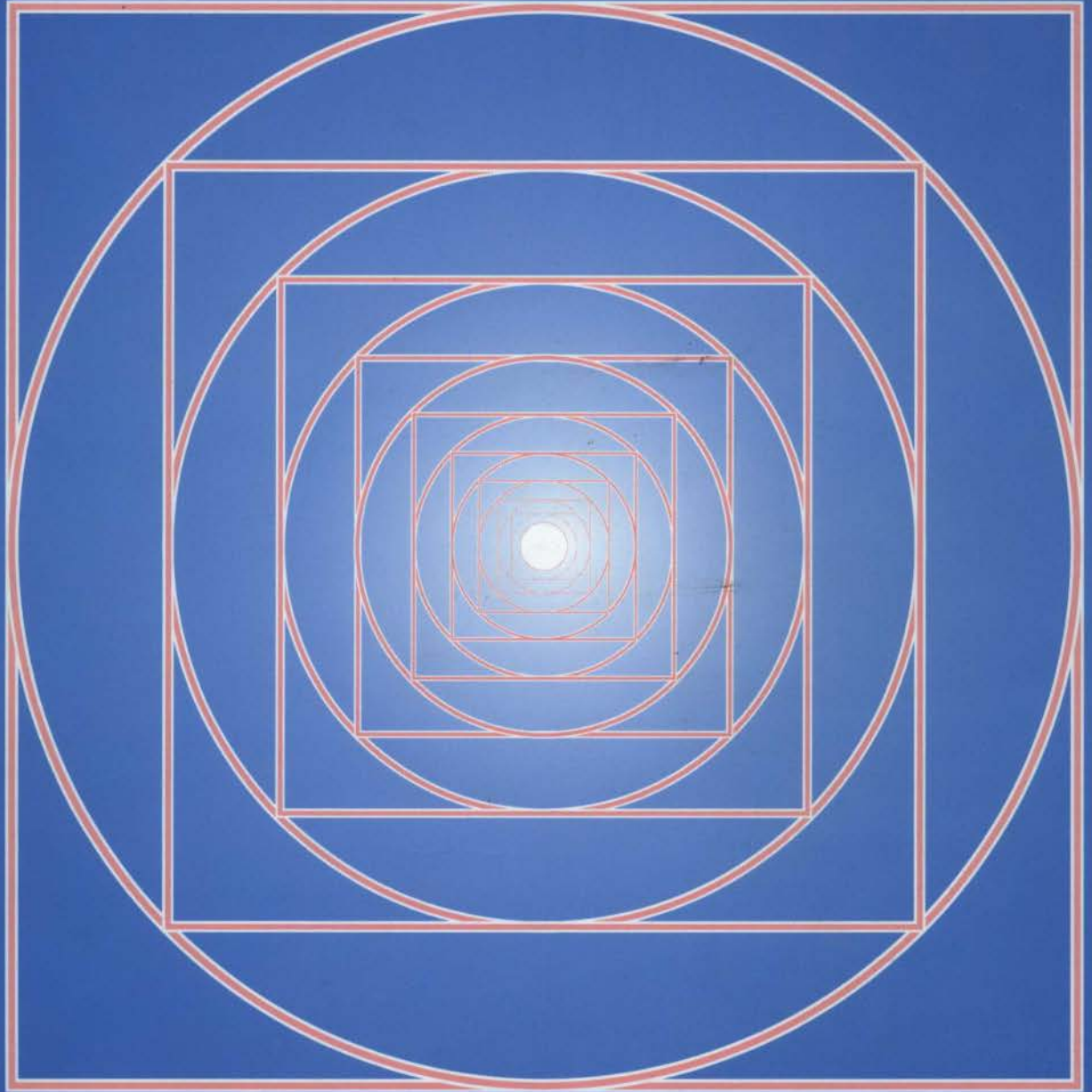


The Aim of Life



General Editor
KIREET JOSHI

The Aim of Life

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The Aim of Life

PREFACE

There are states and states of consciousness; there are profundities and widenesses; there are heights over heights. To discover them one has to enlarge and explore ever-widening possibilities of psychological experience. In the depths of the being we may begin to integrate the threads and complexities of what we are and can become. It is there, perhaps, rather than in books or preachings, that we may begin to perceive and live what precisely is our aim of life. Free from dogmas and fixed beliefs, in the purity of experience, we may hope to discover the answer to the all-important questions: What am I to do? What role do I have to play in the vast and mysterious universe? What is the best and highest goal that I should aim to realise?

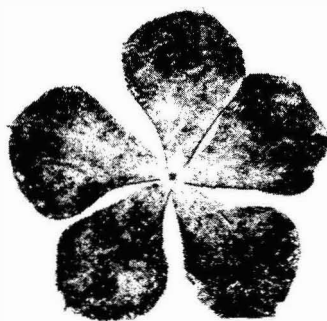
But from no human endeavour — particularly when at a collective and general level — is it easy or desirable to eliminate intellectual inquiry. On the contrary, such an inquiry can be an excellent aid in the ultimate search for the aim of life — a direct search that is based on disciplined practice and experience. But the inquiry must be unfettered by narrow or exclusive assumptions, and carried out in the spirit of sincere exploration. Throughout the history of awakened thought, there has been a persistent questioning as to what is the aim of human life. Answers have been sought at various levels of reflection and critical thought. Answers derived from morality, religion or spiritual experience have also often been expressed in ways which are accessible to our rational understanding. The inquiring mind needs to reflect on these answers and arrive at its own conclusions.

We speak today of value-oriented education and of integral education. It is not necessary to define these two terms here, nor is it easy to do so. But it is clear that certain precautions must be taken if value-oriented education is not to degenerate

into something narrow, rigid, and dogmatic. Firstly, each individual must be given the freedom to explore the full realm of values as comprehensively as possible. Secondly, this exploration must not be limited to the realm of morality alone, but must cover as well the values inherent in the physical, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual realms. Similarly, an unreflecting insistence on integral education can degenerate into a hodge-podge of disciplines in all their innumerable aspects and details, unless we are able to discover some unifying direction in which the various disciplines of knowledge and experience can find an ever-progressive synthesis and harmonization. A free pursuit of the theme of the aim of life could prove a salutary beginning, and even, in a sense, provide a fulfilling climax.

All those who have the responsibility of educating children and youth will have to think out the implications of value-oriented and integral education. They will also have to undergo the training required for them progressively to embody, in their lives and personalities, the experiences gained in their pursuit of values and of integrated development of the being. This book is especially addressed to all those who have this responsibility. The material presented here is meant to encourage a free exploration into the theme of the aim of life. The texts have been selected from many important works related to the aim of life, in the spirit of collecting at random some flowers from a beautiful garden. The limitation of space does not permit us to include as many texts as we wish to. In due course, we shall have an opportunity to bring out a second volume on this theme.

Each text is preceded by an introduction and, when needed, is followed by explanatory notes and comments. Thus, the reader can study the texts without needing to consult other sources. Drawings, sketches, paintings, diagrams, photographs and other symbolic or explicit statements have been added to help the reader understand the texts with a greater ease and joy.



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The Aim of Life

An Overview

In the course of the history of human endeavour, there have emerged four main theories of the aim of life in accordance with four different conceptions of truth of existence. These may be called the supracosmic, the cosmic and terrestrial, the supraterrrestrial or other-worldly, and the integral or synthetic or composite. Human tendencies are complex and move often in various directions simultaneously. This explains why different aims of life are frequently pursued in some kind of ordered or disordered combination. Genuine integration or synthesis is rather rare.

I

The supracosmic view

In the supracosmic view of things the supreme Reality is alone entirely real. A certain illusoriness, a sense of the vanity of cosmic existence and individual being is normally a characteristic turn of this seeing of things. In the extreme forms of its world-vision, human existence has no real meaning; it is a mistake of the soul or a delirium, an error or ignorance.

It would follow that the one thing to be done, the one wise and needful way of our being is to renounce everything, whether terrestrial or celestial, as soon as our inner evolution or some hidden law of the spirit makes that possible.

The resultant call is to go beyond all manifestations and enter into some ineffable Nirvana or into the featureless unity of the indefinable Existence. And the path that is recommended is that of renunciation and rejection of physical life, the call of the spirit, the recoil from Matter.



