other fortunate ones see the Divine in the form of a small girl. Not only was he able to see her but he was also in a position to feed her and the Mother Goddess in Her grace accepted these offerings from him. There have been many more people of a very high spiritual stature who have seen Him in the form of Shiva, Shri Krishna, Shri Rama or any other shape.

Since we are not that exalted spiritually and since we are mere mortals, our perception of the Divine has to be abstract. The Bhagavad Gita can come to our help in this perception. It explains the existence of God in different terms, which are abstract no doubt but perceivable all the same. For example in Chapter X it says that of the different senses the Divine is the mind. It has to be noted here that the mind is the subtlest of the perceiving senses and the most vital species of perception. And it hastens to add that in the living beings He is the Consciousness. '*Indriyanam manashchasmī bhūtanam-asmi chetana-* Of the senses I am the mind and among living beings I am consciousness'. Again the consciousness is a subtle aspect of the living beings and the universal consciousness binds them all. That is why the Lord says, '*Mayī sarvaṃ-idaṃ protaṃ sūtre maṇigana iva-* All this is strung on Me as rows of gems on a string. VII.7' We all know that there are five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether. The Lord has explained in Chapter VII His existence in these elements in the following way. 'I am fragrance in earth, sapidity in water, brilliance in fire and the sound in sky – '*Puṇyo gandhah prithivyam, raso-aham-apsu, tejashchasmī vibhavasau,shabdah khe*'. It will be observed that all these things are abstract concepts. One can see neither fragrance nor sapidity nor brilliance nor the sound.

In the fifteenth chapter the Lord says that a part of His takes the form of an individual being in this world, '*Mamaivāṃsho jeevaloke jeevabhūtaḥ*'. This does not mean that the Lord is fragmented in millions of parts in order to be born in the form of different beings. What it implies is that a part of His unlimited powers and unrestricted functions is assigned to the beings to ensure smooth functioning of the cosmic set up. But in order to perceive Him in the beings He says that He is the very soul and the life of all beings. '*Jeevanam sarva bhūteshu-* I am the life in all beings. VII.9' '*Aham-aatma Gudakesha sarvabhūta-ashayasthitah* – I am the soul seated in the hearts of all beings. X.20' There are a number of other statements wherein the Divine has been described in subtlest possible ways with the result the perception becomes all the more undefined and subtle. He is the valour in men, penance of the ascetics, wisdom of the wise and radiance of the splendid, strength of the strong but devoid of lust and passion, desire in the righteous and the reason of the

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debators. '*paurusham nrishu, tapah tapasvishu, buddhirbuddhimatam, tejas-tejaswinam, balam balavatam kama-raga-vivarjitam, dharma-aviruddho bhuteshu kamo'smi* – VII. 10-11' '*Vadah pravadatam* – X.32'

Shri Krishna tells us to perceive Him as the eternal time, purifying wind, Science of self, silence as the great secret, the first letter 'Aa', as also the sacred syllable OM, which is indestructible. All this constitutes abstract perception as opposed to considering the Divine as the Sun, the ocean, the Himalaya, the Moon, the thunderbolt, the Ganges et al, all of which are visible, perceivable and identifiable. But the beauty lies in the abstract perception, which gives a feel of divinity of the Divine and strengthens the belief in His existence. '*Kalah kalayatam, pavanah pavatam, adhyatma-vidya vidyanam, maunam chaivasmi guhyanam, aksharanam-akaro'smi, giram-asmi-ekam-aksharam*- X.25, 30, 31,32,33,38'. All this description gives us a lead whereby we can perceive the Divine in all that which is abstract, indefinable, indescribable, immeasurable, and that which cannot be quantified. We have to perceive Him in our breathing, in our feelings, in our heartbeat, in the recesses of our innermost selves and derive eternal joy, which itself is the Divine Himself identified as '*Aanandah*'.

This is the message of the Gita, which the Lord Himself has narrated and demonstrated to the world through the medium of Arjuna. Lord is the guide and Arjuna represents a well meaning, intellectually conscious and alert human being who is ever eager to know and, therefore, questions, argues and debates constantly with cogent reasoning and logical analysis. So far as the common man is concerned, he is like a Gopi, full of faith, devotion and dedication. He need not argue or harbour any doubts. He sees and perceives his Lord all the time in the miracles that happen in his life and in the mysteries that he encounters. I as a common mortal human being perceive Him in many forms every day. When I gaze at the vastness of the blue sky above and the lofty mountain peaks kissing it at the fringe, I see Him. When I stroll along the sea-beach and look across where the waters and the skyline meet each other and think of the depth of the ocean I see Him. When I see a multi-hued rainbow scanning the entire span of the grey sky, I see Him. When I walk through a beautiful flower garden and observe the artwork on the flower petals, the variety of colours and the colour scheme, the scent and fragrance, different in different flowers and the singing bees and dancing butterflies, I see Him. When I go into the minutest details of the fruits, the arrangement like that in a pomegranate or in an orange, the pattern like that of the grapes, the making of the interior and the exterior like that of a coconut, an almond or a walnut, I visualize the artist behind all this creation and see Him. I am fascinated by the order, the arrangement and the harmony in the nature. I wonder at my own body in which I dwell, as the wonder of wonders, the functioning of its internal organs and external limbs and see Him with a sense of awe, bewilderment and surprise. This perhaps is the perception best suited to a common man, however abstract and obscure it might be. This abstract perception gives meaning to our lives and direction to us to reach our cherished destination.

10.0 KNOWING THE UNKNOWN

Those who believe in the existence of God also believe that He is not only unknown but also unknowable. That being so, many people question the very wisdom of running after something, which we know cannot be realized, fathomed or known. It is also said that even if He is perceived we cannot for certain vouch that what has been perceived is in reality God. On the face of it, this criticism and these apprehensions appear to be justified, but we need to go a little deeper and examine this problem of knowing the unknown. Take the case of earliest times, when man lived in small clusters, tribes and communes. Everything around him was unknown and even unknowable for him. Had he not made an effort to know, had he not been eager to know and had he not overcome all the hurdles faced by him in exploring the mysteries of the nature, the mankind would have been living in dark and the progress of centuries would not have been possible.

Edison, Bell, Newton, Marconi, Albert Einstein, Bertrand Russell and host of other scientists would not have been able to throw light on the cosmic phenomenon and explained it in that detail, had they given up making an effort by treating all this as unknowable. Our great sages would not have been able to reveal to us the secrets of the creation and the creator, had they not meditated, contemplated and utilized their intuitive powers for trying to know the unknown. Then there is another important aspect to it. Knowing what is already known is no big deal. Finding a person whose address is known is no challenge at all. The real challenge is finding a person whose whereabouts are unknown. The search itself is interesting and satisfying and once we find him, the achievement is rewarding and benefiting. I would like to quote here two couplets written by me in Urdu language. '*Bhala is justuju mein kis tarah se lutf aasakta, agar uska makan hota, agar uska nishan hota* – Pray how could this search for Him be so enchanting, if He had some mark or a specific house'. '*Mile ya na mile voh gham nahin hai, khushi is justuju mein kam nahin hai* – I am least bothered whether I find Him or not, for the search itself gives me a lot of pleasure and happiness'.

This unknown entity is so distant that we cannot see it through any telescope, however powerful. Yet it is so near that without taking a step this way or that way, we can spot Him anytime, anywhere. This unknowable is so minute that we cannot observe it even with the help of the finest microscope. Yet it is so gigantic and huge that we cannot view Him in totality all at once. He pervades the entire creation, animate and inanimate, humans, animal and vegetable kingdom, under and above water, in air and in ether as also in lunar and solar set up and the galaxies. Extroverts can see His splendour and majesty everywhere. Introverts find Him seated in them and revel in silent conversation with Him. Mysteries, coincidences and strange occurrences signal to us His omni-presence, omniscience and omnipotence. No implements and no instruments are needed to see Him. We can perceive

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Him if we have faith and vision and if we make an effort. Our sages made astronomical calculations and profound revelations about the cosmos without any instruments at their disposal by sheer intuitive powers. We are inheritors of their genius and mental strength. It should not be difficult for us to fathom the depths of this unknown and gauge the vastness of the unknowable. Logic and reason shall carry us up to a point beyond that these will be rendered helpless. Only faith and spiritual methods of seeking answers to the vexed and intricate questions about the unknown, will carry us further from that point and lead us to the ultimate truth about that, which we thought all long, was unknowable.

Coming to think of it, nothing is known. What is known is known only superficially and on surface. The intrinsic nature and inherent quality of nothing is known. We are always required to go into the depths of a thing to know its reality. Even people have masks on their faces and the real face behind the mask is not known. This is the situation of mundane and worldly things. Spiritual and transcendental things are more intricate and shroud in mystery. To make an effort to know them is more challenging as also rewarding. The scientists world over observe a phenomenon, discover its intricacies and modalities and then account for them. This gives birth to a scientific principle – a truth that is accepted as well reasoned and logical. After not very long, another batch of scientists account for this very phenomenon in a different way. They analyze it differently and come up with a different scientific theory and the previous theory is countermanded. The new revised and improved theory is also found to be logical and well reasoned till this also is negated by later scientific discoveries. Thus the scientific truth based on logic, reason and experimentation holds valid only for a certain period of time. This also clearly establishes that what we hold as known is not known conclusively at a point of time. What to speak of the spiritual phenomenon? That it is unknown and even unknowable is beyond doubt.

It has to be acknowledged that by the dint of their enormous intuitive spiritual powers, our ancient sages were able to fathom the mysterious world of the unknown. They admitted that there were different ways of looking at the truth, different angles of seeing it and that the same truth had different dimensions. This has given rise to different schools of thought and philosophy, different faiths and beliefs and different approaches. In order to know the unknown it is of paramount importance that the knower, the knowledge and that which is sought to be known come on to the same wave-length so that the vision is not blurred by the veil of ignorance and the view is lucid and clear. Having achieved this state of contemplation the path to know becomes smooth, easy and straight. But the cognition or knowledge in itself is not enough. It has to be backed by action, for the pure sciences are meaningless unless these are translated into action in the form of applied sciences. Application of knowledge is the key to living a meaningful life.

Sometimes we unknowingly know the unknown. A falling fruit pointed to the law of gravitation and the shaking lid on the boiling pot revealed the hidden energy of the steam. In the spiritual parlance if the unknown is revealed in a similar way it is termed as the grace

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of the preceptor, if there is one, or that of the Lord. Some people attribute it to the cumulative effect of the efforts put in during many past births, which have fructified now in the present birth. Whatever be the case, the unknown is revealed and that is what is desired. Sometimes we knowingly un-know the known. The jewel is before us and we are not able to identify it. The truth steers in our eyes but we fail to recognize it. This happens if we put in half-hearted effort. This happens if we are not serious about our purpose or lack faith in what we do. This happens if our resilience and steadfastness are shaky. Many of us apply mundane and worldly methods in trying to know the secrets of transcendent phenomenon. Since these do not work, we feel frustrated and give up the effort instead of rectifying the methodology. After all a piece of cloth needs a yardstick to be measured, whereas milk needs a measuring glass to be measured and the grain needs a weighing machine to find its weight. To find an area only two dimensions are needed but to find the volume we need three dimensions. Our sages have always held that the unknown is multi-dimensional. This fact has been demonstrated by allegoric representation of multi-faced gods. Ganesha is four-faced, Shiva is five-faced and Kumar Kartikeya is six-faced. There is another allegorical representation for knowing the unknown and that is the third eye of Shiva. This is the symbol of that vision, which has to be cultivated in order to know the unknown. With the normal human eye it is not possible to see the unknown. Shri Krishna had to give divine vision, '*Divya-drishti*' to Arjuna to enable him to see His magnificence, majesty and splendour.

It is the spirituality that puts us wise about multi-dimensional unknown. It is the spirituality that gives us divine vision to see the unknown. It is the spirituality that gives us access to the realm of the unknown and it is the spirituality that empowers us with contemplation, concentration and intuition in order to gain cognition of the unknown. One thing has to be made clear at this stage and that is that unknown is different from non-existent. The two should not be confused and mixed up. While the unknown exists and, therefore, can be thought of, the non-existent cannot be thought of at all. That which has no existence can never be conceived as it is outside the ambit of even the wildest imagination. So what we are talking about here is something that has an existence but is not known to us at a particular point of time. That something is desired to be known and for that an effort and a vision are needed. That which has no existence cannot be the truth and, ipso facto, it is not worth investigation or pursuit.

There is another aspect to this whole exercise. The unknown, by its very nature, is abstract and formless. Finding it is almost tantamount to asking the name of the nameless or the shape of the shapeless. It is something, which has to be felt, discerned or perceived. It can neither be seen with the naked eye nor touched physically. Had it been a flame we could see its dazzle and feel its heat. Had it been a light we could see its radiance and observe it flash. Those who have perceived it have not described it either because it defies description or because they were lost in the ecstasy of having known the unknown and thereby were

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beyond reach. This unknown is perhaps a state of pure bliss, which when we reach subsumes our very existence. We become bliss and cease to be 'we'.

11.0 THE GREAT TRANSITION

The other day I was reading an article written by one Swami Ji. He had remarked that had there been only Vedic and no Pauranic literature, the Hindu tradition would have become extinct. It is this literature, he emphasized, which has kept our religious beliefs and traditions alive and vibrant. This statement forced me to think over this assertion made by a spiritual luminary. I was particularly intrigued by this statement because I knew that at one important stage of our socio-religious history Swami Dayanand Saraswati had given a clarion call, 'Back to the Vedas' and had denounced, in a forceful manner, the Pauranic plating that had covered the centuries old Indian tradition based on the Vedas. The Vedas, which are the wellsprings of the Indic religion and culture, do not inculcate passivity. They are suffused with the spirit of adventure and daring, of flamboyance and vigour. Why then should the Swami Ji have made such a negative statement? Before examining and analyzing this let us find out what difference, if any, there is between the Vedic and the Pauranic thought with the resultant effect the two traditions have had on the Indian outlook on life and the Indian way of life.

If we see the corpus of the '*Nigamas*' or the Vedic literature, we find that two points stand out, one the '*Yajnas*' or the sacrificial fire and the second an intense desire in the Indian mind to live a complete life of at least hundred years. This is clear from the innumerable mantras relating to the sacred fire including the opening one, '*Agnimile purohitam ratnadatatam* – Let us bow to the sacred fire, which is our well wisher and the giver of wealth' and the following mantra '*Jeevema Shradah shatam* –Let me live a hundred years'. The sacrificial fire was so important that a complete and separate collection of mantras relating to '*yajnas*' was compiled by Krishna Dvaypayana Veda Vyasa in the form of '*Yajur Veda*'. Besides, the specialists of all the four Vedas were involved in this ritual. The Rig-Vedi called '*Hota*' would recite the mantras at the time of this ritual and the Yajur-Vedi called '*Adhwaryu*' would actually perform the ritual. The Sama-Vedi as '*Udgata*' would sing the mantras and the Atharva-Vedi as '*Brahman*' would engage in overall supervision of the entire proceeding. This ritual was a multi-purpose one and the two prominent purposes were to purify the atmosphere and to inculcate an attitude of sacrifice and renunciation in the society. Life was important and there was keenness to live a complete and fruitful life and contribute to the common good of the society. There was no escapism, no negative attitude and no illusion about the life's realities. In fact the hurdles and obstacles of life were recognized and identified and the ways and means to combat them and overcome them were also indicated. The various elements of the nature were enumerated and their importance for human life was also underscored.

In due course of time, however, the ritualistic and mundane aspects of the Vedic thought went into background and the philosophic contents enunciated in the culmination of the

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Vedas called 'Vedanta' gained prominence. The Brahma Sutra of Badarayana Vyasa and the Upanishads together with their quintessence in the form of Bhagavad Gita, together called '*Prasthan Trayi*', became the pivotal literature for sages and thinkers, philosophers and seekers to analyze, interpret, expound and elaborate. The result was that the tradition started getting distant and unreachable for a common man. The philosophy about the creation, the creator and their mutual relationship became the main subjects of discussion. This gave rise to various schools of thought in the form of non-dualism, dualism, qualified monism and dualism in non-dualism, propounded by the great Acharyas, Gaudpada, Shankara, Madhva, Ramanuja, Nimbaraka, Vallabhacharya and others.

While '*Jnana*' or the knowledge gained prominence one significant thing that emerged and gained popularity was '*Pooja*' with '*Bhakti*'. These attracted the common man and the result was that '*Pooja*' virtually replaced '*Yajna*'. Contemplation, concentration and introspection remained the forte of selected seekers and devotion spread like wild fire among the masses and penetrated the psyche of the common man. A big boost to this transition from '*Yajna*' to '*Pooja*' was given by the Pauranic literature. The allegorical stories and fables, the description of the lives of Vishnu in His different incarnations, particularly that of Shri Rama and Shri Krishna and the description of Lord Shiva in His serene splendour attracted the common man. This literature molded his life, made it meaningful and gave it a purpose and also provided a direction towards divinity and laid down the moral and ethical code of conduct for him. The religion was not a dogma or a set of tenets and beliefs but a way of life. In between the Buddhist theology had also affected the Indic thought process with the result that the intense desire to live a hundred years of the Vedic period was replaced by a craving to get release from the cycle of birth and death called '*Moksha*' or '*Nirvana*'. Even so this change was confined to a selected few, while the common man was still interested to live and live a pious and truthful life with faith and devotion.

This need of the common man was fulfilled by the vast Pauranic literature that was conceived and written over a long period. Through the medium of illustrative stories of sages and kings, demons and Rakhshasas, animals and birds and a host of other groups of humans and non-humans, basic tenets of life, principles of morality and laws of ethics were brought home to this common man, who had an urge to know and be guided to live a peaceful life. The common man remained engaged in his normal life but the worship and devotion, or '*Pooja*' and '*Bhakti*' steered the boat of his life in the right direction. Religion for him was a two-tier business. At the higher and personal level it was his relationship with the Divine and at the lower and public level it was his relationship with his fellow beings. In the first case he treated the Divine, whether personal or impersonal, as his saviour, guide and arbiter of his actions with the result that he willingly surrendered to Him and accepted the ups and downs of his life as His will. He conceived Him with a definite form of his liking, worshipped Him in his individual way, which he thought would please Him and demanded from Him whatever he desired and needed. If he got it, he took it as His grace and benign kindness and if he did not, he ascribed it to his own shortcomings, either faulty actions or

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deficiency in worship. In the second case he realized his duties to his fellow beings, to the society and to the world at large. He conducted himself with responsibility, a sense of duty and out of love and compassion. He related to the fellow humans, other species, nature and everything under the Sun with care, compassion, understanding and the dignity of being the best of the creation. Mutual trust and mutual faith and the common good became the hallmarks of his conduct and behaviour.

This great transition from Vedic yajnas to post Vedic devotion and worship was very significant in that it transformed the very fabric of life in this sub-continent. Devotion was a new approach – a substitute for ritual performance. Devotion meant reliance on a personal god for attaining the ultimate goal. Pooja, as opposed to yajna presupposed images of godheads and a personal relationship with them. The deity was obviously conceived of as a combination of the three, the creator, the preserver and the destroyer. The institution of '*Nitya-agnihotri*' – daily ritual of sacrificial fire gave way to '*Nitya pooja, archana*' – daily worship and a strong current of devotion called the '*Bhakti*' movement swept the nation. From Guru Nanak in the West to Chaitanya Maha Prabhu in the East, from Kabir in the North to Valluvar in the South (incidentally both weavers) sages and savants spread a message of love and compassion, piety and purity and a complete surrender unto God. Whereas the priests nurtured the tradition of yajna, the sages carried forward the tradition of bhakti.

In our own valley of Kashmir, a galaxy of saints and sages appeared on the scene and influenced the life pattern of the common Kashmiri. Not long ago, Bhagavaan Gopi Nath, fondly called Bab, though less communicative and open, also influenced a multitude of his devotees to lead a life of seeking and service, seeking spiritual elevation by '*Sadhana*' or a disciplined spiritual exercise and service of the '*Janata Janardan*' or the common man. In three crisp words of '*Sezar, Shozar, Pazar*' i.e; straightforwardness, purity and truthfulness, he laid down the parameters of human behaviour that will lead us on to a divine path. In his physical form he guided many fortunate persons, sometimes by a word or two, sometimes by a mere touch and sometimes by his penetrating glance. In his astral form also he came to the rescue of many a lucky person by giving a direction, sometimes in his dream, sometimes in his thought and sometimes in his contemplation. That he showed the path of emancipation to many, that he came to the rescue and guided our security forces when the national security was at stake and that he cured many from serious ailments and delayed deaths, though important in themselves cannot be counted as his main contribution. His greatness lies in the fact that he constantly influences our thoughts, inspires us to lead pious lives and thereby gives a new character to our community and to the humanity at large. This eternal message of his, if converted into a mass movement and implemented with a missionary zeal, can create a new world order. That then will make the great transition from Vedic ritualism and post Vedic philosophy to Pauranic worship and devotion, which has been explained above, meaningful and the religion will not remain confined to some selected few but will cover the entire humanity and make life worth living.

12.0 A MATTER OF PERFECTION

I read a quotation in a national daily paper, which read 'You were born an original. Don't die a copy'. I pondered over the quotation. Does every one of us have originality? If yes, does it mean that every one of us is perfect in himself? And if that were the case, why do we say that perfection is the name of God and nobody in this world is perfect. This thought in turn lead me to dwell on the concept of perfection. I wanted to analyze what was meant by this word, what was its purport and what was its connotation.

Normally we say that only God is perfect because He has unlimited powers to desire, know and act and He is unrestricted in His functions of Creation, Sustenance, Destruction, Enfolding and Unfolding. We the humans, on the other hand, can desire, know and act within certain limitations of time and space. Similarly our functions of creation, sustenance and destruction are circumscribed by all sorts of limitations of different nature. That being so the question that arises is whether we can claim to be perfect. In this connection we cannot ignore another important saying that has come down to us from the Vedic times. '*Puram-adah purnam-idam purnat purnam udachyate, purnasya purnam-adaya purnam-eva-avashishyate* – This entire here is verily a complete whole. Adding something to it or by subtracting something from it do not affect its wholeness; it still remains a complete whole'. This dictum gives us some hope that may be every individual is perfect by himself. This needs, therefore to be examined in detail.

First of all let us figure out what is meant by perfection. In case perfection is deemed to be an end product, nothing can be found to be perfect. For every person, every place, every thing and every aspect of life suffers from one deficiency or the other. Once the deficiency is made good or it is removed another deficiency or shortcoming crops up. So at no point of time can one claim to be perfect. It is perhaps in this context that Sartre has said that 'Man has been made inherently empty. And he is always in a quest to fill himself or keep himself occupied with something or the other. You might call it boredom but it's one and the same thing. Anguish, humdrum ennui, the blahs, listlessness...., which is why we have a constant need to invent and then reinvent'. Should, however, perfection be considered to be a process, everything, every place, every single living being and every aspect of one's life will appear to be perfect at a given point of time. With this notion of perfection we can derive lasting pleasure and continue to strive for perfection at every step of our life.

In the well known '*Kundalini Yoga*' the existence of a person is said to comprise seven distinct '*Chakras*', which give him a sense of possession and love, power of action, feeling, communication, perception and knowledge. These faculties control his body systems of excretion, reproduction, digestion, circulation, respiration and the autonomic and central nervous systems. Coming to think of it, these faculties and systems together go to make a

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perfect person. Man does appear to be a machine, a perfect machine at that but it is neither a robot nor a computer. It is a mysterious creation endowed with head and heart, the centers of intellect and feeling. With these faculties and with the help of various internal and external organs this mysterious creation, the human being is able to function in a perfect manner within his sphere of activities that are his forte. In this sense he is perfect no doubt.

In the Indian tradition the span of life of a person taken as a hundred years, is divided into four sections of twenty-five years each. These sections are 1. The period of celibacy and acquiring knowledge called '*Brahmacharya*', 2. The period of householder and acquiring wealth, during which the gained knowledge is to be applied in his life called '*Grihasta*', 3. The period of spiritual uplift and seeking Truth called '*Vanaprastha*' and 4. The period of detachment during which the acquired spiritual knowledge is disseminated in the society and an effort is made to spread the message of Truth for the good of mankind, called '*Sanyasa*'. If we were to examine these sections of the life span of a human being it would be clear that each section could be self-contained, complete and satisfying by accomplishing what is expected of him to be achieved during that section of the life.

Let us start with the first section of celibacy and learning. During this period we are required to gain as much knowledge as possible from our teachers and preceptors. We remain celibate and concentrate on acquiring knowledge and engage in an effort of all round development, physically, mentally, intellectually and spiritually. With due regard to his acumen, capacity and capability every single person gains knowledge, awareness and skill in one field or the other. Having achieved that, one can safely claim to be perfect within the limitations one has to encounter during this first span of life.

