

24 September 1973

## READING 1

During the past two months (when, as individual ‘bodies’, we have been widely scattered) some of us may have had enough leisure to enjoy glimpses of the Pure Consciousness – that Observer who remains always the same in the midst of a changing world. You may, as I have, been confirmed in the conclusion that it is quite possible not to be entangled in, or dismayed by all this unpredictable change that is going on; and may have found your own way to seek refuge from time to time with the Supreme Self (‘your own Self that lives in the hearts of all’) who is above and beyond all that.

Not a few people have told me that they have been greatly helped by the Shankaracharya’s formulation to the general public at the 1973 religious Festival of the seven steps of a practical, non-intellectual way to the Supreme Self, which becomes emotionally effective if one enjoys its results. We could begin by reformulating it like this:

1. The *first stage* is ‘*good actions*’. It starts with doing one’s own job attentively and happily; but also includes ‘good quality actions’ (‘the way one sits, the way one walks’); behaving appropriately to the situation; ‘doing as you would be done by’; and leads on right up to the realized state when every action – small or great – has become ‘worthy of the Supreme Self’. Even quite feeble attempts to follow this line lead to:
2. The *second stage*, which he calls ‘*good thoughts*’ – meaning also benevolence or goodwill (towards oneSelf and other people whether we happen to ‘like’ them or not); also a cheerful attitude to jobs that have to be done and situations that have to be faced. ‘Goodwill’ leads to:
3. The *third stage* which is ‘*decrease of bad thoughts*’ (such as criticism of others) ill-will, malevolence, evil intent or just plain grumbling and complaining. Decrease of ill-will leads to:
4. The *fourth stage* when ‘*Sattva begins to predominate*’, and this shows itself as a kind of waking up of warmth and serenity with a striking change of values.
5. This ‘energy of Sattva’ leads to the *fifth stage*, which he describes as decrease in the power exerted over us by ‘*worldly attractions*’ (those which make us forget the Supreme Self).
6. Decrease in the power of worldly attractions leads to the *sixth stage*, which he calls the ‘*giving up of worldly objectives*’ (most of the things people run after in ordinary life). In other words, getting free of the ‘rat-race’ without neglecting one’s duties, obligations and needful recreation or the ‘repayment of debts’.
7. Giving up worldly objectives leads to the *seventh and final stage* which is ‘*liberation from all thoughts about oneself*’, and its personal profit and loss.

\*

Only a little practice along these lines shows us that (especially when helped by the meditation) it is a very good way of *applying our knowledge to the improvement of our being*.

Let us suppose it to be true that all inspired writings alike indicate that the ultimate solution for the human condition lies in ‘keeping the Supreme Self in remembrance all the time’; and also that this can only intervene in human affairs through human agencies. Then one can look on

this Ladder of Seven Steps like the ‘merchant man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he has found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.’ (Matthew 13: 45).

\*

The chief point is that in the ‘world’ we are ‘on the make’ all the time, and if the higher part of the mind (Buddhi) becomes involved in this, it gets very tired and may wear itself out. Instead, it should attend to its proper job, which is to refer all major problems to the omniscient Self and carry out the instructions received. The ‘ladder of seven steps’ detailed above takes us from without inward by the opposite process of ‘giving up’.

In a talk (15th April 1972), His Holiness had previously summarised it like this:

When the *Bhagavad Gita* prescribes ‘giving up’, it also explains *how* to give up. What we have to give up is the desire to derive personal benefit from our actions – not the actions themselves. Before undertaking a line of action, an ordinary ‘worldly’ person always tries to assess what benefit would accrue to him as a result. But a Realized man undertakes it as a matter of duty, with no interest in his personal profit or loss.

In an answer to me sent last February he wrote:

‘Giving up’ can be done emotionally and intellectually at all times and in all conditions. In this, there is no question of to-day or to-morrow, or of one or two days a week. Practise ‘giving up’ *all the time*. You just consider the body, the ‘heart’ and the mind as belonging to the Supreme Self, and so, offering all these back to the Supreme Self. That is what ‘giving up’ means.

\*

There was an aphorism among the alchemists which carries a similar meaning: ‘Learn to create causes and leave the results to the great laws of the Universe’.

Here is a valuable comment (O.H.G. 20/9/73):

My first and continuing impression was that something was missing from the description of the Ladder. Early this morning it came:

Perhaps it is a sense of urgency that this inner development is the only thing that really matters. Perhaps it is the conviction and faith that this exaltation is our birthright. Perhaps it is the presence and companionship of the Atman uncreated, free from all created things.

With anything of this, the Ladder seems to go quite naturally right through the first six stages, at least in some degree. The seventh has so far eluded me...

I might add that the wonderful thing is that this Ladder is now quite within the range of anybody leading their normal external life. Each of us is meant to supply our own ‘sense of urgency’ to His Holiness’s deliberate understatement.

\*

[It doesn’t help to think and talk much about this inner work, but just to remember to put it into practice. What, then, shall we talk about? We can very profitably keep asking ourselves questions like: ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What is the world with its attractions and objectives?’, and ‘Why is it important to separate the two?.’]

\* \* \*