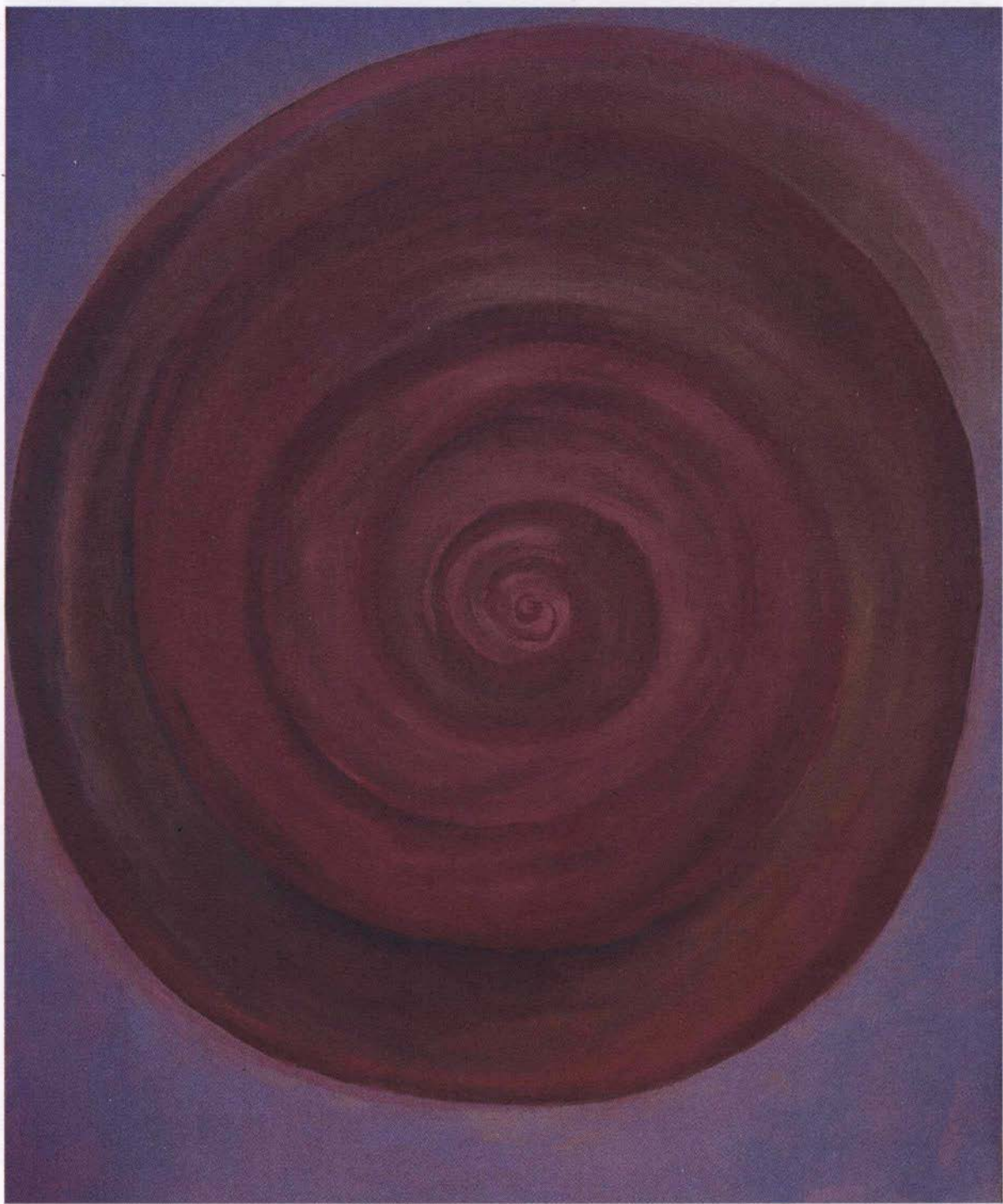
Painting by Mayaura, Auroville

II

The cosmic-terrestrial view

The cosmic-terrestrial view, the exact opposite of the supracosmic, considers cosmic existence as real; it goes farther and accepts it as the only reality. God, if God exists, is an eternal Becoming; or if God does not exist, then Nature is a perennial becoming. Earth is the field or it is one of the temporary fields; man is the highest possible form or only one of the temporary forms of the Becoming. Humanity and its welfare and progress during its persistence on earth provide the largest field and the natural limits for the terrestrial aim of life.





III

The supraterrrestrial view

The supraterrrestrial view admits the reality of the material cosmos and it accepts the temporary duration of earth and human life as the first fact we have to start from; but it adds to it a perception of other worlds or planes of existence which have an eternal or at least a more permanent duration.

There are three essential characteristics in all the varying statements of the supraterrrestrial view: first, the belief in the individual immortality of the human spirit; secondly, the idea of its sojourn on earth as a temporary passage and of a heaven beyond as its proper habitation; thirdly, an emphasis on the development of the ethical and spiritual being as the means of ascension to heaven or supraterrrestrial planes.

IV

The integral view

According to the integral view, there is the Divine Reality which manifests itself as the universe. The universe is a system of planes or worlds, supra-terrestrial and terrestrial. The earth-life is the scene of the evolutionary unfolding of the Divine Reality. There is an all-seeing purpose in the terrestrial creation; a divine plan is working itself out through contradictions and perplexities.

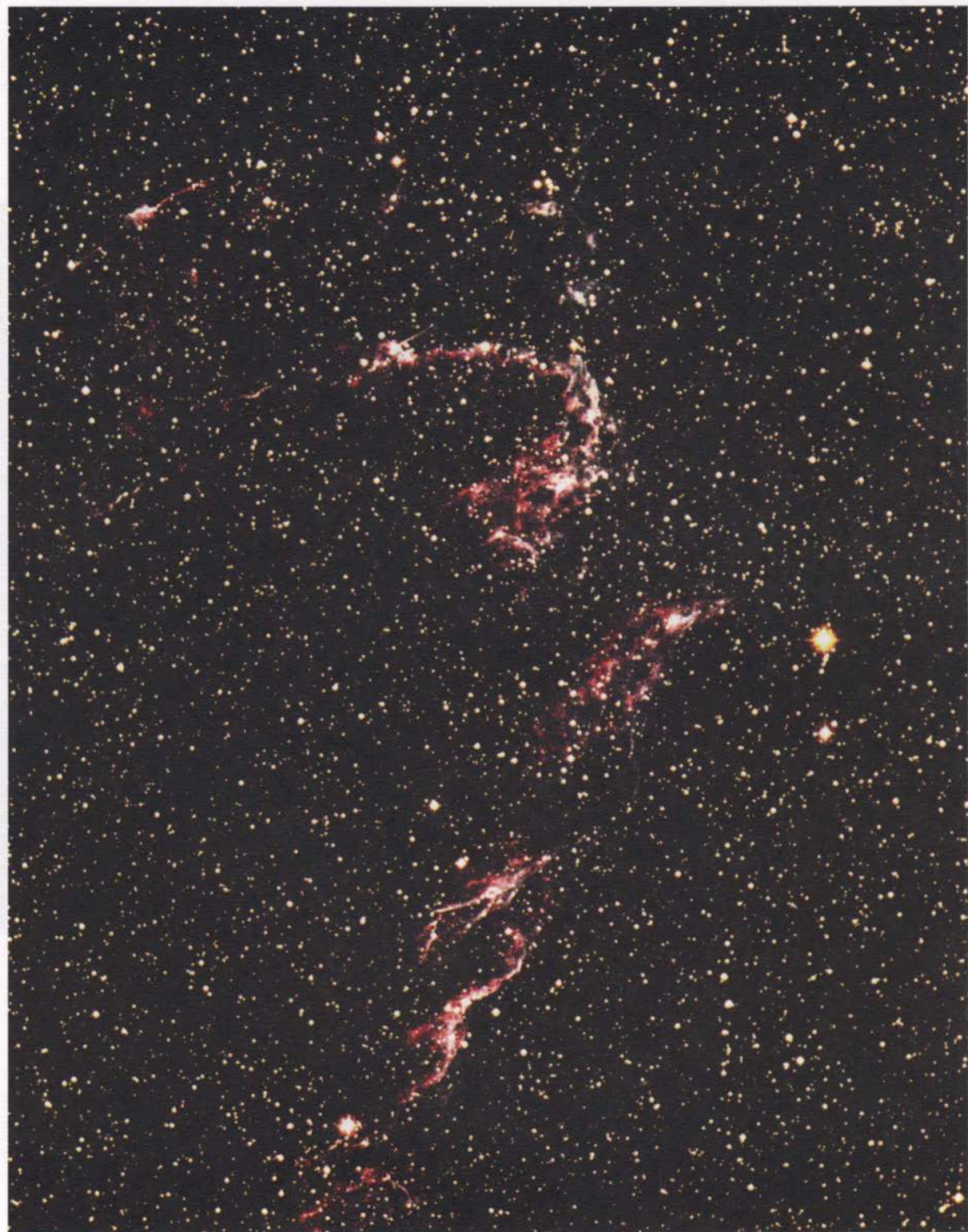
To discover the Divine Reality and to work for its full manifestation in physical life is the integral aim of life. All life must be accepted, but all life must be transformed by the highest divine light and power.





The Aim of Life

An Exploration



Isha Upanishad

Introduction

As one hears of the Upanishads, a distinctive image arises in the mind of a quest leading to the hermitages of teachers who have practised austerities and disciplines of various kinds and have realised in experience the highest states one can conceive of. The age of the Upanishads is considered to be a kind of culmination of a seeking that was recorded in the Vedas.

It is a great mystery how, at a time when a large section of humanity was still living in a half-awakened consciousness primarily concerned with physical well-being, there grew a small nucleus of illumined teachers who could traverse domains of inner life and could speak in an extraordinary language packed with meanings which to us seem difficult to understand. Today, Vedic knowledge is considered to be a secret, and indeed, the language of the Vedas is so far removed from the languages of the present day that a good deal of controversy has arisen as to the meaning inherent in the poetry of the Vedas.

But in the next stage of development, we find a literature which is easier to grasp and understand, which has come to be known as the Brahmanas. The Brahmanas are largely devoted to the explanation of rituals — their significance, their symbolism and the meaning of their observance. We do not find in the Brahmanas anything directly related to our present concern with the aim of life. But towards the end of the age of the Brahmanas, there came about a revolt against ritualism and a new seeking, and a new quest arose. There was a feeling that truth cannot be a matter of ritualism and that it must be sought after without dogmatism or any preconceived belief or idea.

This was the beginning of the age of the Upanishads.

The chains of the past were broken by robust thinkers and seekers who began to chart out a programme of inquiry, and it has been said that these seekers perfected a discovery which in its importance to the future of human knowledge dwarfs the thought of Newton and Galileo. Even the discovery of the inductive method in science was not more momentous. For they discovered, down to its ultimate processes, the method of yoga, and by the method of yoga reached some crowning realisations. They realised as a fact the Existence beneath the flux of things, a supreme unity and immutable stability which they described for want of better term, as "It" (tat). And sometimes they described it negatively by saying, "Not this, not this" (neti neti). They also realised that reality in itself is consciousness; and perhaps the most important realisation they claimed to have reached is that there is in each individual man that same reality which is identically present in the universe. This realisation was enshrined in two famous formulae of the Upanishads: "He am I" (so'ham) and "I am the Brahman" (aham brahmasmi).