In the second stage we engage in earning wealth, bringing up a family and living a utilitarian life of an important member of the society. We apply our gained knowledge and expertise to our assigned task, contribute to the common good of the mankind and play an important role in the socio-economic development of our society, our country and the world at large. Here we have to remember that every single member of the family and the society contributes significantly to the common good. He may derive many benefits and advantages but his inputs are also there for others to benefit from. No job is inferior or superior per se and the sum total of all the jobs is what decides the direction in which we are collectively heading. It is exactly like a machine in which a large assembly or an important component is as vital as a small screw or a tiny rivet that holds them together. In the same manner every person performs a role, which is at once significant and indispensable. With this limited purpose of the role of a person in view, he can safely be considered to be complete in himself.

The third stage is perhaps individualistic, as during this period one has to strive for spiritual uplift and search for the Supreme truth, which in the parlance of the Indian philosophy

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coincides with self-realization. Here again if man derives utmost satisfaction and pleasure from the effort rather than from the achievement, he can be contented at every step, while simultaneously remaining engaged in the search for his goal. In other words he will feel a sense of perfection at every step of his search for the truth. Since various paths prescribed for this search like Knowledge, Action and Devotion or '*Jnana, Karma and Bhakti*' are complementary to each other, the seeker is bound to feel a sense of perfection at every stage of his spiritual quest, simultaneously feeling an urge to know and achieve more.

The fourth stage is a personification of perfection by the very nature of this stage. In the first place it calls for an absolute detachment, which ipso facto, gives perfection to an individual. You do not need anything, so you are a monarch of yourself. In the second place, during this stage a person is required to spread the universal message of truth and guide the fellow humans on the path of righteousness. Nothing can be more satisfying than this selfless service to the humanity and satisfaction is the closest definition of the word perfection. Thus we have seen that going by the traditional division of the life span into four distinct segments, a person can attain perfection in each segment and claim to be perfect.

If we look at human life from a more modern perspective we will find that whereas on the one hand the life has become more materialistic and is beset with commercialism and consumerism, on the other hand man has adopted a more scientific outlook and has recognized the importance of the spirit and the consciousness. This gives him satisfaction in whatever he achieves with a thirst for achieving better heights. Along with the toil and effort man has visualized that leisure, entertainment and rest are also equally important and during these periods a rich food for mind, intellect and spirit can be obtained and enjoyed. There was a time when pleasure was sought to be derived from marijuana, LSD, brown sugar and other drugs, particularly in the West, but now more and more people are taking to yoga, spiritual exercises, music and other healthy forms of recreation and relaxation. In this transformation a significant contribution has been that of the influence of the Indian philosophy, which traveled across the oceans through some prominent saints, musicians and other personalities. This again has given a purpose and meaning to living and inculcated a sense of fullness among the people.

Perfection cannot and perhaps should not be measured or viewed in the totality of one's life. We should find perfection in a man's life in different segments of his existence. The same person would have made a significant contribution at one time and committed a blunder at another. If we view his life on the whole we will brand him as imperfect and rightly so. But if we examine his life in different stages we will unhesitatingly say that he has been perfect at times and imperfect at other times. Wittingly or unwittingly man fixes some goals for his life. Once the goal is achieved another goal is fixed. In achieving these sometimes he meets with success and sometimes with failure. The success and the failure may not always be due to his personal ability or shortcomings alone. The circumstances may be favourable at times and unfavourable at other times. A close examination will show that he was perfect so far as

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his own effort, intelligence and acumen were concerned. The result was affected by other factors, beyond his powers and control.

We in India believe in transmigration of soul and the theory of '*Karma*', which says that we are cast in a particular mold due to the actions of our previous births. We also believe that with the help of the actions of the present birth we can change the effect of the actions of the previous births significantly for better or for worse. That being so, we adopt certain functions and duties to be carried out to the best of our abilities and within the limitations of the frame work in which we function. If every stage, every portion of his life, every day and even every moment of his life is taken as an independent entity we shall find a person perfect and complete without any cause for complaint about any deficiency or want. Even so human reason is so perfectly fashioned that there is no room for any sense of limitation. About the limitation Rajaji has very lucidly stated in the following words: 'This limitation of human knowledge is a familiar boundary in scientific and philosophical investigations. Dive into any truth or investigate any phenomenon or examine any distinction deep enough, and at a certain point we reach the unknowable.' Mahadevi Verma, the renowned poetess of Hindi has explained yet another dimension of human life. 'Many facets of this world are so mysterious that they seem incomprehensible and we are unable to rationalize them. Only the emotional side of our nature is able to perceive truths that are beyond logic, and can thus make them decipherable to society. The communication of a society's values comes to us in this way and literature creates and preserves these values.'

All this goes to show that perfection is a relative term and suddenly the oft-quoted example of a half-filled glass of water comes to one's mind. A person seeing the water observes that the glass is full of water and the one seeing the void observes that it is empty. Much, therefore, depends on our vision and attitude. Life is neither perfect nor imperfect in itself. It is definitely perfect if we see it that way. This perfection makes every individual unique and original. Every one should preserve this uniqueness and originality and try to be his own self without any attempt to ape or imitate any one else lest he should lose his originality and become a copy. In whatever sphere we are, we can have our ideals or role models but we must avoid becoming their duplicates. It is not for nothing that the Vedas have proclaimed '*Manushyat parataram na-anything* – There is nothing beyond a man'. This clearly establishes the supremacy of human beings, which is nothing but perfection. The Vedas have defined a man as '*Amritasya putrah*', which places a man at the high pedestal of immortality. What is immortal has to be perfect by the very nature of the immortality. We are, therefore, perfect no doubt but we have to be aware of this fact and have to seek perfection within ourselves. Fullness or perfection is there within us for us to realize and perceive.

13.0 HOW DOES GOD ACT

The other day I was watching an interview with a bishop telecast on the BBC. The reverend bishop made a statement that 'God acts through the church'. This statement made me think about this whole question of the acts of God. The bishop was answering certain questions, which have cropped up lately about the church, the conduct of those running the church and the desirable attitude of the Fathers and Nuns of the Church towards marriage and different aspects of sexual behaviour in their personal lives. The questions raised were whether they should be allowed to marry or asked to remain bachelors and spinsters throughout their lives, what should be their views about homosexuality, and whether they can be justified in having sexual relationship in spite of their lives having been dedicated to the service of God through the church. While I would not like to offer my views on these aspects so far as the Christian institutions are concerned, I would like to examine the broader question arising out of the statement made by the Bishop as to the manner in which God acts.

Does God need institutions through which to act? If He does, is it the church alone through which He chooses to act? And then what about those sections of the society, which have no institutionalized religious and principles? How does God reach them or how does He act in relation to them? The institution of the church is after all only two millennia old. How did God act before that or was He inactive then? Besides another question that arises is what after all is meant by God's act.

God's acts are manifold. He creates, maintains, manages and controls the creation, and then destroys the creation in that form. He conceals and enfolds. He reveals and unfolds and above all He showers His grace. All these acts of His are independent of any institution. These acts take place constantly, regularly, orderly and in a cyclic pattern governed largely by the principles of cause and effect, action and reaction and other universal principles of nature. Besides these, there are manmade principles based on ethics, morality, and code of conduct and intellectual acumen of the mankind. It is these principles that are institutionalized for different religious groups, different ethnic societies and different cultural sections and communities. Obviously, therefore, various institutions regulate the acts governed by these man-made principles for different sections and groups of people. To give respectability and authority to these principles and to the acts governed by them, and to make them acceptable, the institutions concerned claim that it is God's command and that God acts through their institutions. If all the institutions accept that God acts through their institutions and the institutions of other faiths, there will be order in the world and the notion of superiority and inferiority will go. But in practical life we see that it is not so. Every institution claims that that is the only genuine representative of God and all the rest are fake and false. This false notion causes strife and animosity in spite of the fact that all these

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institutions portray that they stand for truth, piety, justice and basic human values and rights.

To the mankind at large God is at once personal and impersonal. When He is worshipped and invoked for His grace, He is personal. When He is meditated upon, when He is sought after, to be realized and to be reached, He is impersonal. In His personal form He acts within the limitations of the form that He assumes with occasional miracles and supernatural feats. All this He does directly and visibly although the miracles and supernatural feats do create bewilderment and astonishment in the minds of the ordinary folk. In His impersonal form He acts within the laws of nature framed by Him and, ipso facto, there is no deviation or variation. Every thing goes in a cyclic way in a system of cause and effect. The atheists, the scientists and the logicians point out to this factor and conclude that there is no Supreme Authority to control the events, which occur logically as a result of certain apparent reasons.

In the philosophical parlance of India two distinct but inseparable aspects of God have been postulated, '*Purusha*' or Person and '*Prakriti*' or Nature. The former is personal and the latter impersonal but it is the latter that creates and sustains the universe. This impersonal aspect is illusive and creates mystery in the working of the nature. It acts in a scientific manner with inbuilt mechanism of the system, order and energy required to ensure a smooth and automatic functioning in the cosmos. There is no confusion, chaos or conflict but there is no visible hand to control. It is so because God acts through '*Prakriti*' or nature. According to the Gita this nature of God is of two types, Subtle or higher called '*Para*' and Gross or lower called '*Apara*'. The gross nature is eightfold, comprising five basic external elements of earth, water, fire, air and ether and the three internal elements of mind, intellect and the 'I'-consciousness. All these elements have their properties and, therefore, they function within those properties in an orderly manner. Even where the second law of Thermodynamics about disorder applies, a pattern and a method are observed in the disorder as well. The functioning of this nature is so perfect that in the similar circumstances same cause produces the same results invariably and without exception.

The subtle nature is that nature of God by which He sustains the entire creation, animate and inanimate. This nature also follows certain predetermined universal and consistent laws. Once we perceive these laws and their consistency, universality and order we can comprehend the splendour and grandeur of the Supreme God. It appears that God, through his subtle nature referred to in Gita as '*Para Prakriti*', provides the impetus, impulse, order and a guiding law and then leaves everything to the unfolding of this law. It is because of this that the processes of nature do not cater to the convenience of the individuals or groups of people. Once there is a cause, the effect must follow. This is the essence of the law of actions called '*Karma*', which by its nature applies uniformly at all times, at all places and in similar circumstances. These laws are not only, fixed, universal and eternal but these

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are also spontaneously self-acting. The energy for this nature to operate comes from God and does not need replenishing externally nor does it get exhausted.

Thus we have seen that God acts through these two types of '*Prakriti*', subtle and gross. The laws are firm, universal, self-operating and uniform. Not everything about these laws is knowable and much less is predictable. '*Prakriti*' it seems, judges man's actions also and the results follow. However, it has to be noted that God has provided this superior-most specie called human being, a heart capable of care, feeling and love and an intellect capable of thinking, evaluating and judging. Obviously human beings act neither like a computer nor like a robot. It is, therefore, possible for a human being to reinforce, alter or modify and indeed even cancel the results of his actions by his further well-judged actions with due regard to his head and heart. The three H's, head, heart and hands have to act in unison for better and desired results. It is the action that matters not mere prayer or meditation unsupported by proper action.

Having said all this and observed the functioning of nature one cannot overlook the factor of grace, which many a time works wonders and manifests in miracles. Our scriptures are replete with stories of devotees realizing their objectives, sages working miracles, saints performing acts of wonder and seers relieving people of their sufferings and pain. In our day-to-day life also we observe happenings, which do not conform to the logic of a rational mind. These facts point to a Supreme Power, which accepts our prayers and worship and showers His benign grace on the chosen few.

In our times we have seen Bhagavaan Gopi Nath Ji, who performed miracles that defied logic. He enabled his chosen devotees see the Goddess in the form of a small girl and have a glimpse of Shiva and Parvati at the holy cave of Amarnath. He delayed the death of a father so that the marriage of his daughter is solemnized unhindered. He warded off the clouds in order to ensure safe journey for his loved ones. He guided the armies to fight out the battles and drive away the invaders and enemies. This was his way of showering grace on those who were pure of heart and mind. Bhagavaan Ji has made it clear that for success, both material and spiritual, two factors are essential, human effort and divine grace. God showers His grace through saints and sages, who have perceived Him and have access to Him. Our beloved Bab had direct access to God and could ask Him to do anything at his behest. But all this he did for the benefit of devotees, who had three qualities of straightforwardness, truth and purity, prescribed by him. The innumerable instances of such miracles of Bab Bhagavaan narrated by different people point out to this important fact that apart from the universal laws of nature through which God acts, there is yet another way in which He acts and that is His '*Anugrah*' or grace. This medium of God's actions follows no rules, is governed by no logic and has no set or definite pattern.

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But grace is something that has to be deserved and not desired. We shall deserve His grace and be the rightful recipients of that grace only if our actions of thought, word and deed are pious and pure and if we have unflinching faith in our saviour, our beloved Bab. We must strive for spiritual uplift and serve our less fortunate brethren with love and humility. This, in short is the message of Bhagavaan Ji and this will enable us to experience this unique way in which God acts by showering His grace to relieve us of pain and suffering and lift us spiritually, which is the ultimate aim of a true seeker.

14.0 GOD, AS AN ARTIST

The other day I read an article in my daily paper wherein the author had explained why God in his Shiva form had chosen to be a dancer, '*Nataraja*' and not a poet or a painter and the like. This prompted me to ponder over God and His features. To me it seems that God is a multifaceted artist. He not only excels in various art forms but also can be a role model to mortals like us to pursue any art form with aplomb. In His capacity as the creator He assumes all forms of artists and produces a variety of artistic marvels. He is a painter par excellence. After the dark or starry night when it dawns a flood of colours covers the horizon. Preceding the Sunrise, He paints different colours, yellow, orange, pink, crimson, red and host of others in abundance, one after the other. Once the Sun appears all the seven colours get subsumed and a blanket of spotless white covers the universe. Sometimes he paints with rainwater, sometimes with clouds, sometimes with snowflakes and other times with a shower of hails.

This deft artist paints on every possible canvas; only a discerning eye is needed to see the painting and appreciate the art as also the message it conveys. Look at the flying birds in the sky or those hopping from one branch of a tree to the other. Look at their wings, feathers, beaks and necks. Look at the colour scheme, designs, patterns and you will be filled with awe and wonder. Then have a wider look at the flowers, tree-leaves, petals, pods and numerous saplings. You will observe innumerable shades of the green, the blue, the red, the pink, the jasmine and the purple et al. No two creations are alike, no two patterns are the same and no two designs are matching. There is a perfect symmetry, a pleasing harmony and an enchanting brush work on all these canvases, which forces us to applaud the unseen hand of this master craftsman. If you see from the earth below during night, you can see a huge canvas of the sky and the Moon, the stars and the galaxies painted thereon. During a cloudy day the same canvas is painted with clouds, forming varieties of figures, shapes and frescoes with a seven-coloured and enchanting rainbow bordering the huge canvas. If you see from the sky above, you can observe the picturesque landscapes of green, red and grey patches with a network of blue waterways as also vast spans of water in blue, green and grey with foaming waves and an assortment of islands. If you travel by an aircraft flying above the clouds, you can see an unending canvas of the space painted by this deft artist in white, blue and grey. You will marvel gazing the variety of subjects, variety of techniques and variety of colour combinations in these paintings, soothing to the eyes and transmitting an immortal message to the spirit.

God is no less a musician, an innovative musician at that. He is a vocalist par excellence, if you have the capacity to hear the '*Anaahata Naada*' or the soundless sound. This music can be enjoyed both externally and internally. If you go inwards, the music is audible from within the depths of your soul. If you relate to the nature, you can hear music from all sources, reverberating in your ears, sometimes as '*Mantras*', sometimes as divine '*shlokas*' and other times just the sacred letter 'OM' conveying the message that everything

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here is verily pervaded by God. As regards God as an instrumentalist, well this is apparent at every step of our life. We can see a variety of musical instruments and enjoy a variety of musical notes and compositions, soothing to our body and soul. At the seashore you will hear the music from the ebb and fall of tides, tossing waves and surging waters. At the foothills you will hear the fast, '*Drutta*' music of the gushing waters and the torrents of the mountain rivulets and the brooks. In the plains the calm flowing waters of large rivers will put you in a trance with their soothing slow, '*Vilambit*' music. Go to a forest or enter a garden full of trees, you will hear different musical instruments in the form of the chirping of different birds, their echoing sounds and musical notes. If you want to enjoy the beat of multiple drums all that you have to do is to wait for a cloudy day and listen to the musical thunder of the clouds preceded by the flashing lightning. In the musical instruments of the nature you will hear all sorts of notes, high and low, fast and slow, thundering and scintillating. These are so loud at times that you cannot but listen to them even with shut ears and so low and feeble at times that you have to lend your ears with effort and full attention. This music is rich in notes and beats both and is a treat for the soul and the spirit.

God can be perceived as a master sculptor also. The universe, the cosmos and all that is visible to a human eye are the creation of this great sculptor. His hands are so deft in making sculptures that no two pictures resemble each other. Look at the variety of beings, species and humans; look at the tiniest insect and biggest giant-sized animals, look at the species in and under water, winged birds flying in the sky, four-legged animals running on the ground, human beings of different makes and models, of different races, white, yellow and black and you will find the unseen hand of the great sculptor, who has designed them and modeled them. These sculptures are varied in shape and size, different in form and character and multifarious in colours. In creating these, God has given life to innumerable ideas, postulates, propositions and principles. Some of them are apparently deficient in some limbs and faculties but there is a strong and deep message in these apparent shortcomings. Some of them are beautiful and pretty and some are shabby and ugly. Again there is a method in this differentiation. It gives expression to finest and deepest thoughts, which are profound and prolific. It teaches us to find unity in diversity. It enjoins upon us to understand that all the differences are external and, therefore, superficial only and the real and intrinsic essence is one in every form of God's creation. It lends justification to the theories of transmigration of soul and '*Karma*' or the effects of past deeds carried forward from previous births. It gives meaning to the message that we must be pure in thought, word and deed to ensure a smooth and meaningful life.

God is also seen as an expert dancer. He has been conceived as '*Nataraja*', the king of dancers in Indian mythology. He dances in the cosmos and thereby manifests in the entire creation. It is in this form that He desired to manifest as many. Said He, '*Ekoham bahu syami* – I am one; let me become many' and created the universe. His dance of destruction, called '*Tandava*', spells doom and death and lets the hell loose when He desires to annihilate His own creation. His dance is unique and significant in as much as it portrays creation by some gestures and destruction by some other gestures. His one hand rises in benign form to give us fearlessness, '*Abhaya*'. His other hand dangles in gracious form to

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fulfill our desires, '*Anugraha*'. This is strictly in accordance with what the Lord has said in the Bhagavad Gita, '*Tesham nityabhi-yukhtanam yoga-kshemam vahami- aham* – Those who are all the time attached to me, I protect what they have and give them what they need'. His feet dance in tune with the cosmic world with rhythm and beats. His raised foot gives fright to the wrong doers and the lowered foot gives solace to the devotees.

God is also an artistic player. The entire creation and the whole of cosmos is said to be his sport or '*Leela*' as it is called in Indian philosophical parlance. All the aspects of His engaged in creation, sustenance and destruction, '*Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesha*' are puppets in His hands. He uses His own inseparable energy aspect called '*Shakti*' or '*Prakriti*' at will, as a tool to organize, control and command the entire cosmos in an orderly way and ensures that everything goes on in an unending cycle of cause and effect. The great Hindi poet and sage Sant Tulsī Das has said it in a beautiful manner. '*Jag pekhan tum vekhanhare, Vidhi Hari Shambhu nachavanhare* – The world is a theatrical show and you are the lone audience. You only make the trio of Brahma, Vishnu and Shambhu dance to your tune'. No wonder that one of the names given to God is '*Leeladhar*' or the master sportsman.

When I see this master artist, whom we identify as God, in action creating different art forms I am simply spell bound. I realize the significance of different schools of Indian philosophy. When He dances as '*Nataraja*', He depicts oneness and inseparable nature of the creator and the creation and thereby justifies monism or non-dualism of Shankaracharya. When He engages in painting pictures, designing sculptures and trying His hand at brushes and pencils, he shows His creation different and separate from Himself and thereby justifies dualism of Madhvacharya. Sometimes we see Him and His existence of its own. This perception justifies qualified monism of Ramanujacharya. Similarly all these art forms of this specialist artist denote the principles of other schools of philosophy propounded by Vallabhacharya and others. The awe and wonder with which we see His arts ultimately inspires us to surrender unto Him in order to achieve a position of supreme bliss, '*Ananda*'. This inspires us to take to the path of devotion and love. These art forms also clarify that there is no conflict or contradiction in different ideologies. These are all relevant and valid sometime or the other depending perhaps, on the level of consciousness of a seeker at that particular time or on the capacity, caliber or the inclination of the individual seeker. Let us not, therefore, get involved in an unnecessary debate on the relative merit of these ideologies and confine ourselves in perceiving God in whatever way we can and try and raise ourselves to a level of divinity, where we can see Him and appreciate His art.

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15.0 UNION & SEPARATION

Human existence can be viewed in many different ways. It has layers over layers. It has facets behind facets. It has aspects after aspects. Depending upon what we intend to examine about this existence, what we desire to know about this existence we look at it from a particular angle. To me it seems that in all such examinations one thing stands out and that is that there are two prominent, inter-related and inter-dependent sides of this existence, one relating to the body and the other relating to the soul. The importance of the body cannot be over-emphasized for only after the soul is embodied do we come into existence. It is the body that has motor organs, which make our existence operational. It is the body that has sense organs, which make our existence meaningful and connect us with sense-objects. It is the body that has a mind and a heart, which make our existence compassionate, kind and caring. It is the body that has an intellect, which makes our existence thoughtful, discriminatory and evaluating. It is the body that has various faculties, which make union after separation and separation after union possible.

Coming to think of it, unless there is union there can be no separation and without separation union is unthinkable. The individual soul is separated from the universal soul. Once he realizes that he has been separated from the source and feels the pangs of separation, he begins to strive to regain his lost union and oneness with the source. It is here that the soul enters the realm of spirituality. He finds that there are a number of ways to regain this union and chooses the one that is best suited to his caliber and temperament. He traverses a long distance and travels miles after miles of this spiritual journey. On the way he comes across a number of milestones but he does not get any solace at these midway-resting places. He keeps his journey continuous, sustained and in progress. He may stop for a while, take stock of the situation at the milestone reached and draw his own conclusions at that point of time and place. This gives him an insight into various schools of philosophies and faiths propounded from time to time. If he halts his advancement there, he holds that particular philosophy and belief, which he envisages at that point, as valid and true. If he continues with his search, he comes across new strata and new levels of spiritual quest and new vistas of knowledge open up before this seeker of truth.

Thus it is clear that the realization of the separation and the vivid and intense feeling that he has been separated work as inspiration for the seeker and motivate him to strive for the reunion. This journey, from the point when he gets this realization of having been separated to the point where he gets reunited, is a fascinating journey. It gives an insight into various philosophies, faiths, beliefs and approaches. It shows how the truth can be and is often seen in different hues at different stages. It gives the rationale behind different outlooks and justifies these words of the Vedic Rishi, '*Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti* - The truth is one and the wise describe it in different ways'. There is a beautiful metaphor one can take help

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from to illustrate this phenomenon of union and separation. The great ocean is the storehouse of water. The heat of the Sun converts the water into vapours, which rise towards the sky and due to the atmospheric conditions become clouds. The clouds break open and cause rain and this rainwater feels the pangs of separation from its source, the ocean. It gets restless in order to go and get again merged with its source. It takes the form of brooks and rivulets and rushing torrents. It joins mountain streams and meets small and big rivers and flowing and winding finds its way towards the ocean, either directly or through bays and seas. It has, therefore, been well said, '*Akashat patitam toyam sagaram prati gacchati* - the water that has fallen from the sky runs towards the ocean'. This is exactly the situation of the individual soul. It has got disunited from the universal soul, its source and at one stage it realizes the fact of having been separated and starts making an effort to rejoin the source. This aim to get reunited becomes its goal and destination and the quest to achieve the reunion becomes its life-activity. Had it not been embodied it would not have been separated. Still the body should not be flawed for this state of separation because had it not been embodied it would not get the realization of separateness nor would it be in a position to work for reunion. Body is thus an important instrument for realization and effort, both.

Soul is of primary importance for it is the soul that gets separated and it is the soul that gets united. The body is no less important either, for it is through the body that the separation is realized and the reunion is strived for. Once the reunion is achieved the soul is liberated but the feeling of the liberation also comes through the body. Thus both the sides of our existence, the body and the soul, are vital and important. The body may be perishable, '*Kshara*' and the indwelling soul may be imperishable, '*Akshara*' yet the two are of paramount importance for the spiritual uplift. Let us not ignore one for the other. Both need to be nurtured. After all the body is visible and the soul is not, the body is apparent and the soul is hidden, the body is gross and the soul is subtle. The Gita calls the body as '*Kshetra*' or the field and the soul as '*Kshetrajna*' or the knower of the field. Unless the importance of the field is accepted, the question of trying to know the field and identifying the knower will not arise. Whereas the knower is important, that which is to be known is no less important. The whole phenomenon of union, separation and reunion is related to both the aspects of our existence, the body and the soul. The Rishi of the Vedas advises us to pray, '*Jeevema sharadah shatam* - Let us live a hundred autumns'. Autumn refers to the old age and by inference to the maturity. So we must aspire to live a hundred mature years in order to endeavour to know the truth, the secret of our existence, the path of righteousness and dos and don'ts of our life. The epic says, '*Dharmasya tatvam nihitam guhayam* - The secret of duty and righteousness is hidden deep in the cave (of discrimination, wisdom and intellect)'. The Gita says, '*Kim karma kim akarmeti kavayo'pi atra mohitah* - What should and what should not be done, even the wise are baffled at deciding this'.

