

THE JOURNEY

1. Transcendence

Our meditation is said to be 'transcendent' and there have been attempts to characterise the transcendent experience in a more general context. Here is a list taken from *The Psychology of Transcendence* by Andrew Neher:

1. Heightened sensitivity that appears to go beyond the capacity of the senses.
2. Visionary states in which elaborate and seemingly real images are experienced.
3. Mental elicitation of physiological processes to facilitate healing and to maintain a state of health.
4. Altered states of consciousness in which consciously forgotten experiences are remembered in elaborate detail.
5. Flashes of creative insight, which seem to come "out of nowhere."
6. States of consciousness in which intricate tasks are performed without conscious awareness and beyond ordinary capabilities.
7. Mystical and ecstatic states that involve overwhelming feelings of joy and contentment and that can add meaning and significance to life.

Common to most of these items is a sense of 'beyond-ness', that is, an experience or appreciation of something which is normally beyond our usual state of consciousness, and some sort of illumination.

One approach to the subject of transcendence comes from consideration of the nature of God. Mystics often describe God as that which is beyond everything else, and sometimes paradoxically *as* everything else: One. 'God' is a highly topical subject following the publication of Richard Dawkin's *The God Delusion*, with ripostes from many authors, including Keith Ward in *The God Conclusion* and Karen Armstrong in *The Case for God*¹, who have weighed in to show, essentially, how formative is the thinking that lies behind much of the current Science versus Religion debate. If we had to reply to *The God Delusion* from the point of view of the System and Advaita, and our own experience, what would we say?

*

Do we have an understanding, a feeling for, an awareness of the transcendent that will carry us through the next leg of our individual journey? In our way there is said to be no need for 'blind faith' as seems to be requirement of Christianity. Though Karen Armstrong points out that the usual interpretation of 'faith' may be wrong:

In the gospels we continually hear him berating his disciples for their lack of 'faith' and praising the 'faith' of gentiles, who seem to understand him better than his fellow Jews. Those who beg him for healing are required to have 'faith' before he can work a miracle; and some pray: 'Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief. We do not find this preoccupation with 'belief' in the other major traditions. Why did Jesus set such store by it?

¹ We might well make these our texts for the term.

The simple answer is that he did not. The word translated 'faith' in the New Testament is the Greek *pistis* (verbal form: *pisteuo*), which means 'trust; loyalty; engagement; commitment'. Jesus was not asking people to 'believe' in his divinity, because he was making no such claim. He was asking for commitment.

This is not entirely convincing, but it does raise the question of what part 'faith' or at least 'commitment' plays for us. There are HH's stories of the lamps:

Another example is that of a traveller who has to go a journey of seven hours, and who starts in the dark at 3 a.m. with a small lamp in his hand and with the aid of street lamps. The way is not clear and the light is bad, and he feels his way with some trepidation and caution. But by the time he reaches the Fourth Stage, the dawn has arrived, and the sun's rays make the Way increasingly clear so he doesn't need the other lamps. He can now with certainty tread his way up to the High Noon of the Seventh or final stage; so that when he meets the Atman he is searching for he can become like Him. [*Record 11/10/1962*]

and:

There was a man standing at his door on a completely dark night. He wanted to go to a place ten miles away - the road full of darkness. He had a small light in his hand, and with this tiny light in his hand, he was thinking, - 'I have to go ten miles and this lamp throws light only for a few yards; with this how can I cover a distance of ten miles?' So he stood thinking about this. Then a man who knew better, passed that way, and asked, 'What are you thinking about?' He expressed his difficulty. He said, 'When you go ahead, this light is going to move with you and as you go ahead, all the darkness will be left behind and you will greet your dearest.' Similarly, the little light you possess, that is fully capable of taking you to reach your ultimate goal. Don't be afraid that your own power is so little, so negligible, it is little, no doubt, it is not illuminating the whole of your path, but whenever you move forward it is going to illuminate that distance which you are covering at the moment and as you go ahead it will provide light further ahead - so no need to lose heart. [*Record 21/09/1974*]

Is 'faith' for us then the belief that the lamp really will see us to the next step, and also that there really is a dawn? What is the light? Do we take this to be the light of consciousness, or perhaps Sattva? What about the sense of transcendence, that which is unseen but which is always there? Sometimes this seems to guide us.

For some of us, we get a glimpse of the dawn but then the sun's rays fade and we are back in the dark. In really bad times the light seems to go out completely. Is there anything that can be done about it?

* * *