There are more than two hundred Upanishads, but the most important of them are twelve in number.¹ Of these, the Isha Upanishad occupies a very special place. It is the shortest Upanishad, having only eighteen verses, and yet it is said to contain the quintessence of the entire quest expressed in the Upanishads. Moreover, it describes not only the nature of reality, but also the aim of life that seems to be implied by the very nature of the universe, and by the reality that is in the universe and in man. The Isha Upanishad can also be seen as a synthesis — a synthesis not only in regard to the nature of reality but also in regard to the way of life that one is required to pursue to discover that reality.

One singular message that comes out clearly in this Upanishad is that all contraries meet when one reaches the supreme heights of realisation. Elsewhere, that reality is described either as static or as dynamic. But in the Isha Upanishad reality is described as:

*That moves and That moves not;
That is far and the same is near
That is within all this and
That also is outside all this.*

¹ Isha, Kena, Katha, Prashna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Chhandogya, Brhadaranyaka, Svetasvatara, Brahmbindu.

In certain exclusive philosophies and teachings it has been said that to discover reality one must renounce all enjoyment. Indeed, the Isha Upanishad also recommends renunciation, but it boldly proclaims: "By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy."

In some exclusive philosophies a contrast is made between the path of knowledge and the path of action. According to them, action may be a preparation for salvation or liberation, but can never actually give it. They argue that only through the path of knowledge can liberation be achieved. Indeed, the Isha Upanishad insists on attainment of the knowledge of reality, but it also insists that "Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years." It perceives that action is not an obstacle, and it declares, "action cleaves not to a man."

It is obvious that the aim of life proposed by the Isha Upanishad is a composite aim, a kind of integral aim, in which one realises the reality that is at once static and dynamic, or which is beyond both motionlessness and movement; and, having realised this, one achieves the highest state of knowledge in which one is still enabled to do works in this world.

Many commentaries have been made on the Upanishads, including the Isha Upanishad. But our purpose is not to enter into these commentaries. One should read the text without any bias and derive from it whatever meaning one is led to derive, in a spirit of free and impartial inquiry. It is not necessary to fall in line with one commentary or another. The aim of life must be discovered by each individual. Each one must cultivate the necessary patience so as not to rush to conclusions but rather to pursue one's goal by considering various affirmations and negations that have been pronounced by seekers throughout the ages.

The Upanishads are also known as Vedanta, not only because they came at the end of the Vedic age, but also because the highest discoveries of the Veda are supposed to be contained in the Upanishadic teachings. Vedanta grew into a school of philosophy in a later period of ancient Indian history, but the original Vedanta was not a philosophy but a dialogue or a collection of insights and intuitions of the seers. The Upanishadic seers maintained that the senses do not give us true knowledge. They also maintained that while the reason, in its pure ideative movement, can grasp the essential truth of reality, it cannot give a concrete experience of that truth. The Upanishadic seers, like modern scientists, developed a method of arriving at knowledge which can be verified through experience. They cultivated the faculty of intuition or illumination through which an individual's consciousness can be so

enlarged as to experience universal and transcendental reality by a kind of identification or identity. Knowledge by identity was the special method of the Upanishads, and they considered anything that was remote from this kind of knowledge to be Ignorance. According to them, the knowledge of multiplicity gained by sense experience or by rational enquiry is Ignorance; that which is known by identity and that which is known by oneness is Knowledge. But here again, the Isha Upanishad reconciles the knowledge of the One and the knowledge of the Multiplicity, and it considers that to be a true synthetic knowledge which combines the knowledge of the One and of the Many. To arrive at this knowledge is, according to the Isha Upanishad, the right aim of life.

Etymologically, Upanishad means “to sit very near”. The image suggested is of a seeker prepared to sit very close and very near to the Teacher who has “seen” or realised. This indicates the true spirit of inquiry: he who wants to know must be prepared to approach and sit near the teacher. Both intensity and humility are needed if one wants to know. It is with that intensity and humility that we may now turn to the text of the Isha Upanishad.



“All this is for habitation by the Lord...”

ईशा वास्यमिदं सर्वं यत् किञ्च जगत्यां जगत् ।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा मा गृधः कस्य स्विद्धनम् ॥ १ ॥

1. All this is for habitation by the Lord, whatsoever is individual universe of movement in the universal motion. By that renounced thou shouldst enjoy; lust not after any man's possession.

कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छतौ समाः ।
एवं त्वयि नान्यथेतोऽस्ति न कर्म लिप्यते नरे ॥ २ ॥

2. Doing verily works in this world one should wish to live a hundred years. Thus it is in thee and not otherwise than this; action cleaves not to a man.

असूर्या नाम ते लोका अन्धेन तमसावृताः ।
तांस्ते प्रेत्याभिगच्छन्ति ये के चासहनो जनाः ॥ ३ ॥

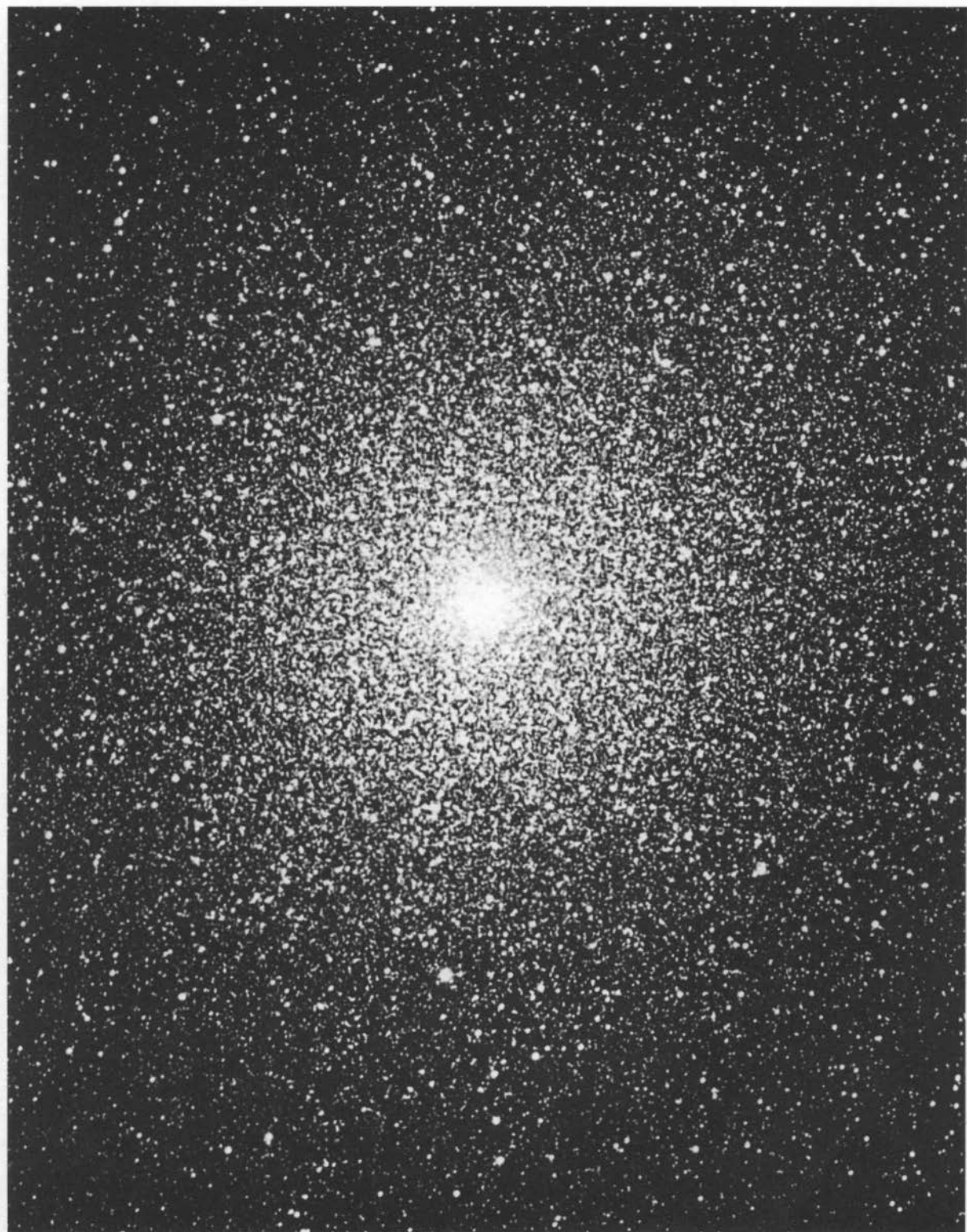
3. Sunless are those worlds and enveloped in blind gloom whereto all they in their passing hence resort who are slayers of their souls.

अनेजदेकं मनसो जवीयो नैनद्देवा आप्नुवन् पूर्वमर्षत् ।
तद्भावतोऽन्यानत्येति तिष्ठत् तस्मिन्नपो मातरिश्वा दधाति ॥ ४ ॥

4. One unmoving that is swifter than Mind, That the Gods reach not, for It progresses ever in front. That, standing, passes beyond others as they run. In That the Master of Life establishes the Waters.

तदेजति तन्नैजति तद् दूरे तद्धन्तिके ।
तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तदु सर्वस्यास्य बाह्यतः ॥ ५ ॥

5. That moves and That moves not; That is far and the same near; that is within all this and That also is outside all this.





यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति ।
सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते ।।6।।

6. But he who sees everywhere the Self in all existences and all existences in the Self, shrinks not thereafter from aught.

यस्मिन् सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मैवाभूद् विजानतः ।
तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः ।।7।।

7. He in whom it is the Self-Being that has become all existences that are Becomings, for he has the perfect knowledge, how shall he be deluded, whence shall he have grief who sees everywhere oneness?

स पर्यगाच्छुक्रमकायमव्रणमस्नाविरं शुद्धमपापविद्धम् ।
कविर्मनीषी परिभूः स्वयम्भूर्याथातथ्यतोऽर्थान् व्यदधाच्छाश्वतीभ्यः समाभ्यः ।।8।।

8. It is He that has gone abroad — That which is bright, bodiless, without scar of imperfection, without -sinews, pure, unpierced by evil. The Seer, the Thinker, the One who becomes everywhere, the Self-existent has ordered objects perfectly according to their nature from years sempiternal.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽविद्यामुपासते ।
ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ विद्यायां रताः ।।9।।

9. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Ignorance, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Knowledge alone.

अन्यदेवाहुर्विद्ययाऽन्यदाहुरविद्यया ।

इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ।।10।।

10. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Knowledge, other that which comes by the Ignorance; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

विद्याञ्चविद्याञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।

अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्ययामृतमश्नुते ।।11।।

11. He who knows That as both in one, the Knowledge and the Ignorance, by the Ignorance crosses beyond death and by the Knowledge enjoys Immortality.

अन्धं तमः प्रविशन्ति येऽसम्भूतिमुपासते ।

ततो भूय इव ते तमो य उ सम्भूत्यां रताः ।।12।।

12. Into a blind darkness they enter who follow after the Non-Birth, they as if into a greater darkness who devote themselves to the Birth alone.

अन्यदेवाहुः सम्भवादन्यदाहुरसम्भवात् ।

इति शुश्रुम धीराणां ये नस्तद्विचक्षिरे ।।13।।

13. Other, verily, it is said, is that which comes by the Birth, other that which comes by the Non-Birth; this is the lore we have received from the wise who revealed That to our understanding.

सम्भूतिञ्च विनाशञ्च यस्तद्वेदोभयं सह ।
विनाशेन मृत्युं तीर्त्वा सम्भूत्याऽमृतमश्नुते ॥ 14 ॥

14. He who knows That as both in one, the Birth and the dissolution of Birth, by the dissolution crosses beyond death and by the Birth enjoys Immortality.

हिरण्मयेन पात्रेण सत्यस्यापिहितं मुखम् ।
तत् त्वं पूषन्नपावृणु सत्यधर्माय दृष्टये ॥ 15 ॥

15. The face of Truth is covered with a brilliant golden lid; that do thou remove, O Fosterer, for the law of the Truth, for sight.

पूषन्नेकर्षे यम सूर्य प्राजापत्य व्यूह रश्मीन् समूह ।
तेजो यत् ते रूपं कल्याणतमं तत्ते पश्यामि योऽसावसौ पुरुषः सोऽहमस्मि ॥ 16 ॥

16. O Fosterer, O sole Seer, O Ordainer, O illumining Sun, O power of the Father of creatures, marshal thy rays, draw together thy light; the Lustre which is thy most blessed form of all, that in Thee I behold. The Purusha there and there. He am I.

वायुरनिलममृतमथेदं भस्मान्तं शरीरम् ।
ॐ कतो स्मर कृतं स्मर कतो स्मर कृतं स्मर ॥ 17 ॥

17. The Breath of things is an immortal Life, but of this body ashes are the end. OM! O Will, remember, that which was done remember! O Will, remember, that which was done, remember.

अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान् विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान् ।
युयोध्यस्सन्नुहाराणमेनो भूयिष्ठां ते नमउक्तिं विधेम । ।18। ।

18. O god Agni, knowing all things that are manifested, lead us by the good path to the felicity; remove from us the devious attraction of sin. To thee completest speech of submission we would dispose.



Search for Utter Transcendence

Introduction

The Upanishad describes Reality as Sat, Being; but it also speaks of asat, Non-being, as the Ultimate from which Being appeared. This nothing, this Nihil, is seen as a "something" which is beyond positive comprehension. Just as pure Being is the affirmation of the Ultimate as the free base of all cosmic existence, so Non-being is the contrary affirmation of the Ultimate's freedom from all cosmic existence. Non-being permits Being as Silence permits activity. It is necessary to grapple with these concepts if we are to understand the message of the Buddha. It has been said that the Buddha rejected the teaching of the Upanishads and the Veda and maintained a Nihil or a zero as final and ultimate. But examining more closely what he is reported to have said about the ultimate reality, it becomes clear that he did not want any formula that would limit what he had experienced as something incapable of being described as either Being or Non-being.

The Buddha achieved Buddhahood and the state of Nirvana when he was only 35 years old. And having reached this state, he did not cease to be engaged in activity. The possibility of having an entirely motionless personality and a void calm within, while outwardly manifesting the eternal verities — Love, Truth and Righteousness — was perhaps the real gist of the Buddha's message. Indeed, it must be affirmed that he did not represent the petty ideal of an escape from the trouble and suffering of physical birth, but rather showed that a perfect man could combine

in himself both silence and activity, and that the absolute freedom of Nirvana could be reached without losing hold on existence and the universe.

The life of the Buddha, known also as Gautama and Sakyamuni, has fascinated people throughout history. That he was born around 560 BC in the Himalayan town of Kapilavastu, into the Sakya clan, and given the name Siddhartha, which means “wish fulfilled”, is part of what is agreed to be factual of the beginning of the Buddha’s life. Later tradition recounts the appearance and early life of the Buddha through history mixed with myth and legend.

It is said that before he was conceived, his mother, Mahamaya, dreamt of a beautiful white elephant entering her side. At his birth his body was found to bear thirty-two auspicious marks. Seven Brahmin priests predicted that if the child remained at home he would become a universal monarch; if, on the other hand, he encountered four signs — an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a wandering ascetic — he would renounce his worldly life, attain wisdom and enlighten the world. But the eighth priest to examine the new-born child, Kondanna, was unequivocal: the baby’s markings could indicate only one thing, namely, the boy would one day renounce the world and become a Buddha, an enlightened being. Indeed, so impressed was Kondanna that he himself decided to renounce the world, and accompanied by four friends of like mind he went away to wait for Siddhartha to grow up and attain Buddhahood.

Suddhodana, Siddhartha’s father, took every precaution that the four signs might not come within the sight of his son. The Buddha himself is reported to have said about his upbringing:

Bhikkus [disciples], I was delicately nurtured, exceedingly delicately nurtured, delicately nurtured beyond measure. In my father’s residence lotus ponds were made, one of blue lotuses, one of red lotuses, and another of white lotuses, just for my sake. ...I had three palaces: one for winter, one for summer, and one for the rainy season.¹

But in later youth, some years after his marriage to his cousin Yasodhara, he was confronted with the four signs and one night he slipped away from the palace. Taking up the life of a wandering ascetic he went in search of a teacher, and eventually associated with the greatest masters of his time. From these men he learned all they could teach, became their equal, even surpassed them, and yet remained unsatisfied. He then, with a group of companions — Kondanna and the

1. *Anguttara Nikaya*, Collection of the Gradual Sayings of the Buddha.

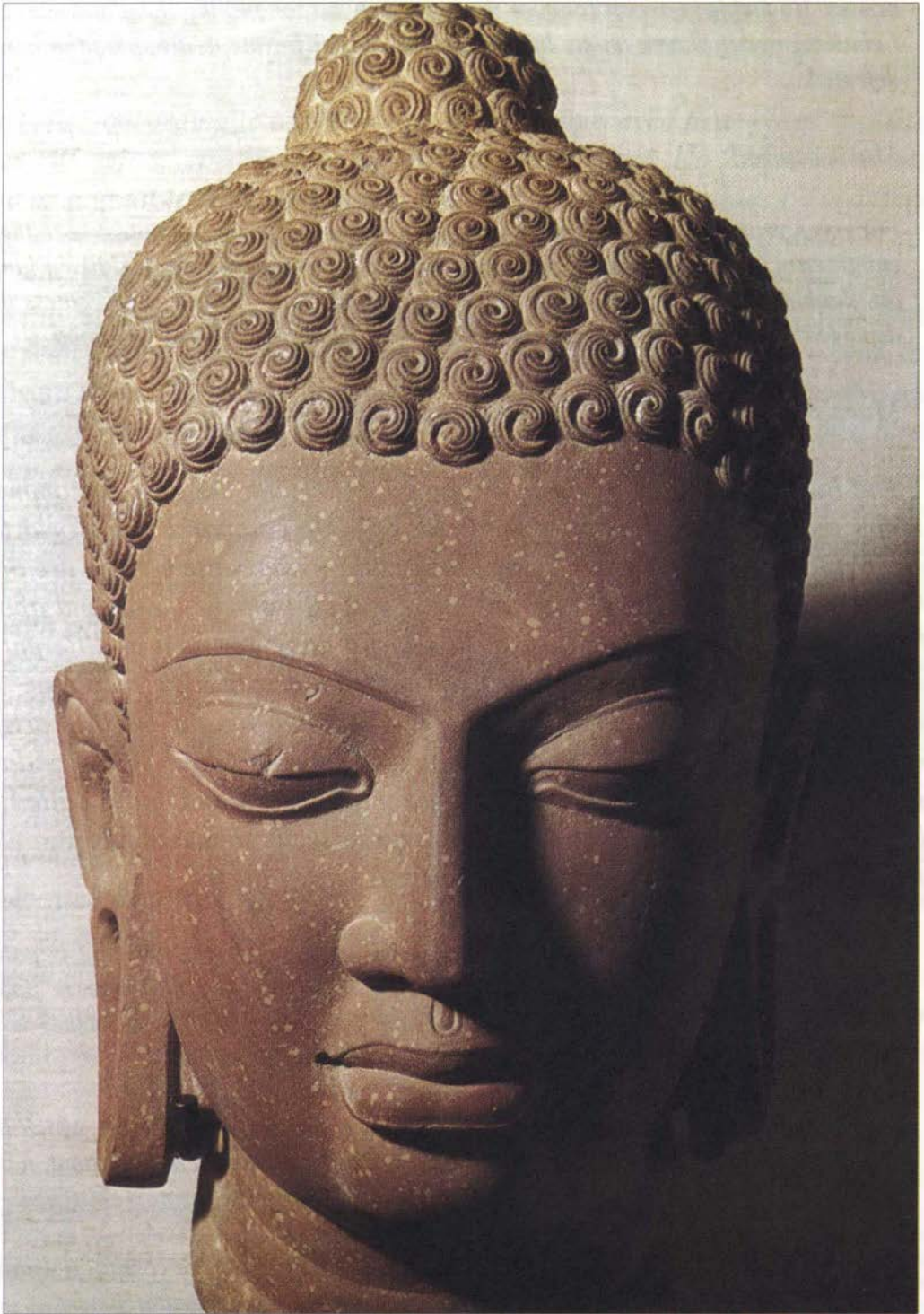
four others who had been waiting for him all these years — began to practise severe austerities and self-mortification. It was a period of self-discovery in which he depended upon direct personal knowledge and direct personal experience. He is said to have described that at a certain stage, through a disciplined lack of food his body reached a state such that when he would touch the skin of his stomach he took hold of his spine.

