

29 August 1972

**YOUR NEW START****for NOLAN HOWITT**

(This is only a suggestion—not ‘Doctor’s orders’ or anything like that.)

It seems at this distance that what you all want is to discard that wild mixture of bad dreams, conflicting theories, and pseudo-Indian language and get down to something practical.

The centre-point of all teachings is the *practice of attention*. Our Western tradition as well as the much more ancient tradition of the Shankaracharyas, both belong to the *Fourth Way* – a Way in which the common life of the householder is meant to be closely linked with some spiritual practice – both being essential to Self-realization. Other ways based on arduous physical disciplines, monastic life and ‘Rule of Obedience’, or the solitary recluse life of the Yogi adept, are all in conflict with the life of ordinary people in the given social set-up of any particular country.

From talks my wife and I had with people in New Zealand, we got the impression that it was a ‘do it yourself country’ to which people emigrated who wanted a fresh start. Why not adapt to that, and close the artificial gap created by the SES between ‘School’ and ‘common life’? Much of it arose from a wrong translation of the word His Holiness uses – SADHANA – and which Jaiswal always translates as ‘discipline’ and his boss turned into fierce and arbitrary attacks on people due to ignorance of their psychological and physical needs. One time we asked His Holiness what the word meant, he said:

The word SADHANA is derived from ‘SADH’ which means ‘to help to realize’, and in the process of realizing one’s full possibilities, whatever helps to hold the person from falling or going lower is known as Sadhana. The role of a teacher is to help; he helps the people from falling down. The whole of Nature is falling down [‘a descending octave’ from One to many], so along with Nature people keep falling down. A true Teacher with his conscious knowledge and conscious action, comes to help to hold people together by giving them a systematic order to follow so as to grow and realize themselves. The word Sadhana has these different meanings – to help, to hold and to Realize. It is more equivalent to a ‘System’ than to an imposed ‘discipline’.

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The *systematic practice of attention* has two sides which help each other – attention in ordinary practical life and the ‘setting up of a state of attention’ during two half-hours of Meditation.

The practice of attention in ordinary life is illustrated by the ‘story of the Arrow-maker’ which comes from a little-known book held in high esteem in India – the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* (Wisdom of God) – from which the Shankaracharya often quotes. In the 11th book, Chapter 3, Shri Krishna describes a young man who wandered about fearlessly learning from all kinds of situations, people, animals and birds and lower forms of life.

(Story of the Arrow-maker: as quoted on p.12 of *A Lasting Freedom*)

Commenting on this story (in response to one of our questions a few years later), the Shankaracharya said:

The attention employed by the Arrow-maker would differ from stage to stage from start to completion of the making of an arrow. First the form was roughed out, and the shape gradually refined until he came to the most delicate stage, namely to shape and sharpen the head and point. According to the coarseness or fineness which the work involves, one would see that the degree of attention also changes. In rough work one doesn't need to use the finest energy which requires one-pointed attention, because coarse energy would be good enough to do the job. But, as the work progresses toward the finer stages, it would demand more and more attention, and when one comes to the last stage or finest work, then only would one need to use the finest available energy in the highest state of attention.

When one reaches that stage of full attention experienced by the arrow-maker, one would see that the outer world is practically cut off and a love of the Self (Atman) takes over, keeping one engaged with full attention on the work in hand. All this is known as Dharana (the 6th step of Yoga). Dharana means 'to hold on', as described in the words of Patanjali in his Yoga-sutras: 'To hold one's attention on one single point is known as Dharana.'

This account does not directly relate to meditation which varies greatly. In meditation one could experience any of the usual states of consciousness common to all human life (sleeping, dreaming, and daytime awareness). One may sit with closed eyes and yet allow movement inwardly in the subtle body, or think about personal affairs, or go into a trance, or even go to sleep and dream.

One can also, by proper meditation, achieve the rare state of Consciousness known as Samadhi, in which the meditator deliberately cuts off the experiencer and the physical world even though he remains connected and enters the joy of the Self. If one still knows he is 'experiencing love for the Self' or 'attending to the Mantra', he hasn't reached the final state, for there is still Duality. All such experiences are certainly better than others, but not the best.

The real Meditation does not last long; one would be fortunate to have 2, 3 or 6 minutes of real meditation which is union with the Self. But that would be sufficient to give all the energy needed to perform one's activities with ease and efficiency. If one could get even longer *real meditation* within a half-hour, then the result would be still better and the actions of such a person would be highly refined and the sphere of his influence would be great – happiness would prevail all round him and the result of his inner work would be very obvious to all. This whole operation is very much like waiting for a trunk-call for three hours, and when it comes, to conclude the conversation within three minutes.

(Record, 19 September 1968)

(The Shankaracharya has suggested that work on attention, which would help the two half-hours of meditation, can best be done if each person chooses the work he loves doing best of all and practises attention on that.)

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