

6 July 1970

READING 9

FAITH – SHRADDA

Sooner or later one is bound to come to a situation where spiritually one sells all that one has, in order to buy a particular thing, the reunion with one's Divine nature. No one can achieve this by himself; from first to last it needs a living human Teacher of the highest level. Most of us – particularly in today's sceptical Western world – will have taken years and years to get to that point. Some process needs all that time – a process which Wordsworth refers to in 'The Excursion':

One in whom persuasion and belief
Had ripened into faith, and faith become
A passionate intuition...

Both 'faith' and 'intuition' come from Higher Centres as the union of pure Emotion with pure Intellect. This word 'faith' has lost any power it may have had through being used in so many conflicting ways. So I suggest that this week we take the Sanskrit word Shradda (for which the English word 'faith' is supposed to be the nearest equivalent) and examine the way the Shankaracharya has recently been using that word.

The first mention of it, at our last visit, had reference to the relation between people under discipline and a fully qualified instructor:

'It is only through faith,' he said, 'that the Buddhi is clarified, or the influence of a Realized Man is made possible to pass into a disciple.'

(21 January 1970)

The Buddhi here is defined as the faculty which takes decisions of right and wrong; decisions which the mind-machine (Manas), having itself no power of decision, is then bound to carry out. The machine simply collects information which it passes to Buddhi, and Buddhi then deciding what is suitable to the person, the cycle goes on repeating. All this is subject to the three Gunas and accordingly there are various possibilities – wrong information may be handed in, wrong decisions taken, or a correct decision may be carried out in the wrong way or at the wrong time.

So it is some unknown quantity 'Shradda' which alone can clarify these repetitive cycles. Some emotional Recognition of Truth has to come in to help the Reason to decide; but it must come from somewhere which is above the Gunas, and therefore not subject to change.

The next clue to the puzzle was given two days later as follows:

It is the *mercy* of the Realized Man (as in the Christian story of the Good Samaritan) which uplifts individuals, and can be illustrated by a simile of the trucks in a railway shunting yard:

The Realized Man is very much like an engine which has the power of self-propulsion and of moving (with or without the goods wagons). The trucks, unless they are hitched up to the engine, do not have any energy or source of power of their own to put themselves in motion.

So if one has faith (Shradda) in some Realized Man and keeps remembering him in one's heart, then the motivation towards Self-realization becomes possible.

(23 January 1970)

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A few days later one of us put further questions about Faith and had an answer beginning with two verses from Chapter 17 of the *Bhagavad Gita*:

The Blessed Lord said: Threefold is the Shradda of embodied beings which is inherent in their nature – whether dominated by Sattva, Rajas or Tamas. The faith of each is according to his Essence. A man consists of his belief; he is, in truth, whatever his belief is.

Faith, the Shankaracharya went on to explain, has two levels: After hearing the discourse of a teacher or wise man, somebody may feel interested and attracted. This would be the first level of faith; but if this is not pursued and knowledge is not gathered, it will die down before long; the second level comes if the advice is taken firmly, and put into action, when slowly and slowly knowledge will deepen and a stage may arrive when it would become deep and full. Then there would be no doubt about what is coming through the Teacher. He used the word Guru which, by derivation, means one who takes a man by his discipline out of ignorance and brings him into the open light of Knowledge. But this, he added, is only possible if the disciple's faith is established in the Guru, so that is absolutely essential.

R. said later: This kind of faith seems to rise up as Remembrance of the Realized Man which comes when the whole being is absolutely still. Is that so?

S. says your observation is right. But this is just one of the ways, because there exist many systems by which the influence of the Realized Man can be passed to the disciple. All these systems could relate to any type of situation which one has to deal with.

If faith (Shradda) is necessary, then certainly faith could be applied or created. There may be other things necessary for different individuals, so these should be applied. Just as in the case of disease, if one medicine does not bring a response then another type of medicine must be administered. Characteristically on this Way, because of faith, the mind of the disciple is stilled, and also his capacity to hold the words of the Realized Man or his leader increases. Since he can hold the words, the practice is likely to be easy, the flow of Grace would work, and the level of the disciple would be raised.

R. On this subject he mentioned a stanza of the *Bhagavad Gita* of which he was going to give us the reference.

S. The quotation from the *Bhagavad Gita* we shall have to trace for you; but it starts 'The faithful inherits the Knowledge.

