

21 January 1974

READING 1

PART 1

A New Year brings the resolve to keep shedding old attitudes and points of view to make way for a new and simpler aim. We are lucky to have been given (just before Christmas) an account of the latest talks with the Shankaracharya which shed much light on the relation of 'giving up' to 'Self-realization'. In the present extract Mr. Whiting, head of the School of Meditation (which we helped to start), is asking this very question:

W. At my former visit (six years ago), when you spoke of 'rest' (through meditation) you said: Your job is to provide 'rest' and make them 'give up'. Can you tell us more?

S. There are three types of 'rest': the bodily rest of the physical realm, the mental rest of the subtle realm, and the Spiritual rest of the causal realm. As far as the *physical level* is concerned, everyone knows that after a full day's work one must get rest through sleep at night... Most people know that, although not every one knows the art of physical rest.

The rest at the *subtle level* appears between the fulfilment of one desire (or course of action), and the initiation of the next. This is the state of non-desire which provides rest for the overburdened mind. One stops (for a short time) all hankerings, and the thinking process comes to stillness.

The rest at the *Spiritual or causal level* becomes available when all activities of both the physical and the subtle bodies – involuntary movements and physical tension, the thinking processes, desires, and even the feelings and emotions – are stilled... When complete acquiescence in everything and every situation is achieved, and there is no hankering after any further need, then one gets the rest of the Spiritual realm.

In that stillness the Self (Atman) appears as the sole witness, in its luminous glory; and observes the great stillness of the whole universe as a single Whole where there is no play of physical, mental, or even emotional movement. This could be described as 'complete surrender', or 'complete faith in the Will of the Absolute'. One simply accepts everything without rejection or opposition. These are the three types or levels of 'rest' which the School should provide for its members according to the varying needs of individuals.

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His Holiness goes on to tell us much more about this fully Realized state but, of course, most people's lives at the present stage don't allow them much time for it. For now, however, there is something everyone can do to prepare the ground. At this talk he went on to say:

The ultimate end of meditation is to reach to this total immobility, or profound stillness, and this is very deep. No meter could measure it; it is boundless.

But it is not necessary that one should remain in this state for a long period. Longer meditation would not guarantee the achievement of this profound stillness. Most of the time spent (even in a half-hour), is in preparation to lead one to this state. There may be 'meditators' (so-called) who would sit for hours and hours but without avail, for they keep on churning their mechanical thoughts in habitual rotation, and just end up tired both physically and mentally. Those who manage to dive deep (even for a very few minutes) come out with potentiality emanating from the Will of the Absolute.

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PART 2

Later in the same talk, he told a story to indicate the general direction by which one could compare one's day-to-day performance with the ideal that lies before us. This story reminded me of my own 'personality and essence' as observed during our discussions last term:

During the great war of India (described in the *Mahabharata*), one day Karna was appointed commander-in-chief of the whole army arrayed against Arjuna. On his way to the battlefield, his charioteer said to him, 'Although you are a great warrior and an efficient leader, it would not be possible for you to vanquish Arjuna because he is supported by Shri Krishna, who has achieved this profound stillness.' (Karna was proud of his descent from the Sun God, and also of his own strength and efficiency.)

The charioteer told him a story about a flock of crows. One of them was strong, clever and good looking, so they made him their leader. This king of the crows felt proud of his exploits, and hence looked down upon all other creatures.

One day a young swan appeared in that vicinity. They all assembled around the swan and asked him if he knew about the great deeds of their king. He pleaded ignorance and wished to see their king. The king crow appeared and asked the swan about different types of flight. The swan, in his simplicity, said that he knew only one style.

The king crow then embarked on an exhibition of his 101 styles of flight. Having performed his 101 types of acrobatics, the king crow wanted to see the art of the swan. The young swan took off in a graceful, gentle and natural flight and, as usual, increased his speed gradually. Since the crow was small and swift he flew fast, and realising that the swan was left behind, he came back to cheer him up. The swan gradually increased his speed, and it was not very long before the crow was tired and trembled, and ultimately fell into the waters of the sea. The swan came down and rescued the crow and helped him back to his flock. The crow then became ashamed of his pride, and thanked the swan for his modesty and magnanimity.

'You see, the swan lived a natural life, while the crow occupied himself in acrobatics and cleverness.

'The ultimate victory goes only to the natural, steady, still and simple man; while the clever, smart and arty-crafty waste their energy in trifling pursuits only leading to their destruction.

'So, my great master, you must keep in your mind the steady, still and natural Krishna, for no one can ever transcend Him or anyone whom He likes to support.'

Those crows, and their king, are surely very familiar and account for nearly all that happens in human life, and the troubles our human nature brings on itself through undue dominance of the active hemisphere. Any poet or painter is familiar with the contrast between the 'contrived' verse or works of art, and the simple inspired expression that occasionally comes apparently from another world.

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PART 3

For systematic work, the character of the Charioteer in the story is of immediate importance to us. We are familiar with the idea that the Charioteer (in the simile of 'man as a chariot' which dates from the Upanishads) represents the recently evolved human Mind (Buddhi) with its capacity for choice of direction not possessed by any other species. Work begins with the training of the Buddhi; instead of wandering off into bypaths innumerable, it should learn to shed its burdens and achieve a paramount interest in becoming the faithful servant of the Supreme Self. Then it will speak to us words of wisdom like Karna's charioteer in the story of the swan and the crows.

[We should like questions and experiments devised to help us discover for ourselves how to achieve this.]

On a bigger scale, the ideal of the 'white swan' inherent in mankind is what keeps humanity going through all vicissitudes. It does us good to dwell on it whenever we can – particularly during and after the silent periods, which people find so valuable at our meetings. That this is how the story was meant to be taken was shown at the next talk (10th November):

W. His Holiness was speaking of Dharana (one-pointed attention) in relation to repetition of the Mantra (Japa) and Yoga or final union. To keep direction seems important – like the white swan who knows only one way to fly and flies to the ocean of bliss. Is this right?

S. The direction is through one's nature to the Will of the Absolute, by which a pattern is established for the nature of all beings. So far as one does not override this pattern, one lives by Nature or lives in the Will of the Absolute. Usually people set aside this pattern and fabricate new inventions, which only create trouble. Being with Nature, means doing all works with a depth of sincerity, without excitement and consequent loss of energy. Whenever the swan flies, he flies with dignity, and a natural rhythm which transcends the ocean and returns quite fresh.

This swan is the Self. According to the Mantra tradition there is a phrase which means: 'I am That', and another 'I am the swan' – 'I', the individual, is that which is the Absolute. It is said that the swan ultimately goes to a lake in the Himalayas where he eats the white pearls symbolic of Bliss. In the individual also the pearls of bliss lie hidden in the turbulent water of mind; only a disciplined and Realized man makes use of them, and this only means living a natural life.

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