While discussing this phenomenon of union, separation and reunion, we should not ignore the basic fact that this phenomenon is imaginary and not real. How can the waves be

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separated from the ocean when they are all the time within it? The Ishavasya Upanishad says, '*Ishavasyam-idam sarvam yat kinchid jagatyam jagat* - Whatever there is in this universe is pervaded by God'. The Gita says, '*Mayi sarvam idam protam sutre manigana iva* - Everything here is stung in Me (God) like pearls on a string'. In view of this it can safely be concluded that the state of union exists always and it is an eternal situation. Separation is, therefore, an illusion and unreal situation. The illusion or '*Maya*' as it is called, puts a veil of ignorance on our eyes and we perceive a state of being separated, while we are all the time united. At sometime or the other we are vividly conscious of this perception and then we find ways and means of reunion. Whatever means we adopt, the effort is to ward off the veil of ignorance and clear the vision. When the vision gets cleared we regain our consciousness and attain the state of union once again. The state of oneness is all along there. We are always in a situation of communion. It is only that the realization dawns on us that we are actually in union with the Supreme and that the perception of separation was only an illusion. This realization is what is termed as liberation or emancipation. We are liberated from the ignorance, from the illusion and from the false perception. But this liberation is not everybody's cup of tea. The Gita also says, '*Vasudevah sarvam-iti sa mahatma sudurlabhah* - Such a noble soul is difficult to find which perceives God everywhere (and by implication sees the individual soul always in communion with the Universal Soul)'. This was exactly the situation with the Gopis of Gokula. When Shri Krishna left that place they were crestfallen and felt the pangs of separation although He was all the time in their minds, thoughts and hearts. They perceived Him in everything around including the Kadamba tree under the shade of which He used to play melodious tunes on his flute.

There are thus three stages involved in this game of separation and union. The first stage is the feeling of separation. The second stage is the effort and exercise to gain reunion. The third stage is the realization that this feeling of separation was not real. It was the result of ignorance about the reality as the oneness was all along there and separation never took place. There are very few people who step on to the first stage itself. Even fewer out of them move on to the second stage of embarking on an effort to seek reunion. Among them also only a lucky and blessed few reach the third and final stage and thus get to know the truth. This has been explicitly stated in the Bhagavad Gita in this shloka: '*Manushyanam sahasreshu kaschid yatati siddhaye, yatatam-api siddhanam kaschit mam vetti tattvatah* - Out of the thousands of people, only a few make an attempt to attain success but still fewer, out of these successful few, are able to know Me (God or the Truth) in essence'. Thus it is clear that to get a feeling of having lost the union is important in order to embark on the road to enlightenment. After treading on this road, sooner or later we get a clear vision of the reality and see ourselves in full and complete union with the Supreme. Even if we do not reach that ultimate state of enlightenment, still we derive a great joy and a unique satisfaction from the effort put in by us to get to the truth.

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The position of the devotees is somewhat different. They are all the time in an ecstatic state of love with the Divine. They have made an abject surrender before Him. They have lost cognizance of their self and are lost in Him totally. They are not conscious about their own existence as they are about their cherished deity. They are least concerned about the technicalities or the terminologies like separation, union and reunion. Even then without realizing it themselves they are all the time in union with their beloved - a position for which great sages, yogis and seekers strive, not in one birth but birth after birth. It is the men of action and the men of knowledge who go through this cycle of the perception of separation and reunion. Otherwise the totality and fullness of the Divine remains unaffected by any addition or subtraction. '*Poornam-adah poornam-idam poornat poornam-udachyate poornasya poornam-adaaya poornam-eva-avashishyate.*'

16.0 DEEDS, DESTINY AND SPIRITUALITY

When we talk of deeds and destiny a variety of people come to our mind. There are people who believe in only destiny and they are docile, lazy and passive in their approach to life. Opportunities come to them and these go a begging. They live a life as it comes and never bother to ponder over the life's reality and the innumerable questions that confront the human beings in relation to their existence. About such people a poet has rightly observed, '*Subuh hoti hai sham hoti hai, umra yunhi tamam hoti hai* – For them mornings and evenings come and go and their entire life is spent'. Then there are people who believe in deeds alone. They are by nature zealous, active and positive in their approach to life. Opportunities come their way and they grab them. In relation to them I am reminded of that old story where a painter was asked to paint a picture of time. He painted a running man bald from the back and having a lock of hair on his forehead. The painter was asked to explain how this picture could portray an abstract thing like the time. He said the man is running and so is the time and if you want to make the best use of it you have to catch him by the forelock because once he slips by there are no hair on the back of his head for you to catch him by. It is exactly the forelock that such vibrant people catch the time by and utilize it to their advantage. The third set of people is of those who believe in destiny and actions, both. They know that they have brought forward credits and debits of their past actions, which forms their destiny but they also know that they are endowed with faculties to gain knowledge, discriminate between right and wrong and apply the gained knowledge with due discretion in their actions and thereby change their destiny for better, substantially if not wholly.

All these people are conscious that since they are born, they must die sometime or the other. According to their disposition and attitudes these people have different approaches towards death as they have towards life. Some are timid and scared and afraid of death all through their conscious life. It will not be an exaggeration to say that they die off and on by the very notion of death. They see their end in every small occurrence, live in fear and heave a sigh of relief when they find themselves alive and kicking. Some go on with their chores of life unmindful of the impending death and have a cavalier attitude of 'we shall cross the bridge when we reach the it'. They go with the idea that when death is inevitable why bother about it and die before it actually comes. They get involved and engrossed with their activities and never bother to think of death. Whenever any near or dear one of theirs dies they are reminded of the fatality of life and they philosophize about it. Once the event is over and old, they are again back, on the same track that they tread on. The notion of death, to some of them, helps to keep cool, balanced and fair in their dealings. There are others who take life and death in their stride as inevitable two sides of the same coin. For them the Gita has said, '*Jatasya hi dhruvo mrityuh, dhruvam janma mritasya-cha, tasmat-hi-paryartherthi na tvam shochitum- arhasi* – One who is born must die and one who dies must be born again. One should not grieve on such inevitable occurrences'.

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This shloka is a tricky postulate. It says that anyone who is born must die. It is essential, therefore, for us first to identify what is born. In doing so we enter into the realm of spirituality. A spiritualist knows that it is the form that undergoes changes but not the intrinsic entity. This intrinsic entity that we identify as the soul, is immortal, eternal and endless. They firmly believe in these lines of the poet, 'Dust thou art to dust thou returnest was not spoken of the soul'. Obviously, therefore, when the soul is not born it cannot die. Acharya Rajneesh has likened the creation with the dance of a dancer, which is inseparable from him. This entity is referred to as '*Avyaya*' or something, which has neither form, nor gender nor number nor any other attribute. It existed in the past, it exists in the present and it shall exist in the future as well. That is why it is called '*Sanatana*' and '*Shashwata*' or something in existence since time immemorial and going to remain in existence till eternity. The great Kashmiri poetess, Lal Ded has referred to this eternal character of the soul in these words: '*Asi aesy tai asi aasav, asi dore kaery patavath, Shivas sori na zyon ta marun, ravas sori na atagath* – We only existed in the past and we only shall be there in the future. It is Shiva in the unending cycle of birth and death just as the Sun never ceases to rise and set'. That being so, there is no death and no fear of death. This immortal entity undergoes change in external form, appearance and in its cage called the body. The intrinsic entity remains unchanged, unaffected and intact. It is this intrinsic entity that we are concerned with in spirituality.

Some philosophers say that our parents give us our body, not our soul. In our scriptures it has been stated that life comes into existence in various different ways. The basic and the most apparent is '*Veeryaja*' or from the semen. Then there is '*Andaja*', life born out of eggs, '*Svedaja*', life born out of the sweat and also '*Ichha-srishta*' or life produced by a wish. Whatever the method a being is created by, the soul it possesses is immortal and deathless. A spiritually inclined person is, therefore, concerned with the uplift of the spirit. He is constantly in search of the truth about his own creation, the factors that brought him into being, his creator, his relationship with these factors and with the creator and the means to know the truth of all these. According to the philosophy propounded by the sages in Kashmir, called Trika philosophy, God manifests in thirty-six different elements, the lowest of which is the earth and the highest the Lord Himself. A seeker has to rise from the base element of the earth denoting the foundation and pass through all the remaining elements in order to reach the highest level of perfection, where he becomes a personification of the existence, the consciousness and the supreme bliss.

The Gita refers to the body as '*Kshetra*' or the field and to the soul within as '*Kshetrajna*' or the knower of the field. The soul has a complete knowledge of its body and it makes full use of this field in sowing the seeds of noble thoughts, kind words and good actions. It makes use of the body in living a meaningful life to seek truth. This body becomes a vehicle for it to meditate, contemplate, seek knowledge and acquire cognition of the supreme truth. The Gita also refers to the gross body as '*Kshara*' or that which perishes and the soul within as

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'Akshara' or that, which is immortal. It is within the competence of this immortal entity to make full use of the mortal frame, which is endowed with limbs and organs, senses of cognition and action, mind and a compassionate heart as also a sharp intellect capable of sifting right from wrong, lasting from transient and true from false. A spiritual person is conscious of the importance of the deeds in the life of a human being. He knows the extent to which place and importance must be given to destiny. He has a firm and definite approach towards all aspects of human existence but is equally conscious of the existence of the subtle entity, which is the reality and must be recognized as such. This is the real 'Purusha' and through its 'Prakriti' manifests as the creation.

When we enter the realm of spirit, we seek truth and reality and both the deeds and the destiny fall in place. We know the deeds that we are required to undertake; we know the commitment and involvement needed from us and also the detachment necessary in undertaking these. We know that as embodied souls we have to enjoy the bounties of nature but in this enjoyment also there has to be an approach of detachment and sacrifice. We have not to get drowned in the ocean of enjoyment but have to survey it from the shores. As ardent spiritualists, we also realize that we are acting on behalf of the Supreme Lord, at His behest, for Him and in our capacity as mere tools. By adopting this attitude we make sure that we remain unaffected by the good and bad effects of our actions and that we are able to steer our destiny in the direction of our own choosing. We also come to know that to perform actions or undertake deeds is within our powers and to shape our destiny is also within our means. Only we should have the right attitude towards life, our existence and our functioning.

It is expected of us to perform actions diligently and efficiently, with full involvement, interest and concentration. The Gita says, '*Yogasthah kuru karmani* – Perform all your actions fully absorbed in and merged with the reality'. This is possible only if we are completely involved in and committed to our actions and deeds born out of our nature and adopted by us as our bounden duties. Then it says '*Yogah karmasu kaushalam* - This yoga, in which absorbed we are required to perform our deeds, is nothing but efficiency of our actions'. In other words any slipshod action is not acceptable. Nor is that action acceptable, which is performed under compulsion without interest. Again it says, '*Samatvam yoga uchyaate* – Yoga is poise, equanimity and harmonious attitude'. This leads us to the principle of detached action. Once we are detached we remain indifferent to the pairs of opposites. We are unperturbed by loss, failure or criticism. Gain, success or commendation and accolades do not elate us. Our mental attitude is the same in pleasure and pain. In other words we know that what we are doing is right and just and that it will lead us to the Supreme truth.

It also means that our attitude towards life is positive. We are absorbed in our assigned work without being unduly perturbed about the results and without blaming our destiny for the troubles, tribulations or unfavourable results. This attitude is possible only if we are

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seeped in spirituality and have full faith in it. The spirituality gives us a perfect mental framework that purifies our thoughts. These pure and noble thoughts are deep rooted in the 'Para' or subtle state in us. They pass through '*Pashyanti*' and '*Madhyama*', the intermediary stages before fructifying as an audible spoken word, '*Vaikhari*'. These thoughts only translate into action in course of time as our deeds, which in turn frame our destiny. It is clear, therefore, that if we make spirituality the hallmark of our life we shall be in full control of our deeds and master of our destiny.

17.0 ACTION, INACTION AND CONTENTMENT

There is a very interesting shloka in the Bhagavad Gita that says that even the wise are baffled as to what is action and what is inaction, '*Kim karma kim akarma-iti kavayo-api atra mohitah*'. Even otherwise we have to differentiate between inaction and inertia. While inaction is not acting even though one has the capacity and strength to act, inertia is not undertaking an activity for want of power to act. Similarly one has to differentiate between action and duty. While action is a natural faculty of a being without which he cannot exist, duty is an action, which one has either chosen of his own volition, or it has come upon him by social, moral or legal obligations. The latter type of activity is discretionary and one may do it or may not do it. If he does he is a good citizen and a good human being and if he does not do it, he is deemed to have failed in his duties. There is a fundamental difference between an individual human being and the Divine in as much as both have to undertake actions but the Divine has no duties whereas the human being has a set of duties to perform. The Lord has said in the Gita, '*Na me Partha-astu kartavyam trishu lokeshu kashchana* – O Arjuna, in all the three worlds I have no duty to perform'. The Divine has, therefore, been conceived as having two facets, Purusha, the absolute one and the Prakriti, the dynamic energy and it is through this Prakriti that the Divine acts. This action goes on in an orderly manner within a cycle of cause and effect, '*...Prakritim viddhi me param, jeeva bhutam maya Baho yayedam dharayate jagat-* I have yet another Prakriti, which is superior and it is with this that I sustain the entire universe of beings and non beings'.

It is a matter of common sense that no one can remain without action even for a fraction of a second. In all the three prominent states of wakefulness, sleep and dreaming we continuously perform actions, some voluntarily and some involuntarily, some knowingly and some unknowingly, some after due decision and calculation and some by instinct and intuition. The Gita says, '*Na hi kaschit kshanam-apistu tishthati-akarmakrit, karyate hi-avashah karma sarvah prakritijairgunaih* – No one can, even for an instant, remain really actionless; for helplessly is every one propelled to action by his innate qualities'. If we act because it is our prerogative to act, if we act because we must act, then the action is natural, born out of our habits. If, on the other hand, we act with an eye on the fruits of action, the action is motivated and selfish. In other words, if the fruits become the cause and reason for our actions, we get involved in a vicious cycle of reward and blame for good and bad actions, respectively. This ties us down to a position where we must take full responsibility for our deeds and be prepared to reap the harvest according to the seeds sown. The sum total of the effects of such actions is carried by the individual soul from birth to birth and becomes an important element in shaping his destiny. It decides the family, the environment and the nature in which he has to take rebirth and start the next lap of the unending journey of life.

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Once he matures in the new birth, he is again endowed with the faculties of compassion and kindness, discrimination and discernment and power and capacity to act. He gets a vision, sees through it, evaluates everything and thus knowingly or unknowingly formulates the philosophy of his life. The Gita has rightly said that a being cannot remain without action even for a moment. It is simply not possible for anyone to remain action-less and exist. To exist and to act are more or less synonymous. Act we must as it is in our nature to act. It has, therefore, been emphasized that we must act unmindful of the fruits of that action. Fruit is different from the purpose of action. Fruit is bait, greed and a selfish motive and if we undertake an action with an eye on the fruit we entangle ourselves in a cobweb of blunders. But if we act selflessly with a purpose we are doing what is natural and ordained. Let us realize that we are only instruments of action and some other super power is the real doer. Then we shall remain detached and unaffected by the acts we do. Even enjoyment has to be detached. The Ishavasya Upanishad says, '*Tena tyakhtena bunjeethah* – Do enjoy and partake of everything but with a sense of detachment and renunciation. The Gita says that we cannot free ourselves from actions by refraining to act, '*Na karmanam-anarambhat-naishkarmyam purushoshnute*'.

The oft-quoted shloka from Gita says, '*karmanyeva-adhikaraste* – the authority vested in you is only to act'. Here the word '*eva- only*' is very significant. It limits our powers to action only and we have no powers to decide what the fruits of the action should be. But this action has to be in all seriousness, with full interest and due concentration. It has been directed that we should be fully absorbed in our actions; '*Yogasthah kuru karmani*' for excellence in actions is the real yoga, '*yogah karmasu kaushalam*'. It shows how much importance has been given in ancient Indian thought to actions. We have to shun docile and inert approach and remain ever zealous, vibrant and steadfast in actions.

18.0 PAIN AND PLEASURE

In our life we get confronted with pairs of opposites in the form of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and failure, victory and defeat, respect and disrespect and credit and discredit. Of all these, the most commonly experienced is the pair of pleasure and pain. In fact the positive and favourable experiences of gain, success, victory and respect give us pleasure, whereas the unfavourable and negative experiences of loss, defeat, failure and disrespect give us pain. We want to avoid pain and if it is there, get rid of it soon enough. On the other hand we want to get pleasure and retain and maximize it, when we experience it. All this is natural and prima facie, there is nothing wrong in it. After all our aim in life is to get happiness and pleasure and eradicate pain and suffering.

Some people say that pain is a signal and a warning for us to remain on the right track of life, imbibe righteousness in ourselves and be virtuous in thought, word and deed. An illustration often given in this regard is that if we touch a hot thing, the pain experienced activates our reflexes and we instantaneously drop it down and thereby get rid of further prolonged pain. Likewise when we experience any kind of pain, mental or physical, it should be a pointer for us that somewhere some action of ours is not correct, which has caused this pain. Immediately we should ponder over our conduct and correct our course, which we feel was heading towards a wrong direction. God is a tough customer. He does not directly indicate our follies; he does not punish us immediately on our committing something wrong. In fact He does not punish at all. He has established a never-ending system of cause and effect because of which we have to suffer the consequences of our good and bad actions. But God has, in His wisdom, given us an intellect with discriminating powers and a heart, full of feeling and compassion. So He has left it to us to find the cause of our pain and take proper corrective action to relieve ourselves of it.

Pleasure is a different cup of tea all together. Every one of us derives pleasure from different things. Some get pleasure out of material achievements, some from mental entertainment and some from spiritual attainments. The sadists, it is well known, derive pleasure from troubling others and inflicting pain on them. The noble derive pleasure from serving others and in being cause of their joy. There are persons who seek pleasure in giving and serving and there are persons who find pleasure in receiving and demanding. All this depends on one's attitude, temperament and inclination. The question, therefore, arises which one of these is the right area of seeking pleasure and happiness. To find an answer to this vexed question we have to differentiate between transient and permanent pleasure, momentary and lasting happiness.

Even a cup of tea gives us pleasure. We taste so many tasty eatables but the taste lasts only till it goes down the throat. The taste is confined to the tongue alone. Below it all that

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we consume is the same even though their nutritional value may differ. No wonder the legendary sage used to mix all the dishes in a vessel, add some quantity of water to it and then swallow it without bothering to differentiate between the tastes of different dishes. We wear a new dress of latest design and of our choice. Our friends admire the colour, the pattern and the show and we feel happy. Next moment the happiness is gone. We listen to a piece of scintillating music or revel in a valley gazing the beautiful scenic surroundings or enjoy reading choicest fiction. The happiness derived may last a little longer and linger in our mind. The moment we engage ourselves in other chores of life, the pleasing effect of these things evaporates and we are back in the madding crowd of our life.

Now compare it with the spiritual joy and happiness that we derive from engagements like seeking the essence and reality of the unknown or the pursuit of the truth. Gauge the joy we get from serving the less privileged, helping the poor and utilizing our faculties for the good of the mankind and other beings. These joys are unending and permanent. For there is no predetermined destination in such deeds, the pleasure has to come from the journey and the effort itself, which is lasting, satisfying and ever so enchanting. It is said about Abraham Lincoln that he believed that man does everything for his own satisfaction, while his friend differed and was of the opinion that sometimes we do things for others. Once the two were passing by the side of a forest in a vehicle, when they heard a moan and a shriek. Abraham, who was at the wheel, stopped the vehicle, alighted from it and looked around to find the source of this agonizing shriek. He spotted a stag whose horns had got entangled in the entwined branches of a bush. Not being able to rid itself from these branches, the stag was wailing and moaning. He pushed the branches aside with the help of his stick and freed the animal. The stag hopped, jumped and ran into the forest. When he came back to the vehicle, his friend, who had been watching the scene, gave a hearty laughter. He said, 'Abraham! You have proved my point. What benefit did you get by helping the animal? You did it for his sake, didn't you?' Lincoln replied, 'On the contrary, it proves my point. Had I not come to its rescue I would have lost my sleep. It was only to ensure that I did not lose my restful sleep that I rescued it from the entanglement'.

The fact of the matter is that pleasure and pain come to us like day and night in our life. We never bother about the darkest nights as we are assured that glowing dawns and bright days are to follow. Likewise if we take the pain and pleasure in our stride we shall never be troubled by the periods of pain nor shall we gloat over the periods of pleasure. Once there is equilibrium in our mind, balance in our approach and harmony in our attitude, we shall remain unaffected by the ups and downs of life and circumstances. This will give us ever lasting peace and tranquility, which is the envy of great hermits and sages. It is the spiritual bent of mind that enables us to adopt such a poised posture in life. It is within our means and competence to live life in such a way that we are unperturbed by the pain and without any elation in pleasure. For this we have to be steadfast, firm and resolute and have to develop a free mind.

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Defeat, failure and loss are again the results of our faulty, incomplete or insufficient effort. When we face with defeat, meet failure or incur loss in any endeavour, we need not feel disheartened. At once we should realize that somewhere something has gone wrong in our effort. We should feel grateful that the defeat, the failure or the loss has given us an occasion to ponder over ourselves and take stock of things more objectively and more closely. But then victory, success and gain should not inflate our ego and make us unnecessarily proud to think that all the credit is due to us. We should be humble and show gratitude towards the Divine who made our efforts fruitful. Let us take a lesson in humility from an apple-tree full of ripe fruit whose branches are bent and learn to be humble in success, victory and gain. Even if we look at the way the life is from a purely mundane point of view we will see that there are so many factors that go into the successful accomplishment of a job. We, as the persons making the required effort, are but only one of these factors. Thus the effort alone is in our control. All the remaining factors are outside our purview. That power, which combined all the factors, put them in an order so as to function in mutual harmony and then made the combined effect of all the factors a success has to be and should be remembered and gratitude must be shown to that power. Call this power by any name, God if you are a believer and of a religious bent of mind, chance if you are agnostic and divine dispensation if you are a spiritualist. Being a spiritualist makes you humble and that is a great virtue to have.

Pain and pleasure are a state of mind. It follows that in order to maintain equanimity a good control over mind is needed. Mind is very arrogant, obstinate, fast and fickle. According to the Vedas, the mind travels millions of miles irrespective of whether we are awake or asleep. It is full of light and also transmits light in a great measure. We pray that the mind should be full of noble resolve, which is beneficial to us and to others. Different methods have been evolved, practiced and prescribed for controlling the turbulent mind. But each one of us has to find our own method best suited to the peculiarities of our mind. It takes time to identify the correct method and it involves a lot of effort to implement it and bring about a balance in our mind. The Gita has said, '*Dukheshu anudvigna manah, sukhesu vigataspriha* – our mind should remain unperturbed in grief and detached in pleasure'. This is easier said than done. When we are grieved we are pained but more often we reconcile with the sad situation and come over the grief to large extent. Pleasure is altogether a different cup of tea. We get delighted or elated at some occurrence and then get so engrossed with the pleasure that we forget that all this is transient. It is very difficult to rise above this attachment with pleasure and be indifferent to elation. For this purpose it is of paramount importance for us to imbibe spirituality. It is the spiritual attitude that enables us to bring about poise and equanimity in our life and have balanced approach towards the ups and downs of life.

Pain and pleasure have one more peculiar dimension. When we are grieved, the period of pain seems to prolong and when we are pleased, the period of happiness seems to be fleeting. Since the time factor is constant, an hour of pain and an hour of pleasure being the

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same in length, again it is clear that what makes it appear long or short is our feeling and attitude. A person steeped in spirituality has a positive attitude. He rationalizes pain and pleasure. He takes a lesson from the painful results of his deeds to correct the course of his actions. He surrenders to the divine will whenever he gets favourable results and takes these as the grace of the Lord. He takes blame for anything wrong and disowns credit for all things right. This situation prevails so long as he is within the ambit of the three attributes or '*Guna*' of light and love, '*Sattva*', passion and zest, '*Rajas*', and ignorance and darkness, '*Tamas*'. Once he rises above this level, the pain and pleasure lose all significance, even existence for him. He becomes completely indifferent to these notions and feels no pain or pleasure. This raised level of consciousness takes him nearer to divinity and closer to the state of supreme bliss.