After six years of such practices the Buddha remembered an experience of his childhood. Once, while waiting for his father under the shade of a jambu tree, he had spontaneously entered a state of consciousness characterised by a sense of freedom, bodily well-being and mental happiness. With this memory he realised that fasting and a life of extreme asceticism was not the way to achieve passionlessness, enlightenment and liberation. He stopped his austerities and soon regained his old health and robustness. But his companions were shocked and upset at his abrupt change. They decided to have no more to do with him and departed, leaving him behind.

In the neighbourhood at that time there lived a woman named Sujata. She was expecting a baby and had vowed that if it were a son she would make a special food-offering to the deity of a nearby banyan tree. The son was duly born and Sujata set about the elaborate ritual of preparing a meal fit for a god. When it was ready she put it in a golden bowl and sent her maid to the tree to make arrangements. Meanwhile, Gautama had sat down under this very tree to meditate. When the maid approached she thought the golden-hued figure was truly a god and rushed back to tell her mistress. Sujata came hurrying with her bowl and offered it to Gautama, saying, "Venerable Sir, whoever you may be, god or human, please accept this food and may you achieve the goal to which you aspire." Taking the bowl, Gautama ate the meal. He then went to the river and placed the bowl upon the water. "If today I am to attain enlightenment," he said, "may this golden bowl float upstream." The bowl immediately did so.

That evening, Gautama made his way to the Bodhi tree, resolved not to rise until he reached enlightenment. Mara, an evil demon, appeared to him to try to keep him from his goal with threats, provocations, violence, and when these did not succeed, with enticement and alluring temptations. To Mara, the Buddha said:

Lust is your first army; the second is dislike for higher life; the third is hunger and thirst; the fourth is craving; the fifth is torpor and sloth; the sixth is fear, cowardice; the seventh is doubt; the eighth is hypocrisy and obduracy; the ninth is gains, praise, honour, false glory; the tenth is exalting self, despising others. Mara, these are your



Mathura Museum, Gupta art, 5th century

armies. No feeble man can conquer them, yet only by conquering them one wins bliss. I challenge you! Shame on my life if defeated! Better for me to die in battle than live defeated....

Mara replied:

For seven years have I followed the Lord step by step. I can find no entrance to the All-enlightened, the watchful one. As a crow went after a stone that looked like a lump of fat, thinking, surely, here I shall find a tender morsel, and finding no sweetness there, departed thence; so like a crow attacking a rock, in disgust I leave Gautama.

Mara retreated and the Buddha achieved his goal.

The Buddha debated whether he should undertake the path of communicating to others the truth of the state he had reached. He compared the world to a lotus pond: in a lotus pond there are some lotuses still under water; there are others that have risen up only to water level; and there are still others that stand above water and are untouched by it. Similarly, in this world there are men of different levels of development — surely some would need and understand his teaching. Since his former teachers were no longer living, the Buddha sought out his original five companions, those who had left him in disgust, among whom was Kondanna. The Buddha began to teach, and, at the Deer Park, Isipatana, now called Sarnath, delivered his first message, known as the Dhammacakkappavattanasutta, “Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth”, from which here is an extract:

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, separation from pleasant things is painful and not getting what one wishes is also painful. In short the five khandhas of grasping are painful.

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: that craving, which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there, namely the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain: the cessation without a remainder of that craving, abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.

Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this

is the noble Eightfold Path, namely, right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.¹

Thereafter, according to tradition, the Buddha journeyed from place to place for more than 40 years, speaking to all who would listen.² He acquired a unique reputation as a great teacher. Behind his philosophy and strict ethics he is described as having a quiet sense of humour and as being affectionate and devoted to his disciples. Although gifts of land and buildings were offered to him by his followers, he appears to have had no settled dwelling place. Near the age of eighty, the Buddha made his final journey to the sola tree grove at Kushinara. His last words to his disciples were these: "It is in the nature of all things that take form to dissolve again. Strive earnestly [to attain perfection]." It is said that the Buddha then moved through various rapturous stages of meditation until he reached final and perfect Nirvana.

The awareness of suffering and death in this world is what sent the young Siddhartha on his quest. What, he asked, is the cause of suffering? He found it to be desire. In order to eliminate desire from our consciousness he proposed an eight-fold path through which one could be liberated into a state free from all affliction, a state of unshakable and perfectly unassailable peace. But, having reached this state, is there anything left to be done in this world? Is there any aim of life to be further pursued? As we have seen, the life of the Buddha shows clearly that the state of Nirvana and the state of activity need not be opposed to each other. For man, when liberated from desire, is motivated to act by something else. Action does not necessarily have its origin in desire. True action proceeds from Silence, and there are deeper and deeper profundities of silence, each corresponding to a greater effectivity of action. At the deepest, or highest, state of Silence, we find the Buddhahood. Thus was it possible for the Buddha to attain the state of Nirvana and yet act in the world, impersonal in his inner consciousness, in his action the most powerful personality we know of as having lived and produced results upon earth...

* * *

1. *Dhammacakkappavattana-katha*, *Mahavagga*, Part. I (Bom. Uni., 1944), pp. 15-16.

2. The oldest documents purporting to be the teaching of Buddha are the *Pitakas* or "Basket of the Law", prepared for the Buddhist Council of 241 BC, accepted by it as genuine, transmitted orally for four centuries from the death of Buddha, and finally put into writing, in the Pali tongue, about 80 BC. These *Pitakas* are divided into three groups: the *Suttas*, or tales, the *Vinaya* or discipline; and the *Abhidhamma*, or doctrine. Among these writings, the *Dhammapada* (in Pali: "Words of Doctrine", or "Way of Truth") is probably the best known book in the Pali Buddhist canon and the most quoted in other Buddhist writings: an anthology of basic Buddhist teachings (primarily ethical teachings) in an easy aphoristic style. As the second text in the *Khuddaka Nikaya* ("Short Collection") of the *Sutta Pitaka*, The *Dhammapada* contains 423 stanzas arranged in 26 chapters.



Ajanta

Dhammapada (a few extracts)

The Flowers

Who will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama¹ and the world of the gods? Who will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers?

The disciple on the right path will conquer this world of illusion and the kingdom of Yama and the world of the gods. He will discover the path of the Law as the skilled gardener discovers the rarest of flowers.

Knowing his body to be as impermanent as foam and as illusory as a mirage, the disciple on the right path will shatter the flowery arrow of Mara and will rise beyond the reach of the King of Death.

Death carries away the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure just as torrential floods carry away a sleeping village.

Death, the destroyer, overcomes the man who seeks only the flowers of sensual pleasure before he can satisfy himself.

The sage should go from door to door in his village, as the bee gathers honey from the flowers without bringing harm to their colours or their fragrance.

Do not criticise others for what they do or have not done, but be aware of what, yourself, you do or have not done.

Just as a beautiful flower which is radiant yet lacks fragrance, so are the beautiful words of one who does not act accordingly.

Just as a beautiful flower which is both radiant and sweetly scented, so are the beautiful words of one who acts accordingly.

Just as many garlands can be made from a heap of flowers, so a mortal can accumulate much merit by good deeds.

The fragrance of flowers, even that of sandalwood or of incense, even that of jasmine, cannot go against the wind; but the sweet fragrance of intelligence goes against the wind. All around the man of intelligence spreads the fragrance of his virtue.

No fragrance, not even that of sandalwood or incense, nor of the lotus nor of jasmine, can be compared with the fragrance of intelligence.

Weak is the fragrance of incense or sandalwood compared to that of a virtuous man which reaches up to the highest of divinities.

Mara cannot discover the way that those beings follow who lead a life of perfect purity and who are liberated by their total knowledge.

As the beautiful scented lily rises by the wayside, even so the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One,² radiant with intelligence, rises from the blind and ignorant multitude.

The Fool

Long is the night for one who sleeps not; long is the road for one who is weary; long is the cycle of births for the fool who knows not the true law.

