

10 May 1971

READING 2

Several of you have asked to hear again the letter (just received) which contained the translation of a talk by the Shankaracharya at the Ashram in March. That talk was about the 'Param-Atman' which has been the focal point of his talks to his people, and his letters to us, since last August. He evidently considers that they and we have reached the stage where we could understand and convert this into first-hand experience.

If we want some form of words by which to picture the meaning of the term 'Param-Atman', we can either take the Lord's Prayer or this one which is a kind of refrain running through the (much older) *Upanishad* called 'Famous Debates in the Forest':

The youth asked: 'Explain that Spirit which, out of sight, is known by insight; that Self who lives in the hearts of all.'

The Saint replied: 'Your own Self lives in the hearts of all.'

The youth asked: 'What self do you say lives in the hearts of all?'

He answered: 'Your own Self lives in the hearts of all... You cannot see the seer of the sights, you cannot hear the hearer of the sounds, you cannot think the thinker of the thoughts, you cannot know the knower of the known. Your own Self lives in the hearts of all. Nothing else matters.'

Thereupon the young man became silent.

With that in your heart try to absorb the letter without mental embroidery:

The letter that you had posted from Switzerland reached me quite soon, and soon after His Holiness was also here for a few days. I attended his evening discourse on Sunday, 7th March, giving him your message that you were trying to practise his teachings yourself before preaching. He was happy to know this, and made it the starting point of that day's discussion.

He said that teaching a subject, without knowing it fully, does more harm than good. Such teachers make their subject repulsive instead of popular, and their schools harm the very cause for which they exist.

The rubbish in our minds is shown in our very behaviour; one whose behaviour is like that, how could his influence and destiny be otherwise? We should improve our behaviour first. We should meditate on the Param-Atman, for this would make us clean internally and externally. People think of you as they see you; if they see you clean, they would think of you as clean, and then they might try to learn cleanliness from you.

The qualities of the Self-realized Man are given in chapter 14, verses 19–27 of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

(NOTE: The gist of these last 9 verses of Ch.14 is contained in the first of them – 19. This says in effect: 'When the Observer sees no other agent than the revolution of the Gunas and knows That (the Param-Atman) which does not revolve with them, he attains to My Being.')

COMMENT

This is clear and simple; no verbal explanations will help! Try now to do just that for (say) five

minutes: that is, to hold the idea of a Universal Self that doesn't revolve with the movement of your mind. Then (during the week) practise this for any five minutes, then for as much of two half-hours a day as you can manage with the help of the Mantra.

(Meditation)

The Shankaracharya's talk continued:

But before reaching that stage (of attaining to Shri Krishna's Being) practice is required. A new recruit in the army cannot march in step with others, but after practice, he can march in step with a large contingent of soldiers without any difficulty at all. *We need not worry too much if we go wrong, but what is important is that we should not form a habit of going wrong. Once we decide not to go wrong again, we are well on the right path.* Once we apply ourselves to the Param-Atman with a single-minded devotion, we reach the stage of a Mahatma in no time and attain permanent peace – as stated in Chapter 14 of the *Gita* – 'Soon does he become righteous and attain Eternal peace; boldly canst thou proclaim that My devotee is never destroyed.'

If once during our lifetime an unshakeable faith in Param-Atman is established – that is, that we belong to the Param-Atman and Param-Atman belongs to us – then we are out of reach of all harm. At that stage things change their properties for us, a harmful thing becoming harmless. This is how a cup of deadly poison given to Meera, a perfect devotee, lost all its poisonousness in her hands. We know that substances change their properties during a chemical reaction, i.e., on a chemical plane. Then, why can this not happen on a more subtle plane, where much more powerful forces come into play? Bhakti (devotion to the Param-Atman) can do that. It cleanses you, purifies you, decorates you and presents you before the Param-Atman at your best.

(Time for questions)

*

Last Monday's meeting continued like this from the reading of the letter:

Dr. R. If you can have only one aim you achieve Unity; the man who is all the time changing never gets anywhere. Ever since last August the Shankaracharya (in letters and conversations with us, and in talks to his people) has centred on this one thing. He evidently feels that we have reached the stage where we could understand and convert this into first-hand experience.

Q. What is the best way to bring together one's aim in life or one's interest in life with this one aim?

Dr. R. To do two good half-hours a day, and to try and live consistently with what reason and your conscience tells you as a result of those. As you know, there are these two Lights which the Param-Atman shines upon us: one in the form of *Consciousness*, and one in the form of *Conscience* through the emotions; through Knowledge and through Devotion.

Q. Has reason got any part to play in devotion to the Param-Atman? Can the Param-Atman be approached through reason?

Dr. R. Good reasoning is essential right from the second step of the Ladder. One sums up one's

experience, and on the basis of experience one chooses. But reason can only take one a certain distance; it can collect evidence that Param-Atman exists, that great men have described the same thing under different names, etc., but it will just remain unconvinced that this is within your own province. It may object that it is far away; or that it happened in bygone times to humanity, but doesn't happen nowadays; it will introduce all kinds of counter-arguments. The only thing that will outweigh all that argumentativeness of the reason is to *experience*, to *taste* this thing, and to *go on tasting* in spite of all the 'dismal' stories that reason tells you and all the contrary 'proofs' it produces.

(to Mr. A.): would you say that?

Mr. A. Yes, I do.

Dr. R. Then gradually, as you experience more and more, reason becomes your servant instead of your master, and is a help and not a hindrance.

Q. How can one 'meditate on the Param-Atman'?

Dr. R. You hold only one desire in your heart; maybe on a particular day you have been through a tough time and are so disillusioned with yourself, with people, and events that you go into the half-hour with the feeling in your heart that there is only *one* thing you can trust for sure, and that this half-hour belongs to That.

Tired with all these, from these would I be gone.

(Shakespeare, Sonnet 66)

Then you must not think any more; you must simply do what you are told during a half-hour – obey instructions. If you are moving from all activity of the mind to stillness and quiet, but without physically going to sleep, you are going in the right direction. After about five minutes (if you do that preliminary part) you begin to be helped along; then you don't have to make deliberate efforts at attention; and when you emerge you must try to live as if you were always 'in the presence of a noble guest'. It's rather like that...

* * *

