

11 December 1961

PART 1

It is pleasant to remind ourselves at this time of the beginning of that fourteenth century book *The Cloud of Unknowing* whose author (according to some) was the first to publish in English the Neo-Platonist ideas of Dionysius. After the warning to keep the book only for serious people, he finds 'four degrees, and forms of Christian men's living; and they be these, Common, Special, Singular and Perfect, three of these may be begun and ended in this life; and the fourth may by grace be begun here, but it shall ever last without end in the bliss of Heaven.' By nature (probably) a recluse, he uses the word 'Singular' in the sense of the 'solitary form and manner of living'. But suppose we take those four degrees as co-existent. Is it not possible for the Special Life to exist within the Common Life, and is it not again possible for certain work which can only be done privately and alone (such as meditation) to exist within the Special Life? And if we take them as co-existing in the world and in a given person, cannot we learn something which can help us just now? Perhaps there are other meanings for the word 'singular'.

I would like you now to take a fresh look at these old sentences from the *Cloud of Unknowing* in the light of our new experiences and this new possibility of finding the Kingdom of Heaven in the midst of ordinary life. I would like you to consider it on two scales: first, that of the individual – oneself, and then on the scale of Society and even of mankind, and the bringing of new hopes and new possibilities to more and more people this Christmas-time.

Remember that the Special Life refers to some kind of discipline – to a School – through which the right relation between Essence and Personality can be restored, and Essence be allowed to grow. When Essence has reached its full growth then this 'form and degree of living which is called Singular' becomes a big step in the development of the Soul. Essence does not die with the body, but Soul – when fully developed – is immortal, and the Perfect Life of a man complete in himself (who is also able to help his fellow human beings) can begin in this life 'but it shall ever last without end in the bliss of Heaven'.

PART 2

In reading material sent to us by His Holiness the Shankaracharya of the North, since last August; it has become very clear that when he speaks of God to the common people he uses the personifications, myths and stories to which they have been accustomed. But to people under discipline he gradually brings understanding that he is speaking *impersonally* of a Trinity in Unity, 'a threeness in a oneness' – a Universal Law. With this in mind you might like to hear some extracts of his Sunday talks in different cities in India leading up to the one he sent us only last week:

May we wish everybody the happiest of Christmases
and a New Year full of tremendous possibilities.

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21 September 1961

The basic difference between man and animals is that animals do not have the faculty of wisdom with which to realize God – an animal eats, feels pain and pleasure like man, but it cannot apprehend God.

Man has three desires (or needs): desire to live, to be happy, and to know. If a man wants to realize all three simultaneously, he can do so by realizing God.

God is Absolute-Bliss-Consciousness and we are the children of God. A sweet made from sugar is full of sweetness. So, too, man, made of God, should be full of Sat-chit-ananda (Absolute-Bliss-Consciousness.) Instead, he is miserable, worried and unhappy. But he is not *really* this – it is only his imagination and fear which make him think he is miserable and unhappy. Thus a fearful man will see a rope in the dark and his imagination may tell him that it is a snake, and if his imagination is very strong, he may even die of fright.

25 September 1961

That which does not suit you, do not apply to others. You do not like to be slapped, so why slap others? (Aphorism: 'Do unto others' could, I think, convey the idea which the translator tried to express.) Further, His Holiness said that when someone commits a wrong, a sin, we hate the sinner whereas we should hate the *sin* only. The 'sinner' is part of God – as are we – so how can we hate God?

8 October 1961

A tree has its roots in the ground. A man has his roots in the air. A tree takes food through the roots in the ground and expires through its upper parts, whereas man takes food through his mouth and expels it through the lower parts. This difference is of no consequence and man is no better than a tree if he does not know, is not aware of the Source of his connection – his roots – of his consciousness.

12 November 1961. Allahabad

One should try to feel the blissful charming beauty or the lotus-like feet of the God which is manas. Only MANAS is responsible for bondage or freedom. The desire-bound manas gets caught like a fly or ant in the sticky syrup and just can't escape. God didn't mean to create the world for human beings to be caught or trapped, but to act, play, please and enjoy.