If a man cannot find a companion who is his superior or even his equal, he should resolutely follow a solitary path; for no good can come from companionship with a fool.

The fool torments himself by thinking, "This son is mine, this wealth is mine." How can he possess sons and riches, who does not possess himself?

The fool who recognises his foolishness is at least wise in that. But the fool who thinks he is intelligent, is a fool indeed.

Even if the fool serves an intelligent man throughout his life, he will nevertheless remain ignorant of the truth, just as the spoon knows not the taste of the soup.

If an intelligent man serves a wise man, if only for a moment, he will quickly understand the truth, just as the tongue instantly perceives the savour of the soup.

The fools, those who are ignorant, have no worse enemies than themselves; bitter is the fruit they gather from their evil actions.

The evil action which one repents later brings only regrets and the fruit one reaps will be tears and lamentations.

The good action one does not need to repent later brings no regret and the fruit one reaps will be contentment and satisfaction.

As long as the evil action has not borne its fruits, the fool imagines that it is as sweet as honey. But when this action bears its fruits, he reaps only suffering.

Though month after month the fool takes his food with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass,³ he is not for all that worth a sixteenth part of one who has understood the truth.

An evil action does not yield its fruits immediately, just as milk does not at once turn sour; but like a fire covered with ashes, even so smoulders the evil action.

Whatever vain knowledge a fool may have been able to acquire, it leads him only to his ruin, for it breaks his head and destroys his worthier nature.

The foolish monk thirsts after reputation, and a high rank among the Bhikkhus, after authority in the monastery and veneration from ordinary men.

“Let ordinary men and holy ones esteem highly what I have done; let them obey me!” This is the longing of the fool, whose pride increases more and more.

One path leads to earthly gain and quite another leads to Nirvana. Knowing this, the Bhikkhu, the disciple of the Perfectly Enlightened One, longs no more for honour, but rather cultivates solitude.

The Sage

We should seek the company of the sage who shows us our faults, as if he were showing us a hidden treasure; it is best to cultivate relations with such a man because he cannot be harmful to us. He will bring us only good.

One who exhorts us to good and dissuades us from doing evil is appreciated, esteemed by the just man and hated by the unjust.

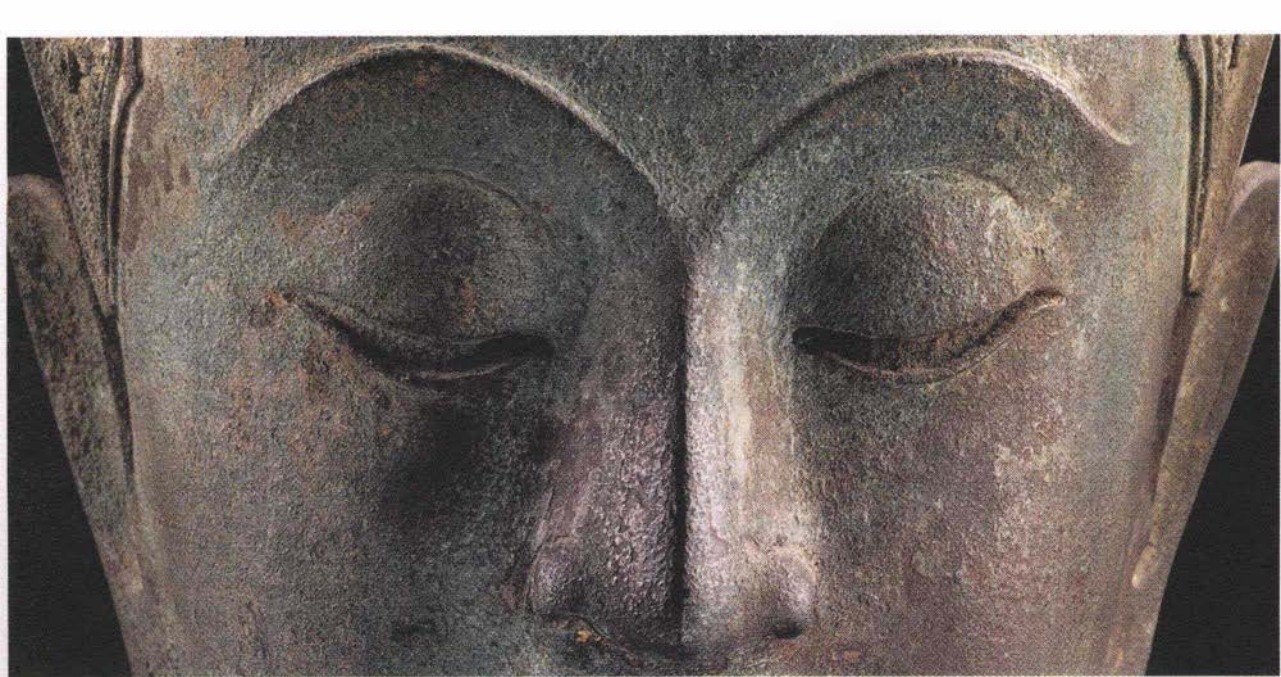
Do not seek the company or friendship of men of base character, but let us consort with men of worth and let us seek friendship with the best among men.

He who drinks directly from the source of the Teaching lives happy in serenity of mind. The sage delights always in the Teaching imparted by the noble disciples of the Buddha.

Those who build waterways lead the water where they want; those who make arrows straighten them; carpenters shape their wood; the sage controls himself.

No more than a mighty rock can be shaken by the wind, can the sage be moved by praise or blame.

The sage who has steeped himself in the Teaching, becomes perfectly peaceful like a deep lake, calm and clear.



Wherever he may be, the true sage renounces all pleasures. Neither sorrow nor happiness can move him.

Neither for his own sake, nor for the sake of others does the sage desire children, riches or domains. He does not aim for his own success by unjust ways. Such a man is virtuous, wise and just.

Few men cross to the other shore. Most men remain and do no more than run up and down along this shore.

But those who live according to the Teaching cross beyond the realm of Death, however difficult may be the passage.

The sage will leave behind the dark ways of existence, but he will follow the way of light. He will leave his home for the homeless life and in solitude will seek the joy which is so difficult to find.

Having renounced all desires and attachments of the senses, the sage will cleanse himself of all the taints of the mind.

One whose mind is well established in all the degrees of knowledge, who, detached from all things, delights in his renunciation, and who has mastered his appetites, he is resplendent, and even in this world he attains Nirvana.

The Adept

No sorrow exists for one who has completed his journey, who has let fall all cares, who is free in all his parts, who has cast off all bonds.

Those who are heedful strive always, and, like swans leaving their lakes, leave one home after another.

Those who amass nothing, who eat moderately, who have perceived the emptiness of all things and who have attained unconditioned liberation, their path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

One for whom all desires have passed away and who has perceived the emptiness of all things, who cares little for food, who has attained unconditioned liberation, his path is as difficult to trace as that of a bird in the air.

Even the Gods esteem one whose senses are controlled as horses by the charioteer, one who is purged of all pride and freed from all corruption.

One who fulfils his duty is as immovable as the earth itself. He is as firm as a celestial pillar, pure as an unmuddied lake; and for him the cycle of births is completed.

Calm are the thoughts, the words and the acts of one who has liberated himself by the true knowledge and has achieved a perfect tranquillity.

The greatest among men is he who is not credulous but has the sense of the Uncreated, who has cut all ties, who has destroyed all occasion for rebirth.

Whether village or forest, plain or mountain, wherever the adepts may dwell, that place is always delightful.

Delightful are the forests which are shunned by the multitude. There, the adept, who is free from passion, will find happiness, for he seeks not after pleasure.

The Thousands

Better than a thousand words devoid of meaning is a single meaningful word which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than a thousand verses devoid of meaning is a single meaningful verse which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

Better than the repetition of a hundred verses devoid of meaning is the repetition of a single verse of the Teaching which can bring tranquillity to one who hears it.

The greatest conqueror is not he who is victorious over thousands of men in battle, but he who is victorious over himself.

The victory that one wins over oneself is of more value than victory over all the peoples.

No god, no Gandharva,⁴ nor Mara nor Brahma can change that victory to defeat.

If, month after month, for a hundred years one offers sacrifices by the thousand, and if for a single instant one offers homage to a being full of wisdom, that single homage is worth more than all those countless sacrifices.

If for a hundred years a man tends the flame on Agni's altar, and if, for a single instant, he renders homage to a man who has mastered his nature, this brief homage has more value than all his long devotions.

Whatever the sacrifices and oblations a man in this world may offer

throughout a whole year in order to acquire merit, that is not worth even a quarter of the homage offered to a just man.

For one who is respectful to his elders, four things increase: long life, beauty, happiness and strength.

A single day spent in good conduct and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in immorality and dissipation.

A single day of wisdom and meditation is worth more than a hundred years spent in foolishness and dissipation.

A single day of Strength and energy is worth more than a hundred years spent in indolence and inertia.

A single day lived in the perception that all things appear and disappear is worth more than a hundred years spent not knowing that they appear and disappear.

A single day spent in contemplation of the path of immortality is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the path of immortality.

A single day spent in contemplation of the supreme Truth is worth more than a hundred years lived in ignorance of the supreme Truth.

The Ego

If a man holds himself dear, let him guard himself closely. The sage should watch through one of the three vigils of his existence (youth, maturity, or old age).

One should begin by establishing oneself in the right path; then, one will be able to advise others. Thus the sage is above all reproach.

If one puts into practice what he teaches to others, being master of

himself, he can very well guide others; for in truth it is difficult to master oneself.

In truth, one is one's own master, for what other master can there be? By mastering oneself, one acquires a mastery which is difficult to achieve.