19.0 PRAYER AND ITS UTILITY

Most of us, whatever religion we may profess and whatever faith we may follow, believe in prayers and have a fixed routine of offering prayers. While the Hindus pray either privately in their homes or at a temple, the Christians pray collectively in churches, the Jews in synagogues and the Muslims in mosques. Muslims have a prescribed procedure of offering prayers, which they call *Namaz*, in congregation in the area mosques. They can, however, if the circumstances so demand, offer prayers individually as well, wherever they are. But on Fridays they must join their co-religionists to offer prayers in congregation in the nearby mosque. The Christians and the Jews too pray collectively on their respective Sabbath days, Sunday and Saturday. On the occasion of the Eid, the festive day, the Muslims gather in a spacious ground earmarked for the purpose and called, Eidgah and offer prayers in a big congregation of the Muslims of the entire city. On one of the two Eid days, when they go for pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, the Muslims from all over the world gather and offer prayers collectively. There is hardly any group belonging to one faith, which does not have the practice of offering prayers in a prescribed manner. Buddhists have their own method of prayers, Jains offer prayers in Jain temples and the persons of Sikh faith go to Gurudwaras and offer prayers in front of their holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, considered to be the last preceptor in the book form after the successive ten preceptors in human form.

All those who believe in God or those who owe allegiance to an institutionalized ideology and faith, even if they do not accept the existence of God, offer prayers. Those who believe in the existence of God also contribute to the belief that the entire cosmos is controlled and managed by Him. Some faiths hold the view that He has established a harmonious system governed by a chain of cause and effect. The question that arises is that if everything functions in an organized and systematic way, how does the prayer affect us or help change the course of events. If the course of events is pre-determined, is offering prayers only a waste of time or is there any rationale behind it. This is a big question particularly for a logical, critical and questioning mind. Before finding an answer to this question it is necessary to examine the nature of the prayer.

Prayer pre-supposes surrender to a superior authority. We bow before the authority with the belief that the authority is omnipotent and can change the circumstances to our liking and in our favour. We also hope ardently that this authority will accede to our request and fulfill all our desires. The prayer is of two types, laudatory and requesting. The latter is further of two types, personal and impersonal. Laudatory prayers are in the form of praise of our beloved deity. We sing either solo or in chorus, about the attributes of our beloved, the beauty, the qualities, the kindness and compassion, the magnanimity and the large-heartedness and the quality of ignoring our shortcomings and forgiving our follies. Personal

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prayers are those wherein we beg of Him to alleviate our suffering, give us all that we need, grant our wishes. These requests can be mundane and worldly like asking for wealth, status, fame, good standard of living and making available all items of comfort and luxury to us, for example this Sanskrit prayer, '*Roopam dehi, Jayo dehi yasho dehi* – Give me good looks, give me victory, give me fame'. These requests can also be spiritual prayers, wherein we seek truth, knowledge and higher levels of cognition, for instance, '*Asato ma sat gamaya, tamaso ma jyotir gamaya* – Lead me from falsehood to truth and from darkness to light'. The impersonal prayer is where the devotee rises above the narrow and restricted personal level and begs for the welfare and good of the entire mankind. '*Sarve bhavantu sukhinah sarve santu niramaya* – Let all be happy and devoid of any grief' can be cited as an illustration of this impersonal prayer. The devotee prays for the peace and prosperity, harmony and brotherhood and common good of not only the humans but also of the entire creation, all beings and non-beings. He expresses a desire for the harmony and peace on earth, in the constellations, ether, sky and space, over and under the waters and at places known and unknown. The best illustration is the Prayer of Peace from the Vedas, '*OM dhyo shanti, antarikshagum shanti, prithivi shanti, aapah shantih, aushadhyah shanti, vanaspatayah shanti, vishvedevah shanti etc.* - Peace be on the ether, peace on the skies, peace here on the earth, peace on the waters, peace on the herbs, peace be in the crops and peace be in all that is in the world'.

In the initial stages of starting the routine of offering prayers it is advisable to select a proper place and a suitable relaxed posture. A private peaceful place where there is no disturbance is ideal for this purpose. Then we can have a picture or a symbol of the deity before whom we want to pray, in front of us. This helps in concentration and unflinching attention towards our prayer and a focussed vision on our deity. Then we must also select a posture, which is not only comfortable but also such that it does not allow any other thought current to detract our mind. Some people advocate adopting '*Padmasana*' or the posture of a lotus. In this posture we sit cross-legged in such a way that each foot is rested on the opposite thigh. This posture is very suitable for concentration and admits of least distraction. Of course there is another significance of this posture and that is the symbolic representation of the lotus; it stands for pure and unscathed life full of values amidst all odds. Later on in the life, the prayer becomes a habit and we pray at any time and at any place. With every breath we pray, at every moment we pray and in any environment we pray. When this happens, the place and the posture, both lose their importance. Look at this Persian couplet, '*Har rage man taar gashtam, haajate zunnar nest* – every vein of mine has become a thread, where is the need for the holy thread, '*yajnopavit*', which is worn by the Hindus'.

The prayer has another classification as well. It can be either '*Jnana-pradhana*', knowledge based or '*bhakti-parak*', devotional in content. In the case of knowledge based prayer, the language used is usually classical. Hindus pray in Sanskrit, Zoroastrians in Avesta, Muslims in Arabic and Christians and Jews in Latin. Using these languages carries some religious

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sanctity and spiritual satisfaction as well. Because the devotees have a lot of reverence towards the languages in which their religious holy books are revealed or written, offering prayers in these languages gives a rare kind of solace and tranquility. The devotional prayer, on the other hand, is often made in one's mother tongue. Mother tongue is nearer to our heart. It carries our emotions and feelings. Every word of this prayer sprouts forth from the depths of our hearts and, therefore, is bound to have a telling effect on our psyche, thinking and actions. We are bound to sit in prayers with love, hope and belief, love for the beloved being offered prayers, hope that he will fulfill our desires and belief that he listens to us, has the power to grant us boons and cares for us.

To an ordinary mind of average prudence it appeals that we should pray daily. When we pray early in the morning our day of activities begins with confidence and resolve; confidence that whatever we do shall bear fruit and all our actions will be in the right direction; resolve that we shall be righteous in our approach, truthful in our effort and compassionate and kind in our dealings. Thus the prayer gives us a mental make up, which is not only good for us but also beneficial for all those who come into contact with us. We often see that the unlettered and illiterate village folk are more honest and straightforward in their dealings as compared to the well-read, literate urbanites who are comparatively more articulate, guarded and non-committal.

Prayer for a spiritually distinguished person has a wider and more important significance. It helps him rise to higher and elevated spiritual heights, where he finds himself nearer to the truth. Initially he prays in all the three states of consciousness, wakeful, dreaming and sleeping. Slowly he attains the fourth supra-mental state and continues to pray at that level as well. Eventually he crosses all physical barriers and attains transcendental position, where the need even for prayers ceases. The prayer is like a boat that helps us cross a river but which we have to give up once we reach the other shore. It is like a ladder to climb a height but which has to be abandoned on reaching the desired position. Thus prayer is a means to a specific goal – a very simple, easy and effective means at that. It may not be an end in itself but is very satisfying as has been said by the famous Kashmiri poet, Master Zinda Koul in his poem, '*Yaar thaevin ya ma thaevin kan ba chhus aalav divan, aalav saeti manas kam kas chham shanti ivan* – Let my friend lend me an ear or not, I go on praying unto him. For, the praying itself gives me some solace and peace'.

Prayer is an antidote of ego. A person who is arrogant and haughty shall never pray. Such a person considers himself superior to all others and powerful enough to accomplish anything. He does not, therefore, find it necessary to ask for favours. In fact he thinks it below his dignity to request. Self-assertion is good. So is self-confidence. Yet it is prudent and practical to know one's limitations. Any occurrence or any happening, which is directly or indirectly connected with us or has a bearing on our life, is the effect of the sum total of so many factors, of which we are but one factor. The sooner we realize this fact the better it is and we shall get rid of our hotheaded attitude and arrogance. Thus it is clear that prayer pre-supposes humility, simplicity and softness. Prayer gives us a high moral character,

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ethical behaviour and polished demeanour. We read in Hindu mythology that prayer is anathema to self-centered people. Kansa would not tolerate Krishna's name. Hiranyakashyapu was averse to anyone uttering the name of God in his kingdom and when his own son defied him he put him to all sorts of sufferings. Duryodhana was not humble enough to take his seat towards the feet of Shri Krishna and had to pay a heavy price for this arrogance. Ravana was emboldened by his ego to take away Sita, the consort of Shri Rama, which resulted in his doom. As against these, we read about noble souls like Dhruva, Prahlada, Draupadi, Arjuna, Shabri, Vibhishana, Hanumana, who surrendered before the Supreme and worshipped Him and prayed unto Him. This gave them exalted position and fulfillment of desires and endeared them to the Lord.

Prayer can be silent, audible or loud. When our mind is under our control, we can offer silent prayer with full concentration on the chosen deity. Our breathing itself shall become the mechanism for chanting the name of the Lord, both in inhaling and exhaling. This is the subtlest form of offering prayer and perhaps the most difficult too but with constant and continuous practice we become adept to the system of silent prayer. Loud prayer can be in the form of a straight submission audible to persons sitting by our side. It can, in the alternative, be a song, a melody or a poetic composition sung in an ecstatic tune. Then we have a collective singing in chorus, where a melodious song in the form of a hymn or praise or a prayer is sung by a group of devotees, to the accompaniment of a few musical instruments or without them. In the Indian devotional parlance it is called '*Bhajan*' or '*Keertan*'. Folk music, folk musical instruments and folk songs are very common in such collective prayer sessions. An ecstatic involvement is often seen on such occasions. The folk musical instruments commonly used are an earthen pitcher, a '*Dholak*', bells, a small rod with iron rings, hand drums and a harmonium. Not only are the singers and active participants in an ecstatic mood but the listeners also feel fully absorbed.

Thus we see that the efficacy of offering prayers lies in the fact that it helps our mental make-up, inspires us to think good and do good and steers the boat of our life in the direction of righteousness. At the mundane level it helps us imbibe moral and ethical values. At the spiritual level it enables us to go nearer divinity and attempt a rapport with the Divine. It is a great feeling where we lose our ego and arrogance. We know the value of being humble, modest and steadfast. We realize the sanctity of surrender before the supreme power and the benefits one derives from that. The time spent in offering prayers is the time put to the best of uses. There is no doubt it changes our mindset, our thinking and our way of life. It may not change the course of events all together yet it does affect the happenings and occurrences. After all in the syndrome of cause and effect, prayer does become a cause that has a positive and beneficial effect. So there is nothing against the law of nature in believing that the prayer helps us a lot in shaping our lives.

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20.0 FACTS STRANGER THAN FICTION

The Sunday edition of Asian Age, dated 17 April 2005 carried a very thought provoking article written by one Mr.V.Ramnarayan under the caption, 'On Murugan's Trail'. He says that his friend MR. Anvar, a devout Muslim, promised the Lord of Palani, Murugan (or Kartikeya, the son of Lord Shiva) that he would bring his wife soon after their wedding. He found out, however, that before he did that, he had to visit another Murugan temple at Tiruchendur in fulfillment of a vow by his bride's family. There he disclosed his name and his wife's with some trepidation, while making a personal offering to the Lord, but to his pleasant surprise, the priest not only blessed them but also wished them both a speedy return to the temple baby in hand. The writer remarks, 'Anvar is a devout Muslim. I often wonder what drives him on this particular mission. Is it a search for his roots, or is there a romance in the lore of a boy-god that transcends religion? I will never know the answer but people like him give you hope'.

True, people like Anvar give us hope for the barriers are our own creation and God transcends all these demarcations, divisions and differences. I am reminded of a host of Muslim poets like Rahim, Raskhan and Jayasi, who were devoted to God in the form conceived by their Hindu compatriots. They have written beautiful devotional poems in praise of Rama and Krishna excelling even some of the best Hindu poets. I am also full of reverence for that unknown lady about whom it was reported in press recently that she had vowed to God that she would build a temple in His name and she raised collections from all and sundry and put in all that she possessed and accomplished her vow by having a beautiful temple constructed at Varanasi.

I am also reminded of that great Muslim governor of Kashmir, Dilavar Khan, who was blessed by God by appearing before him in his dream and then he wrote those immortal lines in Persian, '*Huma asle Maheshwar bud shab shahe ki man deedam* - He was in reality Lord Shiva, whom I saw during night.' In my own locality, where I lived all my childhood, there was a cowherd family owning more than a hundred cows. Because of the size of their business in milk they were referred to as 'Baed gurya' or Big milk-men. It is said that their grand father had come across a small Shiva lingam in the cow shed, which he preserved with reverence. He pledged not to dilute the milk by adding water and was known for selling pure unadulterated milk. In course of time his third generation grand children broke the vow and started adding water to the milk yielded from the cows. Immediately thereafter the Shiva lingam vanished mysteriously from the place where it was kept wrapped in a red cloth.

Long after his 'mahanirvana' in 1968, Jagad guru Bhagavaan Gopinath Ji was seen by a Muslim gentleman at the bank of Vitasta near his Aashram at Kharyar in Srinagar. It is said that he asked him to go to a particular village and fetch from there some intoxicant called

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'Charas' in Kashmiri. The gentleman saw him again the next day and so did his son, who was with him then. Convinced that it was a reality the two, father and son went to the village, purchased some quantity of the drug and then placed it in front of his marble statue inside the Aashram. Alakheeshwari, Roopa Bhawani, who was considered an incarnation of Goddess Sharika was seen by a Muslim saint strolling on the bank of a small river in a village. He was spiritually exalted and recognizing her addressed her in these words, 'Ropi (O' silver!), come to my side of the bank and I will convert you into So'n (gold)'. She smiled and replied, 'Why don't you come to my side and I will convert you into mo'khta (pearl)'. There is a pun on this word. It also means that I will liberate you. It is said that he agreed and instantaneously a boat was seen crossing the river. Shiva and Parvati were seated in the middle and the boat was being rowed by the Muslim saint. Bhawani sent him back and told him that that way was not the right way. He went back and after a while saw the same boat ferrying towards him with Shiva and Parvati and to his astonishment he saw that Roopa Bhawani was seated by the side of Shiva as his consort.

There is this legendary story about a shopkeeper by the name Sudha who was called 'So'dyavonya' in local language. His shop was near a foothill and daily some shepherds who used to take sheep for grazing would bring beautiful stones to him and exchange them for some sugar or candy. One day they gave him a shining Shiva lingam and he was tempted to ask for the source. These poor shepherds described a person sitting on a bull, smeared with white ash and covered with a deer skin. The shopkeeper identified him as Shiva and accompanied them the next day. The Lord was visible to the shepherds and not to him but with their help he caught hold of the bull's tail and got dragged after the Lord. Eventually He had to appear before him. A Sufi poet of repute has written these lines about another Sufi, '*Rama Rama pareyov Sheikh Sanahan tai, hyendi mo'kha lo'b taem jaar* – Sheikh Sanna chanted the name of Rama with the result he saw the Divine in the form of a Hindu God'.

To illustrate that the fact is stranger than fiction in the realm of spirituality let me also narrate an experience of a holy man, Amrit Vagbhavacharya, who visited Kashmir. At the Devi Aangan, the foothill of Hari Parvat, he was reciting a stanza from Panchastavi and a local Pandit clad in Kashmiri dress was listening. When he finished the Pandit asked him whether he understood the meaning of the stanza. The holy man replied in affirmative and explained the meaning to him. The Pandit nodded his head and the holy man felt that he was not satisfied by his explanation of the purport of these lines. He offered to meet him at his residence the next day to understand the stanza better. The Pandit showed him his residence at Alikadal and directed him to call him by the name Shivjee. On the following day he came to the house and called him by his name, He was escorted to the top floor where he was asked to recite the stanza aloud. In doing so the holy man got into a trance, 'Samadhi' and thus the real purport of the stanza was brought home to him. Swami Vagbhavacharya visited Kashmir again during the next year and went to the same house to meet the Pandit. He called him a few times but nobody appeared. In the meantime No doubt there is a romance in the spiritual lore that transcends religion, caste, creed and

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gender. a neighbour asked him who he wanted to see. He said he wanted to see Shivjee who lived in that house. The gentleman told him that he was mistaken as the house had been unoccupied for the previous five years and the keys of the house were with him only. To satisfy him he opened the lock of the front door and showed him the house full of dust and dirt and cobwebs skirting the walls and the ceiling all over.

Let us not forget that God has created human beings and we have created barriers, divisions and demarcations. Spirituality is a science to understand this fact and an art to rise above all these divisive elements. The Sun does not discriminate in giving light, the clouds do not discriminate in wetting with their showers nor does the Moon discriminate in covering with its cool and comforting moonlight.

21.0 TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SPIRITUALITY

Once a man is aware of his shortcomings and drawbacks, he has a strong desire to change and be transformed. There are various ways in which he can bring about change in his thought, word and deed. Of course he wants to change and change for the better. He could emulate and copy others whom he thinks are better or devoid of any shortcomings. But then the circumstances of every one are not the same. Appearances are also deceptive and the reality behind the person whom he wants to emulate may be different and even quite opposite. There is another alternative. He could take somebody's guidance in reforming himself but then it will be more theoretical than practical. After all it is his mind, his self and his thinking and thus he alone can transform these and remove the shortcomings. A senior journalist once told me that when he was studying in a university he chanced to visit a saint who was camping in that city. He approached the holy man and asked him how he could control his mind. The saint retorted, 'whose mind is it that you want to control? It is your mind, go and control it'. How true this statement is! Our things can be controlled, managed and if need be, transformed by us alone. Nobody else can do this for us.

It is said that four things affect us and shape our lives. These are '*Aachaara, vichaara, aahaara* and '*vihara*' or our behaviour, our thinking, the food we eat and the company we keep. According to Shri Gita all these things can be either '*Sattvika*' or '*Rajasika*' or '*Tamasika*'. In other words these can either be leading towards love and light, or towards passion and attachment or towards ignorance and darkness. Once we take to the path of spirituality, the qualities of love and light inherent in us, which might have been till then either dormant or passive, suddenly get reactivated and our behaviour and our thinking tend to be pure and pious. We are inclined to take such food as is invigorating, health-giving and having an effect of sobriety, peace and harmony. Similarly we choose a company where we find that the thought, word and deed are compatible with ours and where we discover new areas and novel vistas of knowledge and awareness.

Spirituality is not something out of this world. It is the part of our nature that shapes our personality. Obviously, therefore, it has its efficacy both in our worldly affairs as also in our spiritual uplift. Once we imbibe spirituality our aptitude undergoes change and our behaviour and attitude towards our fellow beings and our day-to-day affairs gets transformed. Our thoughts are pious, our actions are noble and our intentions are sacred. All the time we are concerned about peace, prosperity, harmony and well being of everyone, humans and other beings, animal world and vegetable world. We begin to take care that our thoughts, words and deeds do not harm anyone. We take care that we are useful to the society and to the mankind at large. We are sincere in our actions and conscious in carrying out our bounden duties. In short we become true and worthy citizens. This shows that the spirituality has an important role to play in transforming an individual

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even in his mundane capacity. It will be interesting to note that if every one of us or even the majority among us adopt spirituality and thereby become pious and pure we will have a better world to live in. there will be no conflict, no strife, no wars, no animosity and indeed no hatred. A spiritually transformed person is conscious of the fact that virtue lies in service and being good to others and vice in troubling others. In the Indian mythology it has been said that the sum and substance of the entire Pauranic literature is this message.

'Ashtadasha puraneshu Vyasasya vachana dwyam, paropakarh punyaya papaya parapeedanam – The great sage Vyasa has given a twofold message in all the eighteen Puranas, virtue lies in serving others and the sin in harming others'. The word 'Others' here does not refer to only humans but includes the animal kingdom and the plant life.

We find religious leaders and god men preach these ethical and moral values day in and day out. Congregations and gatherings are seen everywhere, particularly in India, wherein spiritual discourses are delivered inspiring people to tread on the path of spirituality. These conferences are of far reaching consequences in as much as they spread the message of love and brotherhood. In fact it is this spiritually inclined silent majority who force the misleading vocal and turbulent minority to abjure the path of violence, strife and hatred. Their good intentions and pious values keep the world going and the wars and animosity at bay. Their peace loving nature and concern for amity and harmony ensure that minor skirmishes and small conflicts do not flare into major wars and bigger strife. Their spiritual leanings are insurance for the peace and harmony in our lives. The multiplicity of views, the varied ideologies and the different faiths are no threat to peace. In fact it is good to have a variety of views for it enables us to see the truth in all its dimensions. What creates trouble is the notion that our view is superior to all other views. What is disastrous is the notion that our view is the only valid view and the views of others are based on falsehood. What creates discord and disharmony is the view that our view being the only valid viewpoint, persons belonging to other faiths or holding different views must either come over to our views or they have no right to exist. History is replete with instances where battles and wars have been fought only because of such notions. The spirituality is a befitting answer to all these misconceived notions as it is a great leveler and harmonizer.

Man is not born like a simple white sheet of cloth that could be dyed in any dye we liked. Nor is he like raw clay that can be given any shape by a potter. After all he carries with him the cumulative effect of the deeds of the past births that gives the initial colour to his characteristics. This effect is also responsible for the environment in which he takes birth and grows, which in turn shapes his life. Of course, transformation is still possible. The effect of the past can be wiped off, modified and changed by the deeds of the present. This change can be for better or worse. The spirituality helps us bring about a change for the better. Spirituality and animality are opposed to each other and they repel. Once we imbibe spirituality the animal tendencies in us start getting melted and in course of time these vanish all together. The dormant divine tendencies become prominent and manifest in our personality. If we sit back and think of our bygone years we often find that there have been

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so many occasions in our life when there was enough temptation to do something wrong – an undesirable sin, but we have not fallen into the trap and have refrained from doing that. Then we may ask ourselves why was it so and the answer is simple that the divinity in us saved us and did not let us go the wrong way. After all there is temptation, taste and pleasure in doing something wrong. The temptation is strong and the taste and pleasure are transient and momentary. The path of righteousness may not be so tempting. It may sometimes even be arduous but the pleasure we derive from this path is lasting and permanent. A spiritual person is good to himself and good to his society.

If we go beyond the worldly sphere we find that without treading on the path of spirituality no progress is possible. When we start finding answers to the basic questions like who am I, who is my creator and what is the purpose of my life, spirituality alone comes to our rescue. It transforms us from the mundane plane of consciousness to a higher and even transcendental plane wherefrom seeking answers to these questions becomes possible and perhaps easier as well. We rise to a state that Sri Aurobindo called supra-mental state. At this state exploring the self becomes possible. At this state exploring the Supreme Truth is within our reach. At this state seeking answers to the baffling questions about our existences, about creation, creator and their mutual relationship becomes possible.

Spirituality opens our eyes, widens the sphere of our vision and enables us to see beyond the limits of the horizon. We are able to break the barriers of the parameters prescribed by the religions and faiths. We reach a state where in reality we find the entire world as one family in the true sense of the ancient saying, '*Vasudaiva kutumbakam*'. We wish that the universe became a nest giving shelter to all in the spirit of the old wisdom, '*Yatra vishvam bhavati eka needam*'. Once we adopt this world view and universal approach it is natural for us to see the all pervading Divine in everything and conversely everything in this all embracing Divine, who in the Gita has proclaimed, '*Mayi sarvam-idam protam sutre manigana iva* – In me all this is strung like pearls in the thread'. Our spiritual climb in this way is an ascent, which makes us embrace the limitless and boundary-less Divine and His getting embodied in every being is a descent or the '*Avataran*' as it is called, for the liberation of the mankind. To quote Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, God, the goal adopts the functions of God, the guide and leads us on the path of righteousness. Thus the transformation is accomplished in full. We have to recognize that this God's descent can be in two ways. Either He takes a human form for the specific purpose of eradicating vice and sin caused by the acts of omission and commission against the prescribed and permitted duties or He pervades in the consciousness of the noble to guide the humankind at every step. The latter descent is made possible by the spirituality imbibed by the noble, which enables them to have a direct rapport with the Divine. After all, the Divine is free and the harmony and order prescribed by Him do not bind Him or limit His actions in any way. Kashmir Shaiva Darshan recognizes this unfettered freedom of the Divine and calls it '*Swatantraya*'. When the spirituality transforms us we also enjoy this unfettered freedom of thought and action.

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The transformation brought about by the spirituality can act in two ways. It can lead us on the path of '*Jnana*' or knowledge. In that case, we shall recognize our true self, our essence and our potential and attain emancipation. It can, alternatively lead us on the path of '*Bhakti*' or devotion. In that situation we shall realize the importance of surrender unto the Divine and lose every bit of the ego that we might have. The Divine shall take care of our needs as also liberate us from the bondages. The needs are twofold, making good the deficiency and protecting what we already possess. The Lord has promised, '*Tesham nityabhiyukhtanam yogakshemam vahami-aham* – Both the needs of these devotees ever attached to me I fulfill; I provide them what they lack and protect what they already have'. Surrender also ensures our liberation. Sri Krishna has said in the last chapter of the Gita, '*Sarva dharman parityajya mam-ekam sharanam vraja, amam tva sarva papebhyo mokshayishyami ma shuchah* – Give up all your duties and come to Me for refuge. I shall liberate you from all sins, do not despair'.