(31 January 1970)

The passage turned out to be verses 39 and 40 of the 4th Chapter of the *Gita*, of which this is the best translation we have:

39. The man with Shradda (Faith), the devoted, the master of his senses, inherits the Knowledge. Having attained this Knowledge, he goes at once to the supreme Peace.

40. The ignorant, the man without Shradda (Faith in the teachings of his Guru), the doubting person, goes to destruction. The doubting ego neither enjoys happiness in this world or the next.

He comments on these verses, and says that only the disciple with faith can gain knowledge from the Teacher. But faith by itself is not enough because unless he *attends* to the Teacher and what the teacher is describing, he would not be able to take and hold it, for his attention would not be with the teacher. His faith may be with the teacher, but his attention is also required. If it is not there, he will be thinking of something else in the presence of the teacher and then he would not be able to derive any good from his presence. So he must also be extremely attentive in order to be able to understand and take whatever may be given. This is what he referred to as the disciple '*holding*' whatever is coming out of the teacher by means of attention.

Once knowledge has been given, and taken and held by the disciple, he must also be able to put it all into practice. If he doesn't put it into practice, all this would be lost in due course.

So it is left to the disciple to see that the good advice given to him by the teacher is acted on. He said that the way to judge all this is as follows:

If anything is taken by the individual with attention, it is usually reflected in his dreams. So dreams are one of the chief checks as to what an individual accords the greatest importance. If one finds that the things which have been discussed with the teacher or Realized Man appear in the disciple's dreams or in some way are reflected in his dreams, then one may conclude that the disciple is interested and his power is directed towards the subject of liberation together with his mind.

It is not only in the sensory world of the waking state that all the questions and answers are evolved. Even in the subtle world (and the dream state which is within the realm of the subtle world) questions and answers are possible. Sometimes it can happen to those under discipline, that the answers to their questions can be given during sleep and in dreams.

All the above goes to show that 'faith' in this sense is a *psychological* idea to be taken on the *subtle* and *causal* levels. A common error is to try apply it directly to physical things; and this has been partly due to misunderstanding of the figurative language of the Gospels:

And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, 'Why could not we cast him out?' And Jesus said unto them, 'Because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by *prayer and fasting*.' [retreat from all sensory impressions]

(St. Matthew 17:18–20)

If you refer again to the story of Simon the Pharisee (quoted in Reading 3, 1970/4) which ends with Christ's words to Mary Magdalene: 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'; you can define faith (psychologically) as something Mary had and Simon had not – and by asking yourself which of those two you mostly resemble, can be led to find for yourself the missing quality!

To 'heal' on the physical level you must first have the power to change the *causes* on the higher levels – which is why researches into 'faith healing' are usually so disappointing.

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In summary, take this story told to the crowds at the festival in the context 'the guidance of Realized Men can always help us out of our difficulties':

A rich man had three sons, the youngest being a cripple. The father looked after the cripple well as long as he was alive. But after his death the cripple received no attention from his brothers and passed all his days lying on the doorsteps crying for food and water. One day a Realized Man passed that way; the cripple told him his story and asked for advice. The holy man took him outside the village; making him sit under a banyan tree, he asked him to remain like that for three days without eating or speaking to anybody. When people saw him sitting there motionless for three days, eating nothing and speaking to none, they grew curious and thought that he must be a great Mahatma. As the news spread, people from far and near came to have a look at him. So great were the offerings of fruit and sweets brought by them that a hundred men could live on them instead of one. The Realized Man gave him neither Mantra nor tantra, (i.e. neither method nor System of Philosophy), but merely by taking shelter under him, the cripple's life changed for the better.

(1 February 1970)

This story, taken of course in its subtle meaning, describes my own experience and the feeling of those whom I regard as my friends. But I feel cluttered up with people who still, after a very long time and much bounty, have very little faith. One sees them still protecting their independence or trying other ideas, other ways. Sooner or later we shall part company – and time is counted!

[Thus the Shankaracharya's word for 'faith' is the very opposite of 'blind belief'. It means a Conscious conclusion born of repeated experience. Would group-takers please get anybody using the word to define what they mean by giving a first-hand example?]

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