The evil done by himself, originated by himself, emanating from him, crushes the fool as the diamond crushes a hard gem.

Just as the creeper clings to the Sal tree, even so one entrapped by his own evil actions does to himself the harm his enemy would wish him.

It is so easy to do oneself wrong and harm, but how difficult it is to do what is good and profitable!

The fool who, because of his wrong views, rejects the teachings of the adepts, the Noble Ones, and the Just, brings about his own destruction, as the fruit of the bamboo kills the plant.

Doing evil, one harms oneself; avoiding evil, one purifies oneself; purity and impurity depend on ourselves; no one can purify another.

No man should neglect his supreme Good to follow another, however great. Knowing clearly what is his best line of conduct, he should not swerve from it.

The Awakened One (The Buddha)

He whose victory has never been surpassed nor even equalled — which path can lead to Him, the Pathless, the Awakened One who dwells within the Infinite?

One in whom there is neither greed nor desire, how can he be led astray? Which path can lead to Him, the Pathless, the Awakened One who dwells within the Infinite?

Even the gods envy the sages given to meditation, the Awakened Ones, the Vigilant who live with delight in renunciation and solitude.

It is difficult to attain to human birth. It is difficult to live this mortal life. It is difficult to obtain the good fortune of hearing the True Doctrine. And difficult indeed is the advent of the Awakened Ones.

Abstain from evil; cultivate good and purify your mind. This is the teaching of the Awakened Ones.

Of all ascetic practices patience is the best; of all states the most perfect is Nirvana, say the Awakened Ones. He who harms others is not a monk. He who oppresses others is not a true ascetic.

Neither to offend, nor to do wrong to anyone, to practise discipline according to the Law, to be moderate in eating, to live in seclusion, and to merge oneself in the higher consciousness, this is the teaching of the Awakened Ones.

Even a rain of gold would not be able to quench the thirst of desire, for it is insatiable and the origin of sorrows. This the sage knows.

Even the pleasures of heaven are without savour for the sage. The disciple of the Buddha, of the Perfectly Awakened One, rejoices only in the extinction of all desire.

Impelled by fear, men seek refuge in many places, in the mountains, in the forests, in the groves, in sanctuaries.

But this is not a safe refuge; this is not the supreme refuge. Coming to this refuge does not save a man from all sufferings.

One who takes refuge in the Buddha, in the Dhamma⁵ and the Sangha,⁶ with perfect knowledge, perceives the Four Noble Truths:

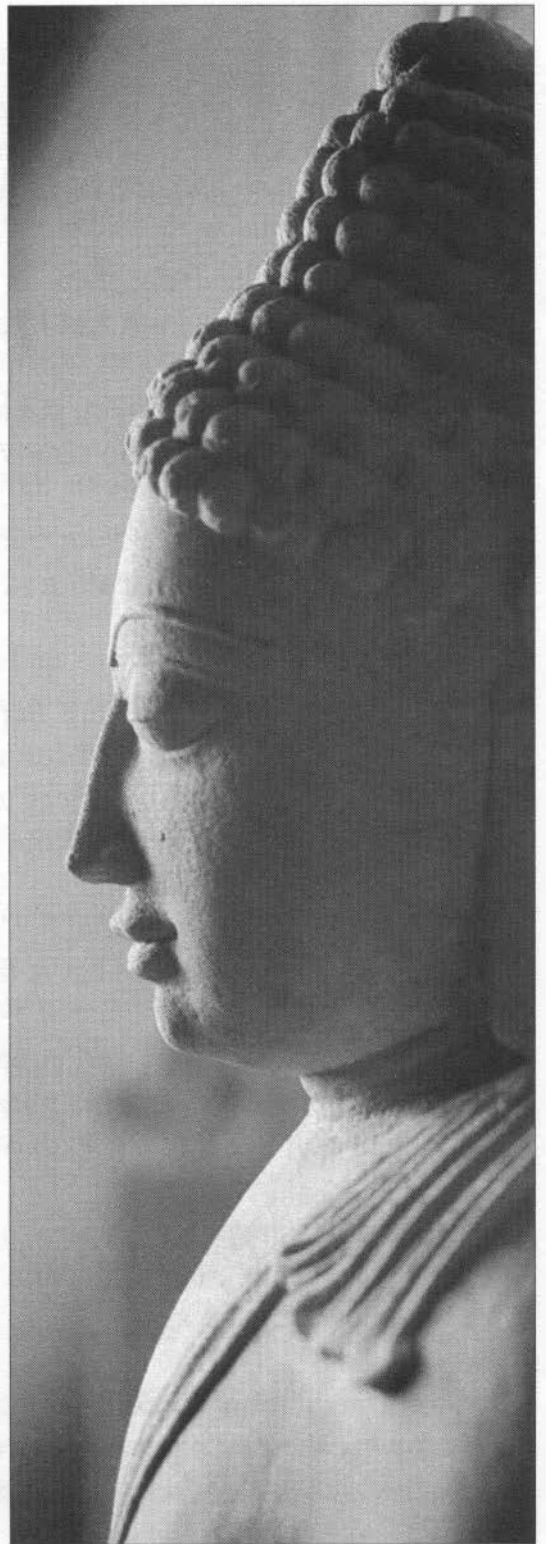
Suffering, the origin of suffering,
the cessation of suffering
and the Noble Eightfold Path which leads
to cessation of suffering.

In truth,
this is the sure refuge,
this is the sovereign refuge.
To choose this refuge is to be liberated
from all suffering.

It is difficult
to meet the Perfectly Noble One.
Such a being is not born everywhere.
And where such a sage is born,
those around him live in happiness.

Happy is the birth of the Buddhas,
happy the teaching of the true Law.
Happy is the harmony of the Sangha,
happy the discipline of the United.

One cannot measure
the merit of the man who reveres
those who are worthy of reverence,
whether the Buddha or his disciples,
those who are free from all desire
and all error,
those who have overcome
all obstacles and who have crossed beyond
suffering and grief.



The Path

The best of all paths is the Eightfold Path; the best of all truths is the Fourfold Truth; the best of all states is freedom from attachment; the best among men is the One who sees, the Buddha.

Truly, this is the Path; there is no other which leads to purification of vision. Follow this Path and Mara will be confounded.

By following this Path, you put an end to suffering. This Path I have made known, since I learned to remove the thorns (of life).

The effort must come from oneself. The Tathagatas⁷ only point out the Path. Those who meditate and tread this Path are delivered from the bondage of Mara.

“All conditioned things are impermanent.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity. “All conditioned things are subject to suffering.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity.

“All things are insubstantial.” When one has seen that by realisation, he is delivered from sorrow. That is the Path of purity.

He who though young and strong, does not act when it is time to act, is given to indolence, and his mind is full of vain thoughts; one who is so indolent will not find the Path of wisdom.

Moderation in speech, control of the mind, abstention from evil actions, thus these three modes of action are to be purified first of all, to attain the Path shown by the sages.

From meditation wisdom springs, without meditation wisdom declines. Knowing the two paths of progress and decline, a man should choose the Path which will increase his wisdom.

Cut down all the forest (of desires) and not one tree alone; for from this forest springs fear. Cut down this forest of trees and undergrowth, O Bhikkhus. Be free from desire.

As long as one has not rooted out of oneself entirely the desire of a man for a woman, the mind is captive, as dependent as a suckling on its mother.

Root out self-love, as one plucks with his hand an autumn lotus. Cherish only the Path of the peace of Nirvana that the Sugata⁸ has taught us.

“Here shall I live in the rainy season; I shall stay there in the winter and elsewhere in the summer.” Thus thinks the fool and knows not what may befall him.

And this man who is attached to his children and his cattle, is seized by death and carried off, as a sleeping village is swept away by torrential floods.

Neither children, nor father, nor family can save us. When death seizes us, our kinsmen cannot save us.

Knowing this perfectly, the intelligent man, guided by good conduct, does not delay in taking up the path which leads to Nirvana.

*

* *

1. *Yama*: The God of Death.
2. *The Perfectly Enlightened One*: The Buddha.
3. Taking one's food with the tip of a blade of Kusa grass symbolises an act of asceticism.
4. *Gandharva*: Celestial musician.
5. *Dhamma*: the True Doctrine.
6. *Sangha*: the community; the order of the Great Ones and the order of the monks.
7. *Tathagatas*: The Buddhas who, according to tradition, came on earth to reveal the eternal Truth.
8. *Sugata*: the Buddha.

Notes

During his lifetime, the Buddha's ideas spread rapidly through the north of India, where he had begun his teaching, and some Buddhists could be found in every part of the peninsula.

In the years that followed, Buddhist monasteries developed into notable centres of learning and stimulated the growth of the new religion. For a while it seemed that the whole subcontinent might become Buddhist. The future of Buddhism seemed especially bright under the Mauryan dynasty, which lasted from 322 to about 184 BC. The first king of this dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 BC), came closer to uniting India than had any earlier ruler; only the extreme south escaped his domination. The third Mauryan king, Asoka (ca. 273-ca. 232 BC), became a Buddhist, and with his support Buddhism developed into the first great missionary religion. In Asoka's days Buddhism was accepted in most parts of India and throughout Ceylon. Later it spread to the countries of Southeast Asia and across the mountains into China. And with Buddhism went Indian art, literature, and philosophy. The influence that India still exercises in eastern Asia began with this cultural expansion under Asoka.