The spirituality takes us out of the field of darkness '*Tamas*', takes us first to the level of '*Rajas*' or zeal and passion and thereafter to '*Sattva*' or the realm of light and love. It does not leave us there. Gradually it takes us to a higher plane, where all the three properties are absent. From this plane it is easier to know the truth and merge with the universal consciousness. This state is called '*Gunatita avastha*' or the state high above the state of these three attributes of ignorance, zest and enlightenment. This is the true state of liberation, emancipation called '*Moksha*'.

22.0 TOWARDS THE SUPREME BLISS

God is referred by many epithets with due regard to His having a form or being without form. We call Him '*Sat, Chit, Ananda*' or Being, Consciousness and Bliss. As humans we seek joy and pleasure in everything we do. In fact our entire relationship with our fellow humans, other beings and other elements in the cosmos is based on the amount of satisfaction and pleasure we derive from such relationship. We eat and drink and feel happy. We dress in an attractive way and feel pleased. We live in comfort and feel elated. We listen to something pleasing like a piece of soothing music and derive joy. But alas all this happiness is momentary and transient. It does not last long. It leaves our thirst for happiness un-satiated and unquenched with the result we are always lost in the thought of sense objects. The Gita has explained this position in the following way: '*Dhyayate vishayan punsah sangasteshoopajayate, sangat sanjayate kamah, kamat krodhopajyate, krodhat bhavati sammohah, sammohatsmriti vibhramah, smriti bhramshat buddhinasho, buddhinashat pranashyate* – Men are prone to think about the sense objects all the time. This creates an attachment, which in turn results in lust. Lust leads to anger. Anger results in delusion, which becomes the cause of distortion of memory. Distortion of memory causes failure of wisdom and intellectual faculty and that is disastrous'. Not that we do not get what is pleasing for us. We do get all that but for one thing we may not get it to the extent we would like it to be and for the other the momentary nature of the pleasure drawn from that leaves us unsatisfied and even dissatisfied at times. All this adds to our grief and discomfiture rather than make us happy.

Spirituality, on the contrary, gives us a mental make up and takes us to such a mental state where we are endowed with a discriminating judgment that tells us where to find a lasting and eternal joy called supreme bliss. Those who seek joy in attaining the desired goal are more often than not disappointed. Those who find joy in the process of seeking the desired are always joyous. This joy derived from the effort rather than the fruit is ever lasting irrespective of the fact whether the goal is attained or not. This is the bliss that the sages and savants have been yearning for and for this bliss alone they undergo penance, charity and other spiritual exercises. They spend lives after lives seeking this spiritual state as has been corroborated by the Gita in these words, '*Aneka janma sansiddhah tato yanti param-gatim* – only after perfecting the efforts put in during so many successive years do these seekers attain the position of supreme bliss'. They collect all their senses, retract them from outward sense objects and take them inwards and find bliss within. Like the musk deer the scent and the aroma they sense is within them and due to the ignorance they were seeking it everywhere outside. To get the feel of this eternal bliss they have not to take even a step. They are like the Divine; they do not feel blissful but they are the bliss, they do not exist but they are the existence and they are not conscious but they are the consciousness itself.

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Experiencing bliss or being in bliss does not make us recluse withdrawn from the world nor an escapist who shirks taking any responsibility of the life. We function as normal human beings. We do our assigned duties and tasks. We act and react in normal manner. What is different is our attitude. We act but do not bother about or hanker after the fruits of action. These come to us in normal course and whether favourable or unfavourable do not affect our actions. This is what is called detached action or '*Nishkama karma*'. We act with a purpose but do not allow fruits of action to become the inducement to action as the Gita says, '*Ma karma phalaheturbhu* – Let not the action be for the sake of the fruit'. We should act for the sake of action. Similarly when we enjoy, we do it with a sense of renunciation. As the Upanishad says, '*Tena tyekhtena bhunjeethah* – Thus you should enjoy all things but with an attitude of renunciation and not involvement'. We have all the bounties provided by the nature but there is no greed as we have full knowledge of the fact that we are not the possessors of all this. These things are with us in trust from the Divine. In this regard the Upanishad makes it clear, '*Ma gridah, kasya svit dhanam* – Covet not for who does this wealth belong to?' Once we imbibe this state of mind there will be harmony, poise and tranquility. We shall remain balanced and steadfast in the face of the pairs of opposites like loss and gain, defeat and victory, pain and pleasure and grief and happiness. This state of mind ensures lasting joy referred to in spiritual parlance as the supreme bliss.

There is another set of epithets or names of the Divine, '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*' or truth, benevolence and beauty. Truth is related to the existence. What exists is true and what does not exist is not true and thus cannot be conceived. Benevolence is related to consciousness. It is the awareness and consciousness that make our thought, word and deed benevolent, useful and utilitarian. It ensures good of not only mankind but of the entire creation. Beauty is closely connected to bliss. What is ugly makes us unhappy and what is beautiful gives us eternal joy. We are enveloped in bliss and it lifts us to the transcendental plane from the levels of immanence. We live like a lotus in the pond, unscathed and unaffected by the mud or the water. We live in the world, but the ups and downs of the life do not disturb us. We act as is our duty but the success or failure does not perturb us. We partake of the nature's bounties but we remain detached and do not get lost in the enjoyment. We relate to fellow human beings, other beings and different forms of creation but there is no self-interest in this relationship. We take pleasure in giving and not in taking. This ensures a lasting peace, an eternal satisfaction and durable joy.

Bliss has yet another dimension. Like happiness and grief, it does not come and go. It is a constant feeling. In fact it is a state where we do not feel the bliss but we are in bliss. What we think is born out of this bliss. What we say is blissful and what we do is the bliss translated into action. Somebody asked Mahatma Buddha, 'What are you, God, a prophet, a sage or something else?' Pat came the reply, 'I am neither God, nor a sage nor a prophet; I am awake'. Such a reply can come from the mouth of a person in bliss, for to be in bliss is to be awake, aware and conscious of the reality. Similarly some one once asked Swami Sukhabodhananda, 'Is there life after death?' His reply was, 'Please ask me about life; I

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have a great experience of life. Do not ask me about death because I have not experienced death'. This again is the characteristic of a person in bliss. He never experiences death. He is always alive and enjoys life in full measure. He experiences immortality of the self and eternal and endless state of life. The great Shaiva philosopher of Kashmir, Abhinavgupta was in a similar blissful state. That is why he could challenge death in these words: '*Antaka! Mam prati ma drisham-enam krodha karal tamam vida- dhihi, Shankar sevana chintana dheero, bheeshana Bhairava shaktimayo'smi* – O Death! Do not look at me with this fearful angry eye. I am all the time absorbed in the thought of serving my Lord and that has endowed me with Herculean strength'. The man in bliss is surely absorbed in the thought of the Divine. Death or any other fearful thing does not scare him. In fact he does not experience bliss but is bliss personified. Because of the awareness of immortality, he is without fear or anger.

If we look at a human being in his totality we shall find that his existence has five specific and prominent levels. These are sometimes referred to as '*Kosha*' or sheaths. The first and basic level is '*Annamaya*' the material level made of all that we consume as food. The second is '*Pranamaya*' or the vital level sustained by the breath. The third is '*Manomaya*' or the mental level where emotions and feelings come into play. The fourth level is '*Jnanamaya*' or the intellectual level, which helps us discriminate between right and wrong, existing and non-existing and true and false and use our wisdom and intelligence in all our functions. The fifth level is '*Anandamaya*' or the level of bliss – the everlasting joy. It is clear therefore, that attaining the level of bliss is a journey where we start from the material and reach the blissful, commence from the transient and attain the lasting and begin with the mundane and strive to reach the spiritual. Obviously it is an evolutionary process where we are lifted from the lowest and carried to the highest level of consciousness. At first we experience the bliss and gradually we become bliss. In other words, the process of becoming ceases and we turn into a being endowed with perfection.

The first four levels explained above are directly or indirectly related to the external world but the fifth one is directly concerned with our inner world. The journey leading to this level is a pleasure to undertake. There is no extraneous or arduous effort involved. We are all smiles all the way, satisfied and contented in self as stated in the Gita, '*Aatmanyeva atmanah tushtah* – Self satisfied within self'. The path is illumined with the light of the soul and its consciousness. There are no pitfalls provided we are inward looking internally and steadfast externally. Once we reach the state of bliss, we have access to the unknown, unlimited, eternal and boundless. We can know at will, desire at will and act at will. Once in my student days I was at the famous shrine of Rajna Bhawani at Tulamula, where the temple of the mother goddess is within a L-shaped spring surrounded by mighty chinar trees and a number of pilgrim rest houses. I met a saint in one of these rest houses overlooking the premises of the shrine, which was crowded with countless pilgrims. Suddenly the saint talked to me and said, 'Do you see the crowd below? They are all my guests and I have invited them to visit this place. Now I am busy in looking after them. I

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must ensure that they are comfortable and all their needs are met. There must be no slip in the arrangements'. Little did I figure out at that point of time what he was talking about and what his spiritual position was. Later in my life when I reflected on his innocent utterance, I could understand that he was at the highest stage of supreme bliss, where he was one with universal self. He involuntarily identified himself with the Divine and looked to the world as his creation. He had in true sense got merged with the universal consciousness. Such is the state of the individual being when he attains the level of bliss.

The state of 'Bliss' has another property. It detaches us completely from the sense objects and consequently from the mixed feelings of love and hatred, attachment and fear, superiority and inferiority etc. Fear and hatred are the two major causes of the strife seen in the world both at the individual and collective levels. Human life is stated to be covered with five types of miseries. These are, '*Avidya*' or ignorance because of which the unreal is seen as real, '*Asmita*' or ego that makes us completely self-centered, '*Raga*' or attachment with the external objects of desire and lust, '*Dvesha*' or hatred that gives us aversion to things we do not like and '*Abhinivesha*' or fear of death caused by the vivid feeling of the temporary nature of existence. Once we attain the level of bliss all these miseries vanish like the morning dew at the Sunrise. At once we are at peace with ourselves and with the world around us. The inner light of the state of bliss radiates into our external self and makes every one we come into contact with feel cool, as in the moonlight on a full Moon night.

23.0 LONELINESS & COMPANY

Love is a natural instinct in a human being and a lover can never be alone. When he loves his possession, he is in the company of what he thinks belongs to him. When he loves his relatives and friends, colleagues and comrades, he is in their company. When he loves his own self, his own self accompanies him. This is a strange situation to be in when you are in silent conversation with your companion, when there is complete understanding between the two and a perfect equation with each other. This is a great level of spiritual uplift and an important milestone in the journey of seeking the truth. Company is a state of mind and so is loneliness. You can be lonely in a crowd, if you so choose. You can be in company when alone, if you so can. The first thing to be known is that your mind is yours and you alone can control it and condition it. Somebody may guide you how and when to control it. You may read from books of knowledge about the technique to control it but the actual exercise has to be undertaken by you. Once you get your mind under your thumb, you can make it a perfect, friendly and loving companion. That is what we must strive for and aim at.

Loneliness creates a void in your mind. You are unaware of your surroundings. You are ignorant of your self. Your mind is at work but you are not in control, nor are you able to perceive the innumerable currents and cross currents passing through it. You are neither able to give a direction to your thoughts nor manage and organize your actions. You are at a loss all the time not knowing what to do. The only vivid realization that you have is that you are alone. No body is there to give you company. Your own mind is not with you. You feel dejected, desperate and dispirited. You had high hopes from so many things, you had great expectations from others but nothing seems to be favourable and nothing seems to be going the way you would like it to be. So there is frustration and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Loneliness surrounds you like un-clear long and stretched shadows on the walls of a partially lit room. The feeling of loneliness pounds your head like a strong hammer striking a huge concrete block during the dead of night.

Company, on the other hand, is a state of pleasure and satisfaction. You are assured that there is someone to talk to, someone to rely on and someone to confide in. There is a problem facing you or you are on a cross road where you have to decide which way to go and which path to take, you can consult this companion, whom you perceive as being present by your side all the time. This companion could be your own self, your own conscience or someone you love so dearly, whose astral presence you feel and you are able to converse with him. There are three aspects of our self in varying proportions and combination in different people. These are the aspects of love and light, zest and zeal and darkness and ignorance. While one of these is always predominant in our nature, occasionally one of the remaining two may over-power it. In such a situation a discussion or a dialogue ensues. This enables us to scan through the pros and cons of a situation we are

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faced with or of a problem confronting us. A very balanced argument or a heated discussion that follows, enables us to take a final decision, which may, of course, be a right decision or a wrong one, depending on which aspect has finally prevailed. One thing good about this state is that we are never lonely. We are aware of what is going on in our mind and whatever be the case we are able to take a conscious calculated decision. In other words we are the masters of our mind. There is no frustration, no hopelessness and no helplessness. There is no dejection, no diffidence and no moroseness.

The company becomes all the more delightful, enchanting and sweet if it is spiritual. You talk to your self, the topic is divine and the conversation is silent and celestial. It is during this state of company that we are able to find answers to many a fundamental question of our existence. We try to figure out who we are, what is our source, for what purpose and why are we here in this world with this name and form and who the creator of this entire cosmos is. This company gives us a clue to our relationship with our source and the creator and helps us find ways and means to attain Him. This company is an incessant journey, an exploration into the mysterious and a research into the essence of all that is subtle, unfathomable and apparently unknowable. It is this company that has given rise to various sciences, different faiths and religions, innumerable theories and postulations, inventions and discoveries. The great scientists, religious pioneers, philosophers, thinkers, sages and savants have been in some sort of company with their inner selves and that has enabled them to gain knowledge of sorts and reproduce that for the benefit of the mankind.

In our childhood we are in the company of our parents. This gives foundation to our character and provides us the basics of all that ought to be known. In our teens we are in the company of our peers and patrons, friends and teachers. This shapes our life, gives it a direction and steers it clear of pitfalls and hindrances of sorts. In our youth again we seek the company of our colleagues, relatives and friends. We cooperate and collaborate with them. We learn from them and benefit from their experiences. We exchange notes with them and share our experiences with them. It gives us pleasure and satisfaction that others benefit from our experiences. It adds to our wisdom and knowledge when we benefit from the experiences of others. The footprints of those who have traversed the same path before us guide us. We also leave footprints on the sands of time for others to take a clue as to the direction they should take. Then comes the old age when it enjoins upon us to guide young and learners. We can be successful in this role only if we teach and preach by example and use the idiom best suited to the learners' acumen and attitude. This age can be made pleasant and enjoyable should we know how to be a child among children, a young man among the youth and innocent and simple among those devoid of worldly wisdom. This is a marvellous time to be in the company of the young and relive with a great joy the bygone days of our own childhood and youth.

Loneliness and company are thus a state of mind that can be enjoyed immensely provided we are spiritually inclined and given to derive pleasure from exploring the mysterious world

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of our spirit. Mind is only a thought but the spirit is an unfathomable ocean, where the deeper you go the more fascinating it gets. Loneliness gives us the impetus and inspiration while company provides us the succour and sustenance to travel in the unknown but fascinating alleys of spirituality.

24.0 OUR DAILY ROUTINE

A common man is so engrossed with his daily routine that he hardly finds any time for other activities, hobbies, social service or spiritual quest. In this post-modern era the desires and aspirations of every one have touched the skies. Means and resources have also no doubt increased but these cannot keep pace with the increased demands. The result is a rat race that keeps man on toes all the time. All his time and energy is utilized in finding enough resources, putting them together and making use of them to satisfy his desires and meeting his aspirations. He gets up in the morning, prepares for the day, has a quick gruff and rushes to his work place. If he has his own vehicle, the traffic snarls are a source of tension for him. If he depends on public transport, its uncertainty causes him worries. Problems of the household and the office or establishment where he works make him tense and restless all the time. He has to work in an atmosphere favourable sometimes and unfavourable other times. He has to deal with people cooperative and understanding sometimes and hostile and unreasonable other times. All this adds to his worries and discomfiture. Sometimes he feels frustrated and sometimes his perseverance and fortitude give him courage to rise up to the occasion. At times he wants to carry everyone with him and at other times he has to ignore and sideline some so that the roadblocks do not hinder his progress.

At his office he meets all sorts of people. There are appreciative seniors and thankless seniors, seniors who give credit to him for his initiative and accomplishments and seniors who deprive him of his due and take credit themselves while simultaneously blaming him for failures and shortcomings. There are cooperative and helpful colleagues and jealous and unhelpful colleagues, colleagues who support and supplement and colleagues who carry tales, hinder the work and engage always in leg pulling. There are diligent and zealous subordinates and lazy and incompetent subordinates, juniors who are eager to learn, assist and put in sincere efforts and juniors who always shirk work, find excuses for whiling away their time and dodge their responsibilities and thereby sabotage every work and programme. When the sailing is smooth, his life appears to him a bed of roses and when it is rough and stormy he feels as if he is walking on the razor's edge.

At home again he has to put up with people of different attitudes and approaches. There is the conflict between the persons of different generations. Their thinking, their values, their assessment of different situations and their handling are poles apart. Then there is the clash of interests, which creates friction and is a cause for concern for him. Elders advise and juniors do not listen. Juniors demand and seniors do not accede. Tastes are different, habits vary and preferences do not often match. Income levels are different and expenditure patterns are different. Definitions of good and bad, right and wrong and desirable and undesirable are quite different for different members. Greed, coveting, envy, enmity and ego create mutual distrust, hatred and distances in the relationship. Social norms,

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unwanted traditions, decadent customs and obsolete practices are so taxing and demanding that he feels perplexed all the time.

No doubt man is the architect of his own destiny but his own efforts are affected and influenced by other factors including the nature, his fellowmen, circumstances and chances. After all he is only a spare part, an important one no doubt, in this cosmic machinery. Of course much depends on the manipulations, machinations and maneuvering that he can muster. If he can grab the chances that come his way, if he is able to harness the nature and its phenomenon to his advantage, if he can carry his fellowmen with him and if he can make the best use of circumstances, things will work to his advantage. If he is unable to make the best use of circumstances and the chances coming his way, if his fellowmen do not go along with him and if the nature also goes against him, he is bound to meet with failure and all his efforts will be in vain.

Often it has been seen that everybody works and expects a return and that too a return of his liking. He may or may not get the desired return. If he gets a return of his choice, his aspirations sore high and he becomes more and more ambitious. This opens up a Pandora box of desires and fruits, returns and rewards with the result that he remains hungry and thirsty all the time. If on the other hand he does not get what he had desired he feels frustrated and crestfallen. The remedy is there provided we recognize it and put it in practice. The remedy does not lie in stopping to act and leaving everything to fate and destiny. The remedy lies in continuing to put in sincere efforts and making the effort itself a goal and deriving maximum pleasure out of these actions and efforts, doings and deeds. This is what a spiritualist exactly does. The Bhagavad Gita advocates that we should not work for a fruit and fruit should not be made the cause of an action. This is misrepresented and misunderstood as if we are asked to work purposelessly. Working for a fruit and working with a purpose are two different things. All our actions have to have a purpose. That purpose inspires us to act. It gives us the proper direction and helps us sustain our efforts in spite of the hurdles and difficulties that we may encounter. On the other hand fruit is an allurements, a greed that blurs our vision and over shadows our sense of discrimination with the result that we strive hard to get the desired fruit by hook or by crook. This corrupts our thinking and misguides our actions.

A question always haunts the mind of this common man, subconsciously though. He wants to know what the aim of his life is, what the purpose of his toiling is and why at all should he work. Some people work to fulfill their basic necessities and all their time goes in doing that and there is hardly any time left to think beyond these necessities. Others who are able to spare sometime after catering to their minimum needs, may or may not give a serious thought to this question. If they are wholly materialistic, which mostly they are, they think that the aim of their life is to gain control on more and more resources so that their comforts are added to and their luxuries are ensured. They may succeed in this endeavour but they are never satisfied for there is no upper limit to seeking access to luxurious life.

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This gives them restless times though they are in search of peaceful life. There are others, though fewer in numbers, who rise above the materialistic mindset. They put in some more effort, some more labour and toil either for self-satisfaction or for the good of others. Serving others, helping the needy and catering to the needs of others give them utmost pleasure. Seeking this lasting pleasure and maximizing it by being constantly behind this wheel of service becomes the aim of their life. They are unmindful of their personal comforts so long as their deeds lead to alleviating the suffering and the misery of others, fellow human beings, birds or animals.

Whether we live for ourselves or for others is a moot point. It depends on our attitude, our way of thinking and our preferences. If selfless service gives us pleasure and satisfaction we like to live for others. Even then we feel that we are living for ourselves because we live for our own pleasure, which we derive from the service rendered. There is this story about two friends who held opposite views about the driving force behind our actions. One of them held that we always work for our own self and the other opined that many a time we work for others only. Once the two friends were on a long drive along a road running by the side of a dense forest. Suddenly they heard shrieking of an animal. The one behind the wheel stopped the jeep, alighted and began looking around. He observed that a stag had his horns entangled in a bush and was unable to free itself and was struggling and shrieking. He removed the bushes to a side and the stag got freed. The poor animal was overjoyed and hopped away into the forest. When he was back at the wheel his friend gave a hearty laughter and said, 'your action has proved my point. What personal interest did you have in setting the stag free, was it not only for the good of the animal?' He replied, 'on the contrary, this action of mine has proved my point. Had I not helped the poor stag to get free from the bushes its shrieks would have haunted me and I would have lost my sleep. I acted only to ensure peace of my mind and to ensure a sound sleep for myself'.

A mindset of this nature is ensured once we take to the path of spirituality. It gives us poise and balance, tranquility and peace. It enables us to deal with all circumstances, favourable or otherwise, with equanimity. It fashions our attitude in a way that we deal with all the people with love and understanding, whether or not they are with us. It inspires us to take delight in whatever we do, whichever environment we are in and whomsoever we come in contact with. Resilience, steadfastness and fortitude become the hallmark of our behaviour. With the strength that the spirituality bestows upon us, we are able to stand like a rock in the face of adversities and yet live a happy life. Our spiritual character guides our daily routine. We start our day with the resolve that we shall do our duty in all sincerity and with due commitment. Our daylong activities are always on the righteous track because of our resolve. When we retire for the day we feel a sense of satisfaction that we have given our best within the capacity and acumen that the nature has endowed us with. We remain contented with what we get while all the time striving for higher achievements. This satisfaction becomes the cause of the lasting joy that we achieve and we are at peace with ourselves internally and at peace with others externally.

25.0 BODY AND ITS IMPORTANCE

There is an old saying in Sanskrit, '*Shariram-adyam khalu dharma sadhanam* – In executing one's duties the body comes first'. What does this pithy saying connote? Before examining this let us first understand the position of body in our existence. There are two main aspects of our existence, body and the embodied. While the embodied is the main entity, the body is the secondary entity. The former is the charioteer and the latter the chariot. Body is the vehicle on which the embodied rides and a tool through which it acts and functions. The existence of the embodied presupposes the existence of the body. That is why the saying says that our first duty goes towards our body. Unless we keep it clean, fit and healthy we cannot function. The embodied is not visible but the body is. The embodied is subtle and the body is gross. So it is of paramount importance first to take care of the gross and visible before we move on the subtle and hidden.

The body is made of the food that we consume. The flesh and blood, the bones and the skin, the external and internal organs all are formed and then grow with the help of the energy that comes from all that we eat and drink. Clean air, pure water and nutritious food are essential to sustain our body in good health. The air that we inhale is the life essence and an important component of our existence. The food and air together form the vital part of our body. There are the two additional but subtle parts of mind and intellect, represented by the heart and head. Together these two give feeling, compassion, wisdom and discriminating faculty to us. The body has the external limbs that keep it mobile, active and functional. Whatever the intellect thinks is executed by these limbs. Whatever the heart feels is reflected in the actions of the limbs. The pattern of thinking that takes place in the mind manifests in the deeds. That is why we pray '*Tanme manah shiva sankalpam-astu* – Let my mind be full of noble resolutions'. All this together forms our personality.

There is some entity that thinks, feels, enjoys on the one hand and manages, controls and orders on the other hand. This entity is the embodied soul and it is up to it to or not to adopt the path of spirituality. Having adopted this sacred path the embodied has no other alternative but to function through the body. Without the body it has no existence. Without the body it can neither act, nor enjoy nor possess anything. While it is a fact that the embodied only can seek the truth, it is also not wrong to say that it cannot do so without the aid of the body it stays in. body is a marvel, a mystery as also a jigsaw puzzle. It is perhaps the greatest mystery for us as to how this body functions both internally and externally. The reflexes, the sensations, the self-curing mechanism, the synchronization between various organs and the actions and reactions of this body are simply fascinating. The rhythmic breathing, the blood circulation, the digestive system, the excretory mechanism, reproduction and the capacities to remember, relate and forget are awe-inspiring. Obviously, therefore, the embodied self is fortunate to have such a marvellous

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machinery at its command in order to be able to tread on the path of spirituality and achieve the desired goal.