The energy which flows in one being is also flowing very substantially in all other beings. There is no difference between one or the other part of the same substance.

The true relation of man towards God is only of a servant to his master.

The whole creation which is filled with the Absolute is a complete unit. Whatever He bestows, take as a gift. Don't fall from your integrity. Respect what you receive and that is a gift. Gift evokes happiness, and happiness inspires mind for service. Only in this service to the creation lies our salvation and of the world too.

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PART 3 [ONLY TO BE READ TO CERTAIN PEOPLE]

We have in our several ways and conditions of living kept this meditation alive for varying periods of a few weeks to almost two years. And that is the prime necessity to give the seed time to take root and germinate within us. It is noticeable how different is the order of those pleasant signs of growth for different people, so that to compare notes with others must not be allowed to bring discouragement. In the end we shall all meet at the top of the mountain, though we may all have explored different routes up it.

It would be good to remind you of one or two pieces of instruction from the Shankaracharya to keep at the back of your minds over the Christmas recess:

29 July 1961. Allahabad

Meditation comprises three factors: (a) Meditator, (b) the object of meditation and (c) the act of meditation which joins them. The sincere and real meditation is that when this trinity merges into one. This of course is possible only by constant practice, perseverance, love of meditation and unshakable trust in pursuit of the aim. The discipline is to offer the ego (me) as sacrifice at the altar of Wisdom. To further this discipline even after the meditation during the ordinary world activities is very helpful.

The simple answer to those who become depressed by failing in meditation because of financial worries and rushing around in life is that these are the persons who need more and constant meditation. This system enlarges the intellect, sharpens it and makes it enduring, which in turn ensures more success in managing everyday activities. Meditation affects all the three levels of body, mind and spirit of the being which are cleansed, purified and enlightened.

9 – 13 September 1961. Allahabad

Sacrifice of ego means that the individual ego, the feeling of 'I', should be merged into universal ego, i.e. a feeling of expansion be created. One should continuously strive to acquire the experience that as a spirit, I prevail in every living organism and that my spirit and all other spirits are one and the same like the thread in a rosary holding numerous individual beads. Just as one single sun causes numerous reflections on different beaches, so it is that only one spirit, named as Truth, Consciousness and Bliss, prevails in every soul behind the ego, and that is what we experience as consciousness or bliss which is reflected from human beings or animal and vegetable kingdoms. We never experience complete absence of ego. The meaning behind Neti, Neti, is that I prevail in everything which bears form, name or (is) known. In this way, the expansion of individual ego, and experience of the universe in one's own self and self reflecting in the universe is the sacrifice of ego at the altar of Wisdom.

(Replying to a question how to further the discipline even after the meditation:)

When one goes inward by repeating the mantra during meditation, he enjoys the celestial bliss and this serves as spiritual food for him. After being nurtured by this food, when he comes out in the sensory world, then the power of the mantra or the bliss of the meditation moves with him like one's shadow. Wherever he goes or works, he is always and all over surrounded by substance created by meditation. This substance protects him from impure substances by forcing them out or obstructing their invasion. The

practitioner experiences such happenings more often as he progresses. Just as when an emperor launches upon some project with resolution, feeling and action, then everybody supports and contributes to the work. Likewise, the cultivation of love for Atman brings everything that is in accordance with the aim and removes everything that is impure.

As to your next question for very busy people who don't have much spare time, they must of course do two half-hour meditations each morning and evening. But this doesn't mean that they are forbidden to meditate more. One who meditates more would profit more. It is quite agreeable to have longer meditation at weekends or during holidays. Time limit is only to facilitate the everyday activities. There is no need to bother about time or lay the burden of duty-bound meditation on the mind. One should rather go ahead with enthusiasm and love to meet one's own Self, the Atman, and never miss him.

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Convey my blessings to all the members of your meditation group.

Your well wisher,

(Signed) SHANTANAND SARASWATI.

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