In Hindu mythology descent of the Divine has been postulated. When God feels the necessity to be embodied so that the evil is destroyed and the righteousness is re-established He takes the human form. He rescues the virtuous and righteous from the tyranny of the evil and vicious. In this case again it has been exhibited that the formless omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God has to get embodied in order to execute the worldly functions. In order to kill the evil He takes the form of a man with weapons like the bow and arrow, sword, discus or axe. He scrupulously observes all the rules of being embodied and makes full use of the body for the purpose for which He has descended. The Gita says, '*Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir-bhavati Bharata, abhyuthanam adharmasya tadaatmanam srijamyaham. Paritranyaya Sadhunam vinashaya cha dushkritam dharma sansthanarthaya sambhavami yuge yuge* – Whenever the righteousness is on the decline and the vice is on the rise, I create myself. I take birth in different eras in order to protect the virtuous and destroy the evil and to establish the rule of righteousness'. Once the Divine is embodied He makes the human body a medium for executing His desires.

If we believe that the Divine pervades in everything including us, then it follows that He is embodied in our body. We are part of the cosmos and the universal consciousness and we have to fulfill our role for which we have taken birth. Therefore it is essential for us to look to our body as the only instrument through which we have to execute our assigned tasks. Our thoughts are dormant in this body and in due course these get stirred up. In other words from the subtle position called '*para avastha*' these get transformed into '*pashyanti avastha*', a position where sprouting takes place. Soon these begin crystallizing at the intermediary position known as '*madhyama avastha*'. Eventually we give expression to these thoughts through words and sentences and this position is termed as '*vaikhari avastha*'. All these stages develop and take place in our body. When we wish to translate these thoughts into action, again the body is the medium. Our actions and reactions are executed through this body alone. This establishes the importance of the body in our existence.

We live in the world of our creation within the world created by nature and managed by the Divine through its divine powers. This life provides us occasions to feel, discern, understand and evaluate. It affords us circumstances that may instigate us to hate, despise or abhor something or someone; it may inspire us to love, be compassionate and kind towards something or someone. Again all these impulses need the body for both assimilation and execution. The fact that we are beings itself raises a number of questions for which we seek answers, voluntarily or involuntarily. Sometimes we have to be extroverts and look outwards and sometimes we have to be introverts and look inwards. Many a time some external agencies guide our path and many a time we find our path ourselves. The sages, thinkers and philosophers as also prophets and religious leaders have left for us a treasure

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of literature including the revealed texts, which throw light on the mysteries of life. To study all this fund of knowledge, assimilate it and adopt whatever appeals our belief and psyche, again the faculties of our body are the only means within our control and at our disposal. This should make it clear how important our body is for our existence, evolution and development, whether physical, mental, vital, intellectual or spiritual.

It is, therefore, of paramount importance that the body is kept fit and healthy in all respects. The physical body has to be kept clean and healthy and for this purpose physical exercises known as '*Yogaasana*', morning walk or jogging is generally resorted to. In addition care is to be taken that we do not consume any thing injurious to our health like alcohol, drugs etc. For our vital body breathing exercises called '*Pranayama*' and breath control are prescribed. For the health of our mental and intellectual bodies we must entertain healthy ideas, listen to pure and pious words, study healthy literature and be in good company. There is a saying in English, 'tell me what book you are holding and I shall tell you what type of a man you are'. The literature that we study shows our interest and shapes our attitude. Similarly there is a saying in Sanskrit, '*Satam satbhih sanghah katham-api hi punyena bhavati* – It is the result of our good actions that we get the company of good and noble persons'. Thus it will be seen that proper literature and proper company are very necessary for our healthy physique, mind and intellect. As regards our dietary habits well it is a matter of common knowledge that some people live to eat. They devour all types of foods unmindful of the consequences and the effect on their health. The wise, however, eat to live. They are selective and consume what is essential to keep their body fit and healthy.

Healthy body is the home to healthy mind and healthy intellect. Naturally, therefore, the indwelling self gets a healthy tool and instrument in the form of this healthy body to carry out its functions as an embodied entity. The subtle and the gross aspects combine thus and give us our existence. Our birth as humans is precious and we must make the best use of it in order to evolve, progress and develop. Let us utilize this body for spiritual uplift and eventual emancipation. Let us make an endeavour through this body to find answers to the basic questions, '*Ko-aham, kas tvam, kutah aayatah, kah me janakah ka me mata* – Who am I and who are you; wherefrom have I come; who is my father and who is my mother (my creator)?' Let us make use of this body to recognize the creator, investigate the secret of the creation and understand their mutual relationship.

26.0 LOVE THYSELF

26.1 Preamble

It may sound odd for me to say 'love yourself'. Odd for two reasons, one that everyone believes that we do love ourselves and two because all the religions, great thinkers and well known books advocate that we should love others as we love ourselves. I am aware of both these points but still I have my own reservations. I feel that we do not really love ourselves even though it may appear so and, therefore, the question of loving others as we love ourselves does not arise. In order to realize that we do not love our own selves we have only to look around and we shall find examples galore of our not caring for self let alone love it. We need a law to be enacted that whenever we drive a two-wheeler we should have a helmet on. We need a law enforcement agency to ensure that we drive a car with a seatbelt on and all this for our safety. Does it not follow that we do not love ourselves for if we did, there would be no need for such a rule or law to be passed and prescribed. Even when such a law is there, we often disregard it and drive without a helmet or a seatbelt, avoiding the eyes of a watchful policeman on the crossing. We smoke, we drink, we take drugs and we cultivate umpteen types of vices and bad habits. Do we ever stop and ponder over the effect these things have on our health and longevity? Do we ever care to realize what a health hazard these things prove to be for us all in the long run? No, we do not and that is precisely proof enough to show our scant love for ourselves. One may argue that we drink, dine and dress, indulge in play and pleasure and cater to various needs for our comfort and luxury and this shows that we do love ourselves. The argument does not stand because all these activities we undertake for our name and fame and to satisfy our lust and senses. This indicates that we love our ego, our pride and haughtiness and not ourselves. Our love is objective and not subjective as is desirable.

26.2 The Self Defined

This situation brings us to a question of very great importance; what connotes the 'Self' that we should love. It is very difficult to define the Self. We have the gross body of flesh and blood called '*Sthoola Sharira*'. We have the subtle body of mind and intellect known as '*Sookshma Sharira*' and then we have the inner coating, which is referred to as '*Karana Deha*'. Technically there are said to be five sheaths, that together constitute our 'Self': 1. *Annamaya Kosha* or the food formed sheath, 2. *Pranamaya Kosha* or the air formed sheath, 3. *Manomaya Kosha* or the sheath of the mind, 4. *Vijnanamaya Kosha* or the sheath of the intellect and 5. *Anandamaya Kosha* or the sheath of the bliss and joy. Thus we have seen that the body, the life essence air, the mind, the intellect and the bliss all the five in their

totality form what may be called the 'Self'. It is this self that we must love and care for. The 'Self' has three distinct facets or levels. These are, the lower level constituting the body with its motor organs, the middle level comprising the mind and the intellect with the sense organs and the higher level of the spirit. The 'Self' has, therefore, to be loved at these three different levels in three different ways. Obviously our love will manifest in physical, mental and spiritual realms of our existence. We will ensure that our physique is healthy, mind is alert, intellect is sharp and the spirit is joyous.

26.3 Love at Different levels

Let us first discuss love for our body, the lower level of our 'self'. Our concern for our body should be in our ensuring its health and longevity. Our prayer, '*Jeevema Sharadash-shatam* – May we live a hundred years' needs backing up by our efforts to make it come true. Healthy food and healthy habits is the simple solution to this problem. What constitutes a healthy or '*Sattvika*' food is clearly explained in the Gita. '*Aayuh sattva-bala-aarogya sukha-preeti-vivardhanah, rasyah snigdha sthira hridayah aaharah sattvika-priyah B.G. XVII.8* – the foods that enhance longevity, vitality, energy, health, joy and cheerfulness and which are savoury and oleaginous, substantial and agreeable to our system are the choice of those with '*Sattvika*' disposition.' We must not take foods, which are pungent, hot, bitter, stale and impure. Purity of the food we take and cleanliness of the manner in which we consume the food are most essential to ensure health and longevity. We must at all costs avoid food and drink which is injurious to our health and which reduces the life span. Next point is about our habits. The problems of the pollution in the environment, depletion in the ozone layer, abnormal rise in various diseases like the AIDS, the Cancer, Insomnia, Sleeplessness, Tension and Stresses are all the result of our bad habits and imbalance in our behaviour and attitude. We have long bid adieu to clean habits. Irregular activities, late night errands, addictions of various types and over indulgence in merry making of sorts have resulted in all these problems. If we really want to love ourselves we have to change our life style and change it radically.

Next point to be understood is how to love our mind and intellect or the middle level of our 'Self'. Mind is a very perplexing aspect of our existence. Arjuna has described it in the Gita as '*Chanchalam, pramathi balavad-dridham, B.G. VI.34* – restless, turbulent, strong and obstinate'. So the first thing is to control this restless and obstinate mind by regular practice and by keeping all the sense organs unattached from sense objects. Otherwise we shall all the time be thinking of these sense objects, which will land us into trouble. We have been clearly warned about this in Shri Gita, '*Dhyayato vishayan-punsah sangas-teshu-upajayate, sangat sanjayate kamah kamat-krodho-abhijayate, krodhat- bhavati sam-mohah, sammohat-smriti-vibhramah, smriti-bhramashat-buddhi-nasho buddhi-nashat-pranashyati, B.G.II.62 & 63* – By remaining constantly thinking about the sense objects attachment is developed. Attachment gives rise to desire. Desire generates anger. Anger leads to

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delusion, which in turn creates confusion in memory. The confused memory blunts the reason and wisdom and that finally spells disaster.' The answer has been provided in the Gita itself. It enjoins upon us to have, along with moderate and suitable food, suitable and temperate habits and clean intentions in actions. '*Yukhta-aahara-viharasya, yukhta-cheshtasya karmasu*, B.G. VI. 17.' If we keep our intentions clean our mind will be healthy and that will be proof enough for our love to our 'Self'. This is the reason that we pray everyday, '*Tan-me manah shiva sankalpam-astu* – let my mind be full of resolve that is benevolent to all'. As regards our intellect, we must remember what the Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu has said, 'Knowing others is wisdom, knowing ourselves is enlightenment'. Since the intellect is the medium of knowing, we must keep it active all the time. Intellect has a vast potential and must be groomed to develop a sense of discrimination and discernment. It should be able to know right from wrong, true from falsehood, eternal joy from transient pleasure. Once these faculties are acquired and refined, the intellect will be active, healthy and strong. In this manner by keeping our mind and intellect healthy shall we be able to love our 'self' at the middle level.

The aspect of our love for our 'self' at the higher level is rather intricate. It is more abstract and subtle than appears at first sight. It is a voyage in the space, where one is likely to meet innumerable galaxies, stars and planets and where many milestones are reached which appear to be the destination but are not. While dealing with the spirit we cannot apply mundane measures or worldly standards. The world of the spirit is unique. Here we have to see self in everything and everything in self. Here we have to destroy animality and rise to the divinity. To love the spirit is to take the path of spirituality, adopt an attitude of universality, transcending time and space, name and form, belief and creed. Let us not forget that we are the masters of our destiny. We can make or mar our life by our own actions of thought, word and deed. The Gita enjoins upon us that we should not debase ourselves, we should raise ourselves by our own efforts, for man is his own friend and foe. '*Uddharet-atmana-atmanam na-atmanam-avasadayet. Aatmaiva hi-atmano-bandhuh atmaiva ripur-atmanah* – B.G. VI.5'

26.4 The Horizon of Love

Here I would like to reproduce a Persian poem written in thirteenth century by Jalal ad- Din Rumi, as translated by Fereydoun Kia, under the caption, 'Do you love me?'

*A lover asked his beloved,
Do you love yourself more than you love me?
The beloved replied,
I have died to myself and I live for you.*

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I' ve disappeared from myself and my attributes.

I am present only for you.

I have forgotten all my learnings,

But from knowing you I have become a scholar.

I have lost all my strength,

But from your power I am able.

If I love myself I love you.

If I love you I love myself.

There is a great spiritual message in this little poem. When we raise ourselves to the level of divinity, we see the Divine in everything around. Our 'I' conditioned by all sorts of boundaries and limitations, factors and elements, expands and embraces the entire universe. It becomes deep as an ocean and vast as the sky. Love permeates in everything we do and we enter a realm of deathlessness where nothing perishes. *'Yo mam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati, tasya-aham na pranashyami sa cha me na pranashyati.* B.G. VI.30 – He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, is never lost to Me, nor do I become lost to him'. It is at this stage only that the Biblical dictum, 'Love thy neighbour as thy self' becomes meaningful and practicable. We first love ourselves, see ourselves in every being and then love them as we love ourselves. This makes our love universal, eternal and infinite, not bound by time and space. The canvas of love becomes so vast that it covers all objects, animate and inanimate.

26.5 What is Love?

Love has been variously defined in different contexts. Unfortunately the definition has been given always keeping in mind love to others. Love to one's own self has never been visualised. If we love our wisdom, it is ego. If we love our wealth, it is pride. If we love our beauty, it is conceit and if we love our virtue, it is blasphemy. The great Sanskrit poet, Bhartrihari has equated self-praise with a grave sin, in these words: *'Nija-guna-katha paatakam mahat* – speaking about one's own virtues is the gravest of all sins'. If we love others it is more often than not motivated and selfish and seldom love for love's sake. Love has been said to be in giving and not expecting, in sacrificing and not demanding, in surrendering and not commanding. All this is in relation to our love for others. In relation to our love for ourselves it is also care and compassion, sharing pain and pleasure and ensuring joy and bliss. If we really mean to love ourselves, we shall never indulge in vices that are injurious to our health and happiness. If we have true love for ourselves we shall not harm or injure anybody; we shall not disturb anybody's peace of mind, for such activities destroy our own peace of mind. If we mean to love ourselves, we shall neither hate nor fear anyone. These are the elements that create turmoil in our minds, snatch away

our sound sleep and make us perennially restless. Among the many qualities enumerated in Chapter XVI of the Bhagavad Gita, of a person of divine disposition, the two important qualities are '*Abhayam*' or fearlessness and '*Adroham*' or absence of hatred for anyone. Loving our 'self' will make us share pain and pleasure of our fellow beings so that we will get a sound sleep, a peaceful mind, a harmonious intellect and a blissful soul. Love is a flower that radiates its beauty and spreads its fragrance. We have to make sure that this flower, tender and delicate, does not wither or dry. We must love ourselves constantly and continuously, every time and at every place. This love should be in our thoughts, in our words and in our deeds. Love should bestow radiance to our looks, illumination to our minds, enlightenment to our intellects and joy to our spirits. Our prayers, prescribed in our scriptures are very appropriate and meaningful. We are required to pray, '*Maa vidvishavahai* – let us not hate anyone.' Ensuring a mind devoid of hatred and full of noble resolve is the best way to love ourselves. This will undoubtedly make us, in the words of the Vedas, '*Amritasya Putrah*' or immortal human beings.

26.6 Rationale of Loving Ourselves

People have been preaching love for others, for God, for fellow humans, for animals, for the environment, for the creative arts, for music and so on. Knowing this fully well, yet I am advocating love for ourselves. There is a catch in the phrase 'love thyself'. The catch is that there is reciprocal dependence of the existence of the 'Self', the 'God' and the 'World'. As Swami Sivananda has observed, 'The Self of everyone bears testimony to the existence of the Self, which comprehends the entire universe. The universal Self is God'. The Self encased in the finite body is consciousness defined by the principles of individuality and the world is an extension of this Self. Our scriptures say, '*Yatha Pinde tatha Brahmande* – as in the individual body so in the whole cosmos. In other words the individual self is the miniature replica of the entire creation'. It is, therefore, obvious that the first step of this ladder of love is love for the self. We begin by loving ourselves and realizing that the world is only an extension of our self, we proceed to love everything around. The objects of our love then become limitless, encompassing the mankind, the flora and fauna, the nature and all that is beautiful and enchanting. Thereafter, once we tread on the fascinating path of spirituality, we get rid of the shackles of narrow viewpoints, the limitations and the fictitious or man made boundaries. We perceive the Truth and the essence of the Divine and the love for God takes root in our hearts. The Self is at the centre of everything. It is encased in the body no doubt, but that situation itself makes it possible for us to have a heart, a mind and an intellect. The body is a vehicle to carry these instruments of the self and we must love it. The heart gives us the faculty of compassion and we must love it. The mind is the realm of meditation and contemplation, that bring us closer to the Divine creation and, therefore, deserves our love. The intellect is the hard disc of the computer of knowledge without which we can neither think, nor discriminate nor discern and perceive and must necessarily be loved. Having developed a love for ourselves, at all levels and in all aspects only, we can widen the canvas of our love. It is only when we love ourselves that we come to practise

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"Satyam' or Truth, 'Shivam' or Ethics and 'Sundaram' or Aesthetics. It is only by loving ourselves that we experience our 'Sat' or Being, 'Chit' or Consciousness and 'Ananda' or Bliss. Search for the Truth is an inward journey – a journey of love and this presupposes that we should love the self. Our love for the self ensures purity and piety and this in turn enables us to see the world as suffused with the sacred, which we love and adore. Our love should have subjective honesty and objective validity. Then only we can proclaim, '*Tat tvam-asi-* That thou Art.' In spiritual parlance also the key phrase is '*So-aham*', which when adopted by the Sufis has become, '*Hama-O-ast*' or I am He. It follows that unless we love 'I' we cannot claim to love 'Him'.

26.7 Concluding Remarks

A question may be asked whether all this means that we should be introverts and not extroverts, that we should escape from the world at large and live in a protected shell of our own self. No, that is not the idea. The idea is that we should not run after material, fragmentary and superficial aspects. We should turn to spiritual, total and profound aspects, which is what love for the self is all about. Transient things and our love towards them give us pleasure but only fragile and momentary. The eternal self and our love for it gives us joy, infinite and ever lasting. Let us find the Truth Divine within and love it and then experience peace and tranquility. Let us love ourselves and then radiate it in the entire cosmos. Let us fill ourselves with the fragrance of love and then transmit it to our surroundings. A drop of love for the self will drench the entire universe with the elixir of love and that is the justification for advocating 'Love thyself'.

Exploring self is the key to loving. What better way to describing this point than the following lines of T.S.Eliot from his poem 'Little Gidding': -

"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time."

27.0 INFLUENCE OF ADVAITA ON MUSLIM RISHIS OF KASHMIR

27.1 Preamble

Kashmir has had a galaxy of saint-poets, both Hindus and Muslims. While Hindus are invariably referred as Rishis, Muslims are given various epithets. One of the epithets given is Sufi, which I feel is a misnomer. Sufis have come to Kashmir towards late thirteenth century and fourteenth century. They include Sharafud-Din Bulbul and Sayyad Mir AH Hamadani etc. They were Sayyads, who had escaped the tyranny in their country of origin and had sought refuge in Kashmir. With the advent of Islam and large scale conversion the demographic situation changed and the valley became Muslim majority place. Naturally, therefore, these inhabitants carried forward their Hindu tradition in the matter of their faith, customs, language, beliefs and so on. Kashmiris had a six hundred year old philosophy called Kashmir Shaiva Philosophy, which had seeped into the very psyche and the way of life of the populace. This philosophy is a non-dualistic doctrine, which emphasizes that the creation is the manifestation of the Creator and that in the ultimate analysis a being as a seeker can attain the Supreme and be one with Him.

That God is one is a universally accepted fact. There is no difference of opinion about the existence of one God, although there is some doubt about the existence of God itself in some faiths. All those who do not doubt the existence of God universally believe that only one Supreme Power exists. There is absolute unanimity on this point among the major religions, religious ideologues, philosophers and thinkers. This view is held by those who believe in Confucianism, Taoism and Shinto in the East, by the Christians, Jews and Muslims in the West and the Middle-East as also by Indians with Sanatana Dharma as their faith. Even Zoroastrians believe in one God, 'Ahur Mazda' although they also believe that there is another evil entity called 'Angra Manyu', which misleads people. This is more or less like Christian and Muslims' concept of Satan. Christians believe in trinity of God, Son and the Holy Ghost, who they believe are one like water, ice and steam are as clarified by Huston Smith in his book 'The World's Religions'. As regards Indian view point, the God is no doubt one called 'Brahman' but He is also perceived through various powers of the nature, which are viewed as 'Devatas' (Literally those that shine) as His different facets only. Thus there is universal '**Ekeshwaravad**' or belief in one God. This is called '*Vahdat-ul-vajud*' in Islamic parlance. Sometimes this term is mixed up with '**Advaita**' or non-dualism of the Upanishads. Advaita actually denotes oneness of 'Jeevatma', the individual soul and 'Paramatma', the Universal Soul. This doctrine of the Upanishads is against the tenets of Islam. When a Sufi saint or poet talks of oneness he is referring to this doctrine and not to the existence of one God, for he says '*Anal Haq and Man Khuda*' – I am the Truth and I am the God. This is the reason why Mansur-al-Hallaj was hanged and burnt for such an

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utterance. Sufis were not accepted in the fold of Islam for a long time till Islam lost political power and they became very important instruments in spreading Islam in different countries. The Muslim Rishis in Kashmir who are called Sufis are, however, a class apart by themselves.

Advaita as conceived in the corpus of Upanishadic literature, the Brahma Sutra of Badarayana and the Bhagavad Gita (*The three together are called 'Prasthan Trayee'*) has been interpreted and enunciated in a variety of ways. Basically it is a doctrine explaining the relationship between the Creator and the creation. Some sages and philosophers have held that the two are really one and what we see and observe outside these, is all an illusion. Some of them believe that no doubt the two are one but individually they have their own identity. Some sages have likened the two to the phenomenon of an object and its reflection in a mirror, while others have explained the two as the ocean and its waves. The Kashmir Shaiva Darshan has not subscribed to the illusion theory. It propounds that since the creation is the manifestation of the Creator and since the Creator is real there cannot be anything unreal about the manifestation. What is unreal is the apparent difference observed between the Creator and the creation. This difference is actually an illusion and once this veil of illusion is removed from our vision we can clearly perceive the truth of the individual soul and the Universal Soul being one. This state can be achieved in a variety of ways including contemplation, devotion, spiritual pursuit and the like. This doctrine has appealed the thinkers world over, whether Greek and Roman philosophers, Eastern thinkers, Christian monks or Muslim Sufis. The Muslim saint poets of Kashmir also could not remain unaffected by this captivating doctrine.

I remember my old home in Chhattabal. There was a long lane leading to our house from the main road. On the one side of the lane there were cultivated fields full of vegetables and tobacco. The other side was a row of houses. One of these belonged to one Sheikh Mehmud, who ran a small shop in the ground floor, selling milk, yogurt and some pulses. Whenever I passed by this shop or went to him to purchase yogurt, I would observe a number of men sitting with him and talking about mystic subjects. Soon I came to know that he was also a holy person of the same Rishi order and had a number of disciples whom he guided in their spiritual pursuit. This '*Peer-mureed*' or '*Guru-shishya*' tradition in Hindu terminology, meaning a lineage of preceptor and disciple is an essential feature of the Rishi order. This holy person was revered and though illiterate, he also wrote mystical poetry to bring home to his disciples the secrets of mysticism, as was the practice with other holy persons of this order.

27.2 Lal Ded and Nunda Rishi

The 'Adikavayitri' or the first poetess of Kashmiri language is considered to be Lal Ded, who was a great mystic and a 'Shaiva Sadhika' or the seeker of the Divine through the path of Kashmir Shaiva Darshan. She has left behind a corpus of her sayings, which are in the form of four-liners called 'Vakh' (or Sanskrit Vakya). These have been translated into Sanskrit, Hindi, and English and interpreted by many a scholar. Let me quote two of her Vakhs to denote how she denounced the false exhibitionist practices and pointed to the essence of spiritualism. She has deprecated the practice of 'Bali' or animal sacrifice in these words: '*Yi kamyu vopadeesh dyutui hayo bata, atseetan vatas dyun sutseetan kath ahar?* O Pandit! Who has advised you to offer as a feed an animate sheep to an inanimate stone idol?' Similarly she has ridiculed the idol worship when she says, '*Diva vata deever vata, heri bon chhui ikavata, pooz kath karakh hayo Bata?* Your deity is made of stone, the shrine is made of stone, everything from top to bottom is the same stone, what are you going to worship, O Pandita?' She laid stress on the need to go inwards and realize the self and perceive the Divine in everything. These two 'Vakhs' of her will make this point clear. '*Go'ran d'opnam kunui vatsun, nyabra d'opnam andar atsun, sui Lali gav vakh ta vatsun.* My preceptor told me but one thing only and that was to go from without to within. Lala adopted this in letter and spirit.' '*Kava chhuk divan anine vatsha, trukai chhuk ta andrei atsha Shiv chhui aet ta kun mo gatsh sa haz kath myani karto patsh.* Why are you groping in the dark like the blind? If you are wise go within yourself. Shiva is there in your heart. Do trust me since it has come to me naturally.' This great poetess was followed by Nunda Rishi, another great ascetic poet of the Kashmiri literature, who wrote four-liners called 'Shrukh' (or Shloka in Sanskrit). He did penance in a cave and was greatly influenced by his senior Lal Ded. He wrote, '*Tas Padmanporachi Lale, Tami gale amryeth chav. Swa sanin avatar lwale, tithyui mye var ditam Diva.* The great Lal Ded of Padamanpura drank a mouthful of nectar. For us she is an incarnation. O Lord! Give me a similar boon as you gave her.' In the true tradition of Vedanta he considered the world an illusion. He addresses himself in these words: '*Hai zuva bram chhui samsar ho, zuva marun mothui kava, s'or ta zuva gara panano.* O my self realize that this world is an illusion, why do you forget the inevitable death; remember your own home, the abode of the Divine.' This influence of non-dualism or 'Advaita' and other Upanishadic principles as were prevalent in Kashmir is vividly seen in the writings, compositions and other verses of the later Muslim saint-poets of Kashmir.

Let us first see what these Saint poets have said about their mentor, Lal Ded. Mohmud Gami (1765 – 1855), a great name in Kashmiri poetry, who may not strictly be clubbed with Saint poets has written a beautiful verse associating every seeker with Lal Ded in these words: '*Tsonza shoobai ba khazmatsei, granz Sahibo hyetsthas na zanh. Ada nav pyom Lala matsei, aavaz vatsei no.* I am nothing but a maid to serve you, no one to be counted by you. Then I got the name of ecstatic Lala, My Lord! Did you not hear my wail?' Shamas Faqir (1843 – 1906, real name Mohammad Siddiq Bhatt), one of the foremost Saint-poets of Kashmir who lived in Chinikral Mohalla in Srinagar was fascinated by the writings of Lal Ded.

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He has paid tribute to her in one of his compositions and also made a mention of her having given spiritual guidance to Nunda Rishi. Says he, '*Kor Lali ikavata aakash pranas, zan milanav Bhagavaanas seit. Lali trov zala no't manz pote'l khanas. Zan milanav Bhagavaanas seit. Tchala gayi Lala ma'ts shurahyar shranas. Hala tami kor zagi tikatar tarnas. Kala tami tso'tnai nafsi shaitanas, zan milanav Bhagavaanas seit. Vopa deesh karni gayi Nunda reshanas. Rindav dophas aini Irfan. Tshyapi tshipras gyundun Shahi Hamadanas, zan milinav Bhagavaanas seit.* Lala did breath control called 'Pranabhyas' to realize the Divine. Lala offered a pitcherful of water to the idol in the shrine to know the Lord. Lala slipped to the riverbank called 'Shurahyaar' to take a bath and took a plunge to cross the river of life. She controlled the sense objects in order to realize Him. She went to give spiritual lessons to Nunda Rishi and the knowledgeable found it to be the pure mysticism. She virtually teased Shahi Hamadan, who could not gauge her spiritual heights (there is difference of opinion on whether there ever was a meeting between Shah Hamadan and Lal Ded as there is some conflict in the dates). Another Saint poet, Ahmad Batawa'r, a contemporary of Shams Faquir (1845 – 1918), has described the exalted spiritual position of Lal Ded in this verse: '*Lala matsi kala tso't nafsi shaitanas. Kala karan Alla Lal sape'n hoo. Lola ha'ts mahav gayi he Bhagavaanas. Jan chum meelith jahanas saet* Lala in ecstasy killed all her senses, engrossed in the love of God she became one with Him. My self is one with the universal self.' While poets other than Rishis have also sung in praise of Lal Ded, but the manner in which the Rishi poets have quoted her, repeated her idiom and referred to her clearly shows the deep impact that her philosophy had had on their minds resulting in their express acknowledgement through their verses.

27.3 The Impact and the Influence

When religions travel to new pastures they adopt many new things both ideologically and in order to gain acceptance among the local inhabitants. Buddhism underwent changes when it travelled outside India to Tibet, China, Japan, Korea and other places. Christian theology was reformed in Europe quite substantially. To quote Lippman, 'Prophet Muhammad's vision of a united polytribal community fused into one brotherhood by Islam has long since been proved to be unattainable' because of which Islam thrives as a religion but not as a polity. In India also a multitude of regional and tribal rituals and customs have got fused into the mainstream religion. The Muslim Saints of Kashmir could not also remain unaffected by the influence of the Hindu tradition of thought, ideology and philosophy, which was powerful and inherited by them. Even though they held the Prophet and the holy Qura'n in high esteem, they absorbed the major tenets of the Hindu philosophy in their own spiritual practices and prescriptions. This became a very strong cementing factor between the Hindus and the Muslims. The lead had come from Lal Ded when she proclaimed: '*Shiv chhui thali thali rozan mo zan Bhata ta musulman. Trukai chhuk ta paan panun parzan, soi chhai sahibas saet zani zaan.* The Divine verily pervades everything here, don't you differentiate between a Hindu and a Muslim. If you are wise realize your own self and that is realization of the Divine.' The lead thus having been provided these Saint poets have tread on the

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same path and have earned respect, reverence and love from both the communities. No wonder, therefore, that these Saint poets, even though professing Muslim faith, earned love, reverence and regard from Hindus as well. Some of these holy men professed great regard for the Hindu deities and why not; for them there was no difference and no conflict. Holy persons like Makhdoom Sahib, Dastagir Sahib, Batamol Sahib (Muslims) and Krishna Kar, Peer Pandit Padshah (Hindus) were revered equally by both the communities. About Makhdoom Sahib there is a legend that he had a firm belief in Hindu concept of Mother Goddess in her 'Jwala' or Flame form. His mausoleum situated at the Hill of Hari Parvat was burnt thrice in fire and the Mother Goddess 'Jwala' had to be propitiated so that there is no more devastation of this holy place by fire.

In the backdrop of what has been stated about it would be worth our while to study the impact and the influence of the Hindu thought, Hindu practices and Hindu tradition on some of the prominent Muslim Saint poets of Kashmir, who in my opinion should appropriately be called Muslim Rishis. This is evident not only from what we hear about them but is also explicitly brought out by them in their poetic compositions.

27.4 Shams Faqir

Lal Ded had said '*Asi aes tai asi asav asi dore kaer patavath*. We only were and we only shall be, it is we only who kept on coming and going.' Shams said the same thing in his own way. '*Yun ta gatshun mo mashrai, tami gatshit chhu tuhund garai*. Do not forget birth and death because His abode is beyond this transmigration.' The Gita has stated that people see the secret of life with awe and wonder and no one knows the reality of self. This idea has been conveyed by him thus: '*Kyah chhu hayat kyah chhu mamat, kath cheezas nav kara bo zaat*. What is life and what is death, what shall I call the Self (or the Divine)?' Lal Ded had said, '*Phiran phiran nyoth anguj gaji manech dui tsaji no*. Telling the beads of the rosary you have rubbed the flesh of your thumb and finger but the duality has not gone from your mind.' The same idea has been conveyed by this Sufi in the following verse. '*Ha zahida kyah chhuk tsa karan, raath doh goi tasbih phiran. Mokhta ravi fatus rachhit zom, roni mutsrith shroni shroni ko't gom*. What are you doing you fool, you have been telling the rosary day and night. Going after fake things you are losing the real pearl. Have I lost the jingle by untying the bells?' Again Lal Ded had dissuaded from giving spiritual message to an undeserving person in these words: '*Syeki shathas byol no vaevze, Kharas gore dina ravi doh. Moodas jnanach kath no vaenze, kom yajyan raavi teel*. Do not sow seed in a sandy belt; you will waste a whole day in feeding a donkey with jaggery. Do not give spiritual knowledge to a fool, as you will waste oil in preparing cakes from chaff.' Shams Faqir has put the same thing thus: '*Nasihath kaerzi no nasli shaitanas, tala kani zanzyan aasi ma kham. Maarfat kyah kari napak banas, tas naadanas kar tsali tshai*. Do not give advice to a satanic person because basically he is raw and not ripe. Mysticism is a waste for an impure one. Alas! When shall his ignorance go away.' The opening lines of one of his ghazals are an excellent example of the non-dualism of the Vedanta. '*Bo chhus kenh nai kho'd panay, bo kenh nai kas vanay panay*. I am nothing; it is He himself in my form. How shall I explain my not being anything to any one.' This can be compared with this line from Shankaracharya: '**Tad-eko-vashishthah Shivah kevalo-aham**. I am Shiva and Shiva alone'. He has described omnipresence of God in these words: '*Mye vuchh har shayi su yaar, chhuno kanh moi ti khali. Vanai bo siri israr yino aasakh vubali*. I perceive the Divine at every place. Not an inch is without Him. This is the secret I reveal to you; do not get lost.'

27.5 Ahmad Batawari

Ahmad Batawari was a contemporary of Shams Faqir and lived from 1845 to 1918. He was an advocate of the immortality and continuity of life. In the footprints of Lal Ded he has said '*Hayatuk aaftab chhuna zanh losan, bozan kona chhuk yi chhu yaksan*. – The Sun of life never sets, why don't you understand that the Divine pervades everything equally.' He has freely used the Hindu mythology to bring home his point of view. A few examples are given

here. 'Saalkas balkas Shiva Naranas, tsonven ikavata pranas saet. Tarkas saath chum vetsarnag sranas, jan chum meelith jahanas saet. Veshnas, Krishnas, Resh madanas, Maha Ganish tati kas kari namaskar, Ganga raza byuthum Gangabal thanas... Ravun rovmut manz tawanas, Sita sata rats He chhavan, Tsayi Rama Tsandras manz daricha khanas... Shaster dendar gupt gnanas, zuv chhuk Shaster dil sat noor, Ahmad Batawar gupt rood panas, jan chum meelith jahanas saet. A seeker, a child, Shiva and Narayana, all these four are together to be remembered through the vital breath. This is the auspicious time to bathe in the spring of contemplation. The individual self is united with the universal self. Maha Ganesha is bewildered in the gathering of the sages. He sees Vishnu, Krishna among them and whom he should salute in reverence. The Lord of the Ganges is seated at the source of the Ganges. Ravana has gone astray while Sita is engrossed with her consort. She is there with Shri Rama. It is the Shastras (the revealed text) that give the secret knowledge. The life essence for the knowledgeable are these texts while their hearts are full of divine light. Ahmad Batawar has remained hidden and his self is one with the universal self.'

27.6 Swachhi Kral

This poet lived around the same time in a village named 'Yander' in Pulwama. He was an ardent believer in non-dualism. He says, '*Akh tsa te byeyi bo ganzer maba, haba yi chhui gumanai*. Me and you are not to be taken as different because dualism is a delusion.'
'*Dapyomus bavitam pananui mye aasun, dapunam pan panun gatshi thari kasun*. I asked Him to reveal Himself to me. He replied that for that you have to go beyond your self.' Long before, Lal Ded had stated, '*Larah lazam manz maidanas aend aend kaer mas takiya ta gah. So rooz yati tai bo gayas panas vonye gav vanas falav dith*. In the middle of a field I constructed a house and decorated it on all sides. The house remained here and I only went away as if the shopkeeper left after downing the shutters of his shop.' Swachh Kral has this to say in the same vein, '*Yath fan sarayi dyun chhui shaba, ath manz mo trav dukanai. Path chhui marun az ya saba, haba yi chhui gumanai*. You have to spend just a night in this mortal inn. Do not start a business here. For you have to die now or in the morn; it is all a delusion.' He advocates adopting a vision of discrimination to see right from wrong.
'*Dapyomas swarma laegith kyah chhu banan. Dapunam poz ta apuz ada chhu nanan*. I asked him what use is the collerium of discrimination in ones eyes. He replied that this enables one to distinguish right from wrong.' He sees the Divine in everything, the ocean in every drop. '*Joyi manz basith chhui daryav, nav dar aab tai aab dar nav*. The river exists in a brook, water inside a boat and boat inside the water.'

27.7 Nyama Saab

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Nyama saab was senior (born 1805) and he also lived at Chinikral mohalla of Srinagar. He has time and again reiterated what Lal Ded had said in these words: '*Lal bo drayas lolare tshandan lustum dyan keho raath. Vucchhum Pandit panani gare, sui mye rotmas nyechhther ta saath.* I set out in search of Him early at dawn and wandered day and night. Ultimately I saw Him within myself and that was the auspicious moment for me.' At one place he has said, '*Yas naad layi su chum nishi, kamyu sheeshi chovnas mai.* That one whom I call aloud is near me. What a cup of wine he has made me drink!' At other place he repeats, '*Shah chhui basith panane gare, hoore mye nyunam tsure dil.* The Lord is seated within me, he has taken my heart away.' Again he says, '*Yaar chhui gari panane, su no me vane aaw.* My Beloved is within me but I failed to recognize Him.' Nyama seems to have reached a stage where he has shunned the notion of 'I' and 'my'. This is the high point of Upanishadic Vedanta. '*Orai aayov ladith chhav, dopnam sorui myonui gav. Ba dapun myonui vasith pyav, ath nav aalim haarith pyav.* He came with all His grandeur and declared that everything is His. The notion of 'I' in me was gone because no reason or intelligence is of any use in this arena.' He has described the status of the Divine purposefully in indefinite terms because he feels that none of the religious schools has any clue to that. '*Sang ta gnyana math haeratas. Nyermalas manz myani naav. Shubi shinyah tati khidmatas, pyom tsyatas tas chhu myon naav.* Bouddh congregations (Sangha) and Hindu centers of spiritualism (Maths) are themselves bewildered; the boat of my life is in the pure sacred waters. Even nihilism is meaningless there for I realized that He and I are one – with the same name.'

27.8 Shah Ghafur

This great holy man lived in the beginning of 19th century at village Chhivan in Badgam. He has adopted the Vedantic dictum 'So-aham' (or I am He) in its pristine purity and has written a full poem with this title. '*Brahma, Veshan, Maheeshwar garun, shuft ho chhui tyuhundui zuv. Pan hai khatanai jan hyekh marun, darnayi darun suhamsu.* Seek to know the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as they are the givers of your life. If they hide themselves from you give your life at their feet. Adopt always the great mantra of 'I am He'. '*Bashar travith, Ishar tsa garun, Isharas saet roz sapnakh sui Ishar sapdun sharir gav marun.... Dah chhi avtaar zanh lagi na tharun, mah zan prazlan naran chhui, Ram Ram karun gav naam sandarun, daranayi darun suhamsu.* Leave the individual soul and go after the Universal soul. Remain with God and you will become God. For that you have to shun your self. There are ten different incarnations of God. Narayana only shines in all of them like the Moon. So you need not feel hesitant. Repeating the name Rama is the way to remember God and once you get habituated to that you will feel one with the Divine.' Saying so, he is at once reminded of the crucifixion of Mansoor and he warns, '*Chhu vanan Shah Ghafur vaati ma marun.* When Shah Ghafur says that the Divine and I are one, he should not be crucified for this truth.' Again he says, '*Shah Ghafur pazichi han chhuna bavan, tan chhas rachhni lachha bo'd jaan. Po'z gatshi aashkar asi maranavan.* Intentionally Shah Ghafur avoids telling the truth. After all he has to save his skin for the life is very

precious. If he reveals the truth (of oneness of God and man) he will be killed.' One is reminded of these lines from a Urdu poetess of repute: '*Sach bolna bhi lazim jeena bhi hai zaroori, sach bolne ki khatir Mansoor ho na jana*'. Speaking the truth is necessary but to live also is essential, one should not give up one's life like Mansoor did simply to speak the truth.

27.9 Asad Paray

Asad Paray is a later poet who lived in village Hajin (1862 to 1930). The effect of Hindu mythology and philosophy is apparent from most of his poems. 'Naran naguk mas' is a glaring example of this influence. It would suffice to quote a few stanzas from this poem. '*Om ba karith drass Omkarasay, Om Narayan sat logum saet, tosas Omki pan khalmasay ba rasa rasay kornas tayar. Suhamsu yaar vuchha novnasay tathya Rama tsander sholyav, sayas tahndis tal thovnasay. Jugyah lagith doonya zajmasay, khalvakh dandakvanasay manz, pranay abhyas sharir zolmasay. Bhavanaki nagarada tan navmasay, bava sara vuchhim divay jan. Haramokha bala paan mansovmasay, bo rasa rasay kornas tayar.* I started my spiritual journey uttering the sacred 'Om' and the Divine accompanied me all through. I went on chanting Om as if He was preparing me for the journey slowly and steadily. When by His grace I realized that He and I are one, I perceived the radiance of Shri Rama. He kept me under His refuge. In the solitude of a forest I lit the sacred fire like a Yogi. I burnt my body in the fire of breath control. In the sacred waters of the shrine at Bhavan I cleansed my body. This helped me to see the divine radiance here itself. I sacrificed my childhood at the sacred foothills of Harmukh, the abode of Shiva and He geared me for the journey slowly and steadily.

27.10 Ahad Zargar

Perhaps last of the great tradition of Muslim Rishi poets, Ahad Zargar is a forceful exponent of this ideology, which thrives on non-dualism, self-realization and emphasis on contemplation. He was born around 1916-17 in the house of Mohiuddin Zargar, a weaver by profession, whose ancestors were goldsmiths because of which the family got the surname 'Zargar'. Although he had studied a little of the Persian language but by any standards he can be said to be illiterate like many of his predecessors. Many holy persons would visit their house and in their company he got attracted to this field of mysticism and spiritualism. Finally he became the disciple to one Khwaja Abdul Kabir Lone of Kawadara, Srinagar at the young age of fifteen. He emphasized the need for interaction with the holy persons in the very first verse that he wrote. '*Shad roz dila myani kyazi chhuk gamanaey, Saet mehramanaey thav ikhlas* – Rejoice my heart, why are you gloomy? Keep in contact with the knowledgeable persons.'

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I have stated elsewhere that calling these Muslim Rishis as Sufis is a misnomer. Ahad Zargar's saying supports my contention. It is well known that 'Zikr' or rhythmic movement of head, body and arms is an essential feature of a Sufi. Such a person is called 'Zakir'. By this practice he recites the name of God, tells the beads of a rosary and aims at 'Fana' or complete annihilation of the Self. Ahad Zargar opposes this practice as useless and lays stress on contemplation and thought process, essential features of 'Advaita' or non-dualism. Says he, '*Zikir tai tasbih zalith trav, fikrav gaetsh gaetsh seer parzanav* – give up this Zikra and the rosary and try to know the secret by contemplation. Not only this, he calls it a fraud and deception, which leads us to nowhere. In his words, '*Makrav saet no dai athi aav, fikrav gaetsh gaetsh seer parzanav* – You cannot attain God by these frauds and deceptions. You should know the secret only by a serious thought process and contemplation'. He does not see any difference between himself and the Supreme, again a prescription of the non-dualist philosophy. For him self-realization and realization of the Divine are one and the same thing. '*Dayi saey bronh sapud oasis bui*- Only I existed before the Divine'. '*Ha Ahad Zargara dur kar daey, pura ada deshakh panun deedar* – O! Ye Ahad Zargar, shun all duality and then alone you will realize your self'.

Zargar is influenced by Hindu theology so much that he freely uses terms from that and refers to Hindu sacred scriptures with reverence. '*Rig Ved, Yajur Ved, Sam Ved, Athar Ved vaster sanyasyan tai. Khastar go'ran tsor veed havinam, jugya samana gnyan* – My preceptor taught me the four Vedas and revealed to me the knowledge from these, which is the characteristics of a Jogi'. Kashmir Shaiva Philosophy describes the Creator as 'Prakasha' or radiance and the creation as 'Vimarsh' or awareness of Him as the multitude in the form of creation. This holy person says the same thing in his own way. '*Aakash paatal prakash meelith su gash gatshi vuchhun tai* – At the horizon there is a grandeur of light when the two worlds meet. That radiance is worth seeing. He acknowledges the benefits of chanting the sacred 'OM' and refers to the Hindu practice of 'Pranayam' or breath control. '*Dama Shama dyut me Omkaran tav* – I practiced breath control and was spiritually ignited by the sacred OM'. Bhagavad Gita has described the abode of the Supreme as self-illuminated. In the same spirit Zargar says: '*Na chhu tor subaha ta na chhu tor sham- na chhu tor kalma ta na chhu Ram Ram, na chhu tor millat-u- mazhab saman , rinda ban zindagi sara kartan* – That supreme abode has no mornings, no evenings. There is no classification of sacred words nor is there any demarcation of creed and religion. Free yourself of all these divisive notions and try to know the secret of life.'

He uses Hindu names of the Divine, Hindu ways of worship and Hindu religious symbols freely in his verses, sometimes in a better way than a Hindu Rishi would use. I cite a few examples here. '*Goshi goshi Shankaras Shainkh kona vayav*- Why not blow the conch in every nook and corner to please Shankara?' '*Om ki aalav dity mye har shayav*- I chanted aloud OM at every place.' '*Ram bo ko'rhas Rama rubayav*- I was ecstatic to listen to the hymns in praise of Lord Rama'. The great Lalla had in a typical mystic way referred to the Divine as nameless in these words: '*Goras pritsham sasi late, yas na kenh nav tas kyah*

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chhu nav- I asked my preceptor repeatedly about the name of that nameless Divine'. Ahad Zargar has followed suit and has said, '*Chhu kenh nai karith kenhnas ral, vuchhum kenh nai mye deedan tal, chhu kenh nai kyah mye kornam tshal* – He is formless and you get absorbed in that formless. I have myself perceived the formless before my eyes. Being formless how come He has enchanted me'.

'Advaita' or non-dualism is essentially a philosophy that believes in one-ness of the Creator and the creation. Knowing self according to this doctrine is tantamount to knowing the Divine. This has been amply explained and expressed by Ahad Zargar time and again in his compositions. A few examples are cited here. '*Lamakan sapdith vaechh lamakan-* you have to become the Divine (Literally one who has no house) in order to realize the Divine. '*Abaech soorath aabas banayo, khabas milavan khabas saet, grakas pananizath athi aayo* – Water merged with water and all the illusions were removed. The seeker perceived his own self.' '*Katras meelith gav daryav* – the entire river got merged with one drop.' '*Baey chhus maikhana paimanay, baey chhus saqi hyeth sarshar, baey chhus baegrans maerfata maiy, aki nokta gatsh bedar-* I am the goblet in the tavern. I am the cupbearer and I only am distributing the wine of spiritualism. Thus you need to become wise by just one hint.'

The great Lalla had said six centuries earlier, '*Asi aes tai asi aasav, asi dore kaer patavath* – We only were in the past and we only shall be in the future. We only have been coming and going all the time'. Underscoring the same view about the continuity of life Zargar says, '*Baey chhus aamut az kehnaiy, baey chhus kehnachi ziyi hund bahar, baey nata panaiy chhus kehnaiy, aki nokta gatsh bedar* – From nothingness I have emerged, I am the fruit of nothingness. I am not I but nothingness. Again you should take a hint and awaken'. Non-dualism is a creed with this great mystic. He has no qualms to declare himself as the supreme and that too in a wonderful terminology. He says, '*Bae chhus shama ta parvanay, baey chhus gashuk banikar, baey shamso qamar prazlanaiy, aki nokta gatsh bedar-* I am the candle as also the butterfly that hovers around it. I am the one from whom the light emanates, I am the shining Sun and Moon. Take the hint and awaken'.

27.11 Other Luminaries

There is no Muslim Saint poet or Rishi, as I prefer to call him, who may have remained unaffected by the Hindu philosophy, mythology and religious beliefs prevalent among the Kashmiri Pandits. Non-dualism, universality of the Divine, transmigration of soul, continuity of life, chanting the name of God, penance in solitude and maintaining secrecy in spiritual matters as also '*Guru-shishya parampara*' or teacher-taught tradition are some of the prominent principles which have influenced these pious souls and which they have clearly expressed in their poems. For the Divine they have often used the Hindu terminology like

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'Naran' or 'Daiy' (Narayan or Dev). Suffice it to cite a few examples from other such luminary- poets.

Rehman Dar who lived at Chhattabal, Srinagar around the middle of 19th century has said, '*Nishi chhui panas paan parzanav*. He is within you and so realize your self.' Rahim Saab, who lived in Sopore and died in 1875, writes, '*Samah kornam aem Omkaran*. Chanting Om has created poise and balance in me.' Moomin Saab (1810) has explained the high point of yoga in this line, '*Aslas saet gatshi vassal sapdun ye*. One should get merged with the ultimate Truth.' Shah Qalander who lived at Haigam in mid 19th century has almost quoted Lal Ded verbatim in this verse, '*Lava ta prava chhai navi khota navye, ravas atagath sori na zanh, Shiv Shah Qalander chhuna kansi hyuvye kamadeev divaye Manasbal*. The radiance and glare is newer and newer while the Sun cannot cease to rise and set. Shiva is unique and unparalleled and Kamadev is enjoying at Manasbal (A village in Kashmir, literally the lake of the mind.). Another great Saint Vahab Khar has written a full 'Masnavi' on Sheikh Sanna clearly bringing out his love and devotion towards Hindu tradition and philosophy. In Hindu mysticism there is a tradition of keeping the directions of the preceptor secret and the disciple, after getting initiated makes a pledge in these words, '*Shrutam me gopaya* – I have heard what you have told me and I know I have to keep it a secret'. Ahmad Rah, who lived at Dalgate in Srinagar has stated the same thing in his poem thus: '*Peeran vaenim easar, seer gatshi vyaparavun. Seeras ma kar guftar, deedar tas deedan* – my preceptor revealed the secret to me and this secret has to be protected. Secret should never be talked about and then only the seeker is able to have a glimpse of the Supreme'. Referring to the Hindu concept of '*Jeevan-mukhti* – emancipation during life time', he says '*Mar zinda par soo ham soo hamas, damas saeti zaan* – attain death while living, repeat 'I am He' and in a moment you will get enlightened'.

Another great name is that of Samad Mir. Originally he belonged to Nambal Har but lived initially at Narwara in Srinagar before going back to his village, where he lived up to his death in 1959. He was a disciple of Khwaja Ramzan Dar of Anantnag who initiated him in mystic discipline. He also advocated the doctrine of non-dualism and self- realization. Says he, '*Pay hyot aashqav kaaba butkhanas, gayi ada panas pana mushtaq*- The seekers searched in the temples and the mosques and ultimately they realized that God was not different from them and they began loving their own selves'.

These examples can be multiplied by the dozens. The influence is so pronounced that the following line from Asad Paray appears to be the translation of the oft-quoted quotation from the Veda. The Veda has said, '**Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti**. The Truth is one and the seers describe it in different ways.' Asad Paray has said the same thing in this way, '*Kath chha kuni vath chha byon byon*. The Truth is one but the paths leading to that are different.' This points to the mountain peak theory according to which the ultimate Truth is like a mountain peak, which can be reached from many sides. Of course the climb may be easy and smooth from some sides and steep and tough from others. It is high time that we

realized the truth of this statement and started respecting each others religious beliefs and customs as valid and relevant, so that harmony, love and peace are ensured for all times to come.

27.12 Conclusion

The non-dualism is a universal experience and the great thinkers of every religion have sometime or the other contributed to this on the basis of their own experience. Dionysus the Areopagite, a Christian monk of the 5th century has said, "Then beyond all distinction between knower and known the aspirant becomes merged in the nameless, formless Reality, wholly absorbed in that which is beyond all things and in nothing else... Having stilled his intellect and mind, he is united by his highest faculty with That which is beyond all knowing." Malise Ruthven in his book on Islam has this to say, "In the long term modernization is a global process...Muslim souls are likely to find the Sufi path of inner exploration and voluntary association more rewarding than revolutionary politics." In an article published in The Times of India Jamal Ahmad Khan has observed, "The Sufi saints, Muslim scholars and Islamic sects were liberal in their out look a la their Hindu counterparts and recognized that there were several paths to God, Love of God and service to mankind were their most important principles They were believers in pantheistic monism, the earliest exposition of which is to be found in the Upanishads." The great Chinese Philosopher, Lao-tzu has said, 'Knowing others is wisdom and knowing yourself is enlightenment.' The bottom line is that the emancipation lies in realizing immortality of the soul, in awareness of the Self and in being an integral part of the universal consciousness. This is what Rishis and saint-poets of Kashmir have absorbed and expressed in their poems. Together with Hindu Rishis these noble Muslim Rishis preached a life of piety, purity, contentment, love and firm belief in God, who they said was attainable by love, devotion and penance.

28.0 SPIRITUALITY IN GHALIB'S POETRY

28.1 Spirituality and the Poets

Spirituality ordinarily has a religious connotation. Even so it is an essential aspect of human existence. After all a man is both an outer man and an inner man and unless we study the inner man our study of the man is incomplete. It is the analysis of this inner self that leads us into the realm of spirituality. Spirituality is knowing the essence of human existence, knowing one's own self and recognizing divinity inherent in a man. Spirituality is also an attempt at finding answers to the basic questions that have been tormenting and troubling thinkers, philosophers and intellectuals in all ages, about the secrets of creation, the creator and their mutual relationship. In this backdrop I am fervently of the opinion that any poet worth the name cannot be a poet of a reasonable standing unless he has spirituality in him, which gets reflected, in his compositions. A poet studies and watches the life in and around him very ardently and then contemplates. This contemplation gives him a vision, which in due course forms his philosophy. Since a poet must write, describe and sing about both the aspects of life, the outer and the inner, it is natural for him to imbibe and invoke spirituality in order to be able to analyse and react to the inner aspects of life.

It is because of this perhaps that in the parlance of the Urdu poetry it is often said that a poet starts from the mundane love, '*Ishq-e-majazi*' and rises up to the divine or true love, '*Ishq-e-haqiqi*'. Love is the centre point of all poetry, be it at mundane level or at spiritual level. Many great poets of different world languages have been categorized into different compartments. We have poets singing about nature, poets singing about love, mystic-poets, poets of romance, revolution or renaissance and the poets having leaning towards this or that ideology. Some poets are committed and others have been branded as such by the critics and analysts. Whereas according to Wordsworth poets express their thoughts recollected in the tranquility of their minds, Sumitranandan Pant feels that the poetry is the product of grief and suffering, and according to Maulana Hali poets are of two types, those who write by design and those to whom poetry comes naturally. Be that as it may. One thing is, however, certain that both head and heart play a role in the spontaneous expressions of a poet and the proportion of the two determines the quality of his poetry. If the element of head predominates, the poetry is intellectual or ideological. If the element of heart predominates the poetry is compassionate and full of feeling and love. Ghalib belongs to the second category no doubt.

28.2 Poet of Romance

Ghalib is generally considered to be the poet of romance, love and feelings although much of what he has composed and written is the result of deprivation, want and suffering. Naturally, therefore, the heart has played a dominant role in his creativity. Yet there is spirituality in his writings in a great measure. A verse like the one following could have flown from the pen of a great mystic only. *"Na tha kuchh to khuda tha, kuchh na hota to khuda hota. Duboya mujhko hone ne, na hota mein to kya hota? –* When nothing was there only God existed, had there been nothing only God would exist. I am lost because of my own existence, how would it matter if I were not around in existence." For him the world is nothing but God's manifestation and various things are just an illusion. Here he comes very near to '**Mayavad**' of **Adishankara** when he says, *"Juz nam nahin surat-e-alam mujhe manzur. Juz vaham nahin hasti-e-ashia mere aage. –* I do not accept the world as anything other than Him. For me the existence of various things is but an illusion." This can verily be compared with the famous statement of **Advaita**, '**Brahma satyam, jagan-mithya** – God is a reality and the world is a myth.' Again he says, *'Hai ghaibe ghaib, jis ko samajhte hain ham shahud, hain khwab mein hanuz jo jage hein khwab mein -* that which we consider obvious is in effect beyond our comprehension. We are still dreaming although we dream that we are awake.'

28.3 The Fire of Ignorance

The thin line of difference between '**Sat**' and '**Asat**', being and non-being, existence and non-existence seems to have been disturbing Ghalib. He has attributed this state of his mind to ignorance, which he refers to as fire. Says he, *'Poochhe hai kya vajud-o-adam ahl-e-shauq ka, aap apni aag se khas-o-khashak ho gaye. –* No use asking about the existence and non-existence of love-lorn seekers. They have been ruined by the fire of their own ignorance.' Iqbal, who came much later, likened a being with a small brook and the Divine with an ocean. He beseeched the Almighty either to merge him with Himself or break all the barriers limiting him throughout his course. He wrote, *'Tu hai mahit-e- bekaran main hun zara si aabjoo, ya mujhe hamkinar kar ya mujhe bekinar kar.* You are a limitless ocean and I a small rivulet; pray either absorb me in Thyself or make me devoid of shores that limit my existence.' Ghalib on the other hand knew that the being does merge with the Divine eventually and all his boundaries and limitations are dismantled. In a matter-of-fact way he reveals this belief of his in these words, *'Qatra dariya mein jo mil jaye to dariya ho jaye. –* When a drop of water gets mixed with the water of a river, it becomes itself a river.' He wonders at people who are engaged in the thoughtless discussion about the existence of God. In the following verse he has brought home the truth of non-dualism. *'Asal shahud-o-shahid-o-mashhud ek hai, hairan hun phir mushahida hai kis hisab mein -* the scene, the seer and the seeing faculty are all one. I am, therefore, puzzled to what avail is the observance'. He is vividly conscious of the omnipresence of the Brahman. He says, *'Jab ki*

tujh bin nahin koi maujud, phir yeh hangama-e-khuda kya hai? – When no one but only You exist, why is there all this noise about God?' He could safely be called a rare 'Mahatma', in accordance with the pronouncement of the Gita, since he sees the Divine everywhere, **'Vasudevah sarvam-iti sa mahatma sudurlabhah** – Rare is a sage who sees the Divine in everything.' As the Gita says, **'Ashcharyavad pashyati kaschid-enam**. – This is seen by some with astonishment,' Ghalib also sees everything around with a sense of wonder. He writes, *'Sabza-o-gul kahan se aaye hain? Abra kya cheez hai, hawa kya hai?* – Whence have these flora and fauna come? What is the secret of the clouds and what is this air?' This awe and astonishment towards God's creation re-establishes his belief in the splendour and majesty, omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of the Divine.

28.4 Devotion of Surrender

Ghalib is an ardent devout who believes in complete and total surrender unto God, the omniscient. *'Jaan tum par nisar karta hun, Main nahin janta dua kya hai*. I give my very life for you; beyond this I know no other way of prayer.' *'Ghalib na kar hazur mein tu bar bar arz. Zahir hai tera haal sab un par kahe bagair*. No need to make a request at His doors time and again for He knows about your condition without your speaking about it.' He is so engrossed in his love of the Divine and so confident about His omnipresence that he expects to find Him behind every veil and at every place. Poets have talked about God in idols, *'But mein Khuda'* and about elevating idols to the level of God by worshipping them, *'Parastish se but ko khuda bana diya'*. Ghalib, however, perceives the existence of his idol in every place of worship. Therefore he pleads, *'Khuda ke vaste parda na ka'abe se utha zalim. Kahin aisa na ho yan bhi vohi kafir sanam nikle*. For God's sake do not remove the covering from the Ka'aba. There is a possibility that by uncovering it we may see our beloved idol here as well'. He is ecstatic in his love for the Divine, so much so that at times even unknowingly and involuntarily he proceeds in His direction. He speaks of his ecstasy in these words: *'Vai-e-deevangi-e-shauq ki hardam mujhko, aap jana udhar aap hi hairan hona*. Look at the madness of my fancy and ecstasy of my love for Him that I myself walk towards Him and myself feel bewildered.' Even then he is not satisfied. He wants Him to be in his thoughts all the time. He wants leisure but filled with His thoughts. He craves, *'Jee dhundhta hai phir vohi fursat ke raat din. Baithe rahe tassavure janan kiye hue*. My heart craves for a period of leisure when I would be just sitting lost and absorbed in the thoughts of my Beloved'. He has a complaint against his love that in spite of being always in his heart he does not appear before him in person. He wants to have a glimpse of His, which in spiritual parlance is called **'Darshan'**. He beseeches in these words, *'Ki jab dil mein tumhi tum ho, to aankhon se nihan kyon ho*. When you and you alone are seated in my heart, tell me why are you hidden from my vision.' He longs to hear about a meeting with his love and is keen to have a glimpse of Him. He is very critical of both his eyes and ears, neither of which obliges him in this desire. It seems to him that both are in league with each other to deprive him of the good news and the desired vision. His heart cries aloud, *'Nahi mujdai-e-visaal na nazara-e-jamaal. Muddat hui ki aashti-e-chashm-o-gosh hai*. I have got no good news of meeting

him nor have had a vision of his dazzling beauty. For a long time now there has been a perfect understanding between my ears and my eyes in keeping me deprived of either the news or the glimpse.' For him the essence of faith lies in devotion and loyalty, '*Vafadari ba-sharte ustvari asle yeemanhai* - the real faith is a sustained loyalty unto God'.

28.5 Love and Mysticism

This spirituality that runs as an undercurrent in his poetry is, however, beyond this great poet's reach as a dogma or as a creed. He is aware though that he dangles with spirituality in spite of his human failings. In the last verse of his famous ghazal he confesses about this state of affairs in this way, '*Ye masayil-e-tasavvuf ye tera bayan Ghalib. Tujhe ham vali samajhte jo na badakhwar hota*. All these topics of mysticism and your unique way of expression! Ghalib we would consider you a sage were you not addicted to liquor.' He feels the pangs of separation and is diffident about meeting his love ever. He laments, '*yeh na thi hamari qismat ke visaal-e-yar hota. Agar ore jeete rehte yahi intezaar hota*. It was not destined that I should be united with Him. Had I lived longer the same endless waiting would continue'. He is very clear about one thing that his beloved is unmatched and unique. He has no parallel. It is very difficult to see Him or in other words it is within no body's powers to withstand the dazzle of his beauty. This phenomenon has been described by him in this verse very succinctly, '*Use kaun dekh sakta ki yagana hai voh yakta. Jo dui ki boo bhi hoti to kahin do char hota*. – Who can see Him or withstand His radiance, for He is incomparable and unique. Had there been even an iota of duality we would have seen that sometime somewhere.' Here one is reminded of the famous shloka of Adi Shankaracharya: **'Na ekam tad-anything dwitiam kutah syat. Na va kevalatvam na cha-akevalatvam –** Even one is not visible whence does the second spring forth. In fact we are lost between singularity and non-singularity of the existence of the Divine.'

Ghalib is the poet of love and purity and sincerity of love are the essence of spirituality. In this journey of love for the Divine he has gone beyond his self. That is why he has stated, '*Ham vahan hein jahan se hamko bhi, kuchh hamari khabar nahin aati*. – I have reached a stage, a level wherefrom I do not get the news of my own self even.' In other words he finds himself at a transcendental position and lost in his own existence, which he says is the centre of both knowledge and ignorance. '*Apni hasti hi se ho, jo kuchh ho. Aagahi gar nahin gaflat hi sahi*. Whatever takes place is related to one's own existence. It may not be knowledge, it may even be ignorance or negligence.' He has no illusions about himself. He knows that whatever happens is caused by Him, all that is enjoyed is enjoyed by Him and all that is possessed belongs to Him. He, therefore, considers himself as insignificant whose being or not being is immaterial. He knows whether he be around or not, nothing will cease to exist and nothing will cease to function. Everything will keep on happening and moving in accordance with the set pattern of the nature. He forbids his admirers from grieving on his death. Says he, '*Ghalib-e- khasta ke bagair kaun se kaam band hein? Royiye zar zar kya,*

kijiye hai hai kyon? Does any work suffer in the absence of Ghalib, when he is gone? Why then grieve at his death, why shed tears?' The sumum bonum of spirituality and religion for him is love, so much so that all other forms and practices of observance of religious disciplines do not attract him. He admits that '*Janta hun savab-e-ta'at-o-zahad. Par tabiyat idhar nahin jati.* – I know the reward that accrues from obedience and other religious practices but I am not inclined to all that.' He believes in ecstasy and rapture of love. This rapture is there to get to the bottom of the truth. Sometimes, however, he is lost in this rapture although he is aware that his goal is self-realization. Here he seems to recognize that self-realization and the realization of the Divine are not different. He blames the state of his rapture that keeps him wandering but away from the alleys of his love. This is clear from these two verses: '*Bekhudi be-sabab nahin Ghalib. Kuchh to hai jiski pardadari hai.* The rapture is not for nothing, there is something hidden behind the veil.' '*Phir be-khudi mein bhool gaya rah-e-kooy-e-yaar. Jata warna ek din apni khabar ko main.* Once again I lost the way to the abode of my love due to this rapture or else I would realize myself one day.' This is a significant pointer towards the oneness of the self and the Divine.

28.6 The Path of Love

Different poets have viewed this path of love differently. Jigar Muradabadi likens it to a river of fire wherein a seeker has to get drowned and reappear on the other shore. He writes, '*ik aag ka darya hai aur doob ke jana hai*. It is a river of fire and one has to cross it by getting drowned in it.' Makhmoor Dehlvi compares it with a flame, which is self-ignited without anybody's effort. '*Yeh shola khud bhadak uthta hai bhadkaya nahin jata.* This flame is self ignited and is not lit by anyone.' He also opines that this flame is kindled not in every heart but only in specified ones. '*Muhabbat ke liye chand khas dil makhsus hote hein. Yeh voh nagma hai jo har saz par gaya nahin jata.* Some selected hearts are earmarked for love for this is a tune that cannot be played on every musical instrument.' For Ghalib this love is uncontrollable burning fire, which can neither be ignited voluntarily nor extinguished once it gets burning. A seeker is helpless in the face of this spiritual love. '*Ishq par zor nahin, hai yeh voh aatish Ghalib. Ki lagaye na lage aur bhujaye na bane.* One has no control over love. It is a fire that can neither be lit at will nor extinguished at will.' The great Kashmiri poet Master Zinda Kaul also calls the Divine as the flame of love in the heart of a compassionate person. '*Dil chhu lale bebaha insansund, dai chhu loluk shol dildaras ander* – The heart of a human being is a priceless jewel and the Divine is the flame of love in the heart of a compassionate lover.' Ghalib is aware that this path of love is no bed of roses. It calls for hard work and leading a tough life. '*Kave-kave sakht-jani haye tanhayi na pooch. Subh karna sham ka lana hai joo-e-sheer ka.* Alas one has to lead a tough life full of hard work. This endless waiting in solitude from dusk to dawn is an impossible task like creating a canal of milk.' He, therefore, craves to remain perpetually at the doorstep of his love like a stone slab of the platform leading to his abode. He does not want to seek any favours but would be content with what he gets without asking. After all, the Divine is omniscient. '*Dayam pada hua tere dar par nahin hun main. Khak aisi zindagi pe ki patthar nahin hun main.* Alas

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I am not at your door all the time. Woe be gone to this life that I am not a stone.' *'Be-talab den to maza usmein siva milta hai. Voh gada jisko na ho khu-e-sawal achha hai.* It tastes better if one gets without asking. Bravo to the seeker who is not in the habit of making a request.'

My critics may accuse me of reading too much into the verses of this great poet. I would like to reply to their criticism by quoting from one of his ghazals. He says, *'Har chand ho mushahit-e-haq ki guftugu. Banti nahin hai bada-o-sagar kahe bagair.* One may be talking about God and the Truth but even this cannot be expressed properly without taking recourse to wine and the goblet.' It is clear that Ghalib has used these props and metaphors but his intentions are different and he wants to convey something else. He is talking about God and the Truth and it is for us to find the real purport of his compositions. And for this purpose we need a vision because the urge in us to know the truth will uncover the secrets but it is the vision that will perceive the Truth. This poet is groping for this vision when he says, *'Vaa kar diye hain shauk ne band-e-naqab-e-husn. Gair-az nigah ab koi hayil nahin raha.* My fondness for Him has removed the veil from His beautiful face. Now all that I need is a vision to see Him, for there is no obstacle but my own vision between Him and me.' To have this vision and be able to see Him one needs the Divine grace. This has been described with the help of a beautiful metaphor in this verse of his. *'Partav-e-khur se hai shabnam ko fanaa kee talim. Main bhi hun ik inayat ki nazar hone tak.* The reflection of the Sun in the dewdrop is indicative of the end of its life. I also exist till I receive grace of the Divine in the form of a glimpse of His.' This very clearly shows that the poet seeks his own merger with the Divine when he will cease to exist as an individual being and become part of that Eternal Universal Being. All the time involuntarily though, he goes on calling his love. *'Tumko chahun ki na aavo to bulaye na bane* –Even if I desire that you should not come, yet I cannot resist calling you to me.' One has to understand the hidden meaning of every verse every couplet of this all time great composer or else his lament in this oft quoted verse of his will be justified. *'Yarab voh na samjhe hain na samjhenge meri baat. Dey aur dil unko jo na de mujhko zuban aur.* God! These people have neither understood nor shall ever understand what I say. If you are not inclined to change my way of utterance, please bring about a change in their hearts.' Ghalib sure must have had a deep vision capable of seeing the hidden and the unseen, or else he would not have been able to pen this couplet - a sum and substance of spirituality: *'Katra mein dajla dikhai na de aur juzva mei kul, khel larkon ka hua deeda- e- beena na hua* - If one cannot see the river in a drop of water and the whole in a part, one cannot claim to be a person of vision but can be considered only a child playing'.

29.0 EPILOGUE

So dear readers, we have travelled thus far together. We do not know how far we have to go still. We do not know whether we will reach the truth. We do not know whether during this journey at some point of time in the past, we did come across the truth but we failed to observe it or realize that that was what we were after. In any case our journey is continuing and there is no breaking it or stopping it now that we have traversed a distance thus far. Let us keep on going so that one day we may attain the truth or some day we may realize that we had come across it but moved on without noticing it. This journey on the path of spirituality has been an evolving exercise. It is possible that we have experienced the truth in different shades at different stages and every time we thought that that was it but the next moment we felt that there was still a long way to go. People pick up glass pieces and mistake these for diamonds. There are others who pick up real diamond but throw that away as a mere glass piece. So what is needed is a vision and that too a discerning one.

If we do possess a discerning and a discriminating vision, we can attain the truth after sifting chaff from the grain. The angle of our vision can be different from that of others. Our perception of the truth can be at variance with others. Our experiences can vary but the delight, the joy and the bliss will be equal in intensity and same in satisfaction. We will feel relieved that our pursuit has borne fruit and our effort has been crowned with success. Now if we were to explain the truth, describe it or narrate it to others, it will simply be impossible. There is a saying that 'those who speak do not know and those who know do not speak'. The question is why do not the knowledgeable speak. The reason is not far to find. The truth that is experienced at the spiritual level cannot be explained at the mundane level. We cannot put temporal applications to esoteric, celestial or super-natural truths. We do not even know to which category the truth we have realized, belongs. It is indescribable, defies description and cannot be narrated in words in any language. In fact it is not seen by the external eyes but perceived by the inner vision, which has no tongue to express and has no command on any lingo that could explain it. Let me quote a verse written by me in Urdu long ago. '*Zabaan gar deedar hoti nazar gar bazabaan hoti, ayaan sab kuchh bayaan hota, bayaan san kuchh ayaan hota* – If my tongue had eyes or the eyes had a tongue, whatever I saw could be described and whatever I described could be seen'.

I feel a great sense of satisfaction that I have, through the pages of this book, taken you along the path of spirituality, on which I have travelled all these seven decades of my life. This travel has in reality been a pilgrimage of sorts. This has been a pilgrimage to the inner recesses of our self, to the depths of our soul, to the vast expanse of our spirit. The continuity and connectivity between various stages of this journey have been very fascinating to me personally and I am sure to you as well in your capacity as fellow travellers. I am still travelling on this path and implore you to keep on travelling. The first

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step having been taken, there is no going back, neither for you nor for me. Every journey starts with the first step and so has this journey on the path of spirituality started with the first step. When did I take the first step, I do not remember. In the same way you might have taken the first step, knowingly or unknowingly, long back. Now you have traversed this distance along with me. This might have been a rehearsal, a first show or a repeat performance for you. If it was a rehearsal, I am sure it has been a good experience enabling you to gauge the level at which you are. If it was a first show, I wish you many more shows in your life that will give you joy and satisfaction. If it was simply a repeat performance, I admire your resilience, fortitude, patience and perseverance and assure you that these will stand you in good stead in your future life. May God be with you in your endeavour to know the Truth and may you succeed in your noble mission.

30.0 PROFILE



Sh. T. N. Dhar 'Kundan'

Sh. T. N. Dhar 'Kundan' has written exclusively on Kashmir, its political scenario and religious practices of its original inhabitants, the Kashmiri Pandits, and has authored several books on a variety of socio-cultural topics. For a number of years, he served as an editor to [Koshur Samachar](#), a tri-lingual publication of Kashmir Samiti, New Delhi. We at KNN are indebted to him for sharing some of his articles with our readers.

List of books written by T.N. Dhar

English

1. A Portrait of Indian Culture published by Rashtriya Sanskrit Sansthan.
2. A Window on Kashmir
3. Bhagavad Gita, the Elixir of Life
4. Exploring the Mysterious
5. Understanding Education
6. Philosophy of a Common Man
7. Saints and Sages of Kashmir
8. The Saint Extra-Ordinary, Bhagavaan Gopinath

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Serial No. 2,3 and 4 published by Mittal Publishers, Ansari Road, Darya Gunj New Delhi.
Serial No. 5 and 6 published by Rajat Publishers, Ansari Road, Darya Gunj, New Delhi. No.7
published by Bhagavaan Gopinath Trust and No 8 by A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, Ansari
Road, New Delhi.

Hindi

1. Main Pyasa Hun (I am Thirsty) - A collection of Hindi Poems
2. Main Samudra Hun (I am an Ocean) - A collection of Hindi Poems
3. Guru Se Samvad (Dialogue with a Preceptor)

Kashmiri

1. Swapna ta Sonch (A Dream and a Thought) - A collection of Kashmiri Poems.

In addition two more books in English, 'Kashmiri Pandit Community- a Profile' and 'On the Path of Spirituality' are under print being published by the Mittal Publishers, Ansari Road, New Delhi.