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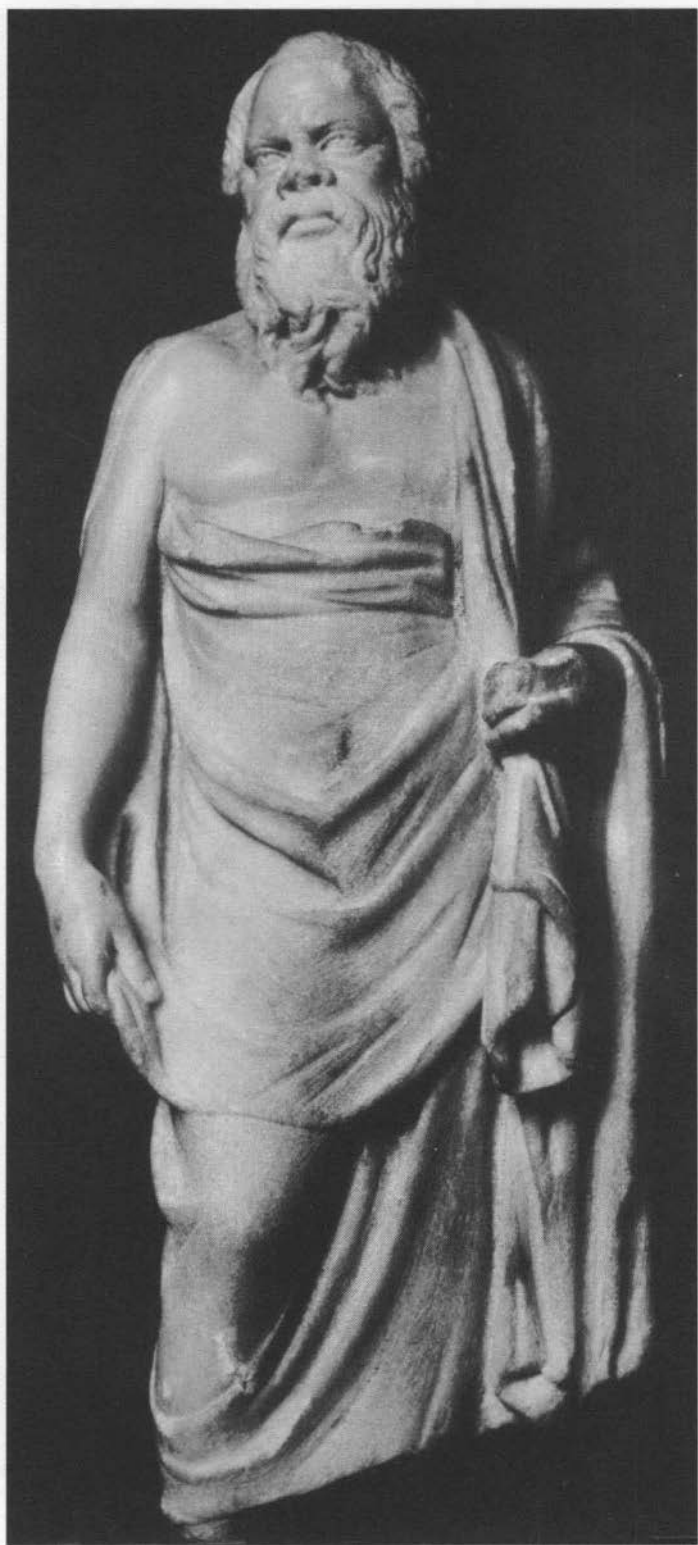
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*... the adoration group
of the mother and child
before the Buddha,
one of the most profound,
tender and noble
of the Ajanta masterpieces...*

**The Adoration Group:
mother and child before Buddha,
Ajanta (copy Nandalal Bose)**





Apology

Introduction

A stout man with a flat face, broad nose, thick lips, heavy beard, shabby clothes and an unduly large paunch, which he hoped to reduce by dancing this is how Socrates has been described. Not a very flattering description of the man commonly considered the founder of Western philosophy. Although far from the Greek ideal of beauty, his face shows the honesty, courage and humour which has come to be called “Socratic”. Plato speaks of him as “all glorious within”.¹

For the historical facts of Socrates’ life we have to rely on the accounts of two of his pupils: Plato, the philosopher, and Xenophon, the historian and biographer.² Born in 469 BC in Athens, Socrates first learned the trade of his father, a sculptor. He distinguished himself during the Peloponnesian War by his endurance and courage, married Xantippe, with whom he had three sons, held public office for a short time, and was sentenced to death by drinking hemlock poison in 399 BC. Most of his time was spent in the public places of Athens — in the streets, the marketplace and the gymnasium³ — engaging his fellow citizens in conversation on subjects ranging from reflections on nature to inquiries into politics; but he never set himself up as a teacher. A number of these conversations were recorded by Plato who, after

1. Plato, *The Seventh Letter*, 324 e.

2. Plato, *Complete Works*.

Xenophon, *Memorabilia*

3. In ancient Greece, the “Gymnasium” was a public school for physical education for the adult male population. The state-owned “gymnasiums” were basically rectangular sportsgrounds surrounded by colonnades containing wash-rooms, massage rooms and training rooms.

Socrates' death, founded the "Academy", the famous school of Athens which lasted nearly 800 years.¹

After repelling two Persian invasions, the polis (city) of Athens reached during Socrates' lifetime the zenith of its political power and cultural achievements, and every aspect of the collective life prospered and developed.² Architecture and the arts blossomed during this time, when Pericles, a political leader, promoted the extension and beautification of the Acropolis, and Phidias, the sculptor, created the statues of the Parthenon.³ Cultural events such as public performances of the great plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides formed part of the developing urban lifestyle. All citizens, rich or poor, could enjoy these social events together in an atmosphere of critical appreciation. The political and social organisation of the Greek city-states is regarded as an important step in the evolution of mankind's collective organisation, for it was an attempt to realise freedom and equality for the individual. Although the rights of free expression and political participation were confined to Greek citizens — the agrarian economy being based on slave labour imported from foreign "barbaric" countries — the polis embodied the ideal of the dignity and independence of the human being. Politics was considered an important common concern, and participation in the daily decision-making process was the right and duty of each citizen. Athens grew into one of the largest cities of the ancient world, bursting the limits of the traditionally small city-state and establishing an empire. This empire, however, did not last long: a conflict with the Greek city-state of Sparta, Athens' rival throughout Greek history, grew into the long Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) in which Athens was ultimately defeated. Thus, Socrates knew both the splendour of the Periclean age and the chaos of war — a war which brought not only material hardship but, even more crucial for Socrates, a confusion in the sciences and an erosion of moral values.

Socrates taught that the great problem of any human being lies in the question of how to live his life. Endowed with rationality, each man must decide what course his life shall take. Although mankind's common aim is a "good life" (eu-zen), there is no common agreement on what a "good life" is, or how to reach it. Socrates' answer to this question lies in the Greek term arete, which is usually translated as "virtue", but more precisely means the full perfection of man's innate qualities.

1. The Academy was one of the two famous schools in ancient Athens, the other being the Lyceum of Aristotle. The Platonic Academy was closed down by the Christian emperor Justinian in AD 529.

2. The Persian king Darius was defeated at Marathon in 490 BC. And his son and successor Xerxes at Salamis in 480 BC.

3. Acropolis is the Greek term for the central place of a city containing the municipal and religious buildings, preferably located on a hill, as is the one in Athens. The Parthenon is the main shrine of the Athenian Acropolis dedicated to the patron deity, the goddess Athena.

Socrates' concept of the excellent and perfect human life is an integral one, encompassing the development of all physical, vital and intellectual potentialities. Pursuing this aim in his own life, Socrates fought in war and participated in the Olympic games, but his primary concern was the intellect, which he considered the noblest part of man's nature. He persistently inquired into problems of human knowledge and conduct but, unlike the Sophists — "the skilled men" — he never did this for pay. In fact, Socrates despised the Sophists for being "quibblers".¹ He speaks of himself as a seeker of truth or as a lover of wisdom — a philosopher. As a result of this reluctance to use his talents for material gains, he lived a life so poor that the Sophist Antiphon could mock: "A slave who was made to live like that would run away." But his simple lifestyle was not the outcome of self-torment or asceticism; it originated in his attitude of complete indifference towards physical enjoyments.

The history of philosophy speaks of pre- and post-Socratic thinkers. Illustrating Socrates' impact on the course of Western philosophy and science prior to Socrates, the intuitive visions of the Orphic mysteries,² had a decisive influence on Greek thought. Socrates and his followers, Plato and Aristotle, established a rational and intellectual approach towards life, an approach which extensively influenced the course of Western history. Their reflections on man's intellectual abilities led to the notion of the independent soul bestowed with cognitive powers through which man could achieve excellence and perfection. Socrates regarded the right use of the intellect as a great help to enlighten man in his search for the highest good in life. According to Socrates, knowledge is an indispensable part of the excellent and perfect life because doing good requires knowing what is good: "Man has only one thing to consider in performing any action — that is whether he is acting rightly or wrongly, like a good man or like a bad man."³ For Socrates, knowing the good necessarily implies doing it; otherwise man would consciously be choosing misery over known happiness. Knowledge and wisdom, he says, are virtues of the soul which pursues the perfect and excellent life. By relentlessly seeking wisdom and knowledge or, as he puts it, by "practising philosophy and exhorting and elucidating the truth",⁴ Socrates developed a method for discriminating between mere opinion (doxa) and knowledge (episteme). This method became known as "dialectic". In this question-and-answer type of discussion, opposed opinions are reduced to essential

1. The Sophists were travelling lecturers, writers and teachers who offered training and instruction in return for fees. Through training in the art of speaking and arguing they prepared ambitious young noblemen for a successful political career.

2. *Orphic Mysteries*: secret rites which sprang up round the mystical figure of Orpheus, exalting the life of the next world.

3. Plato, "The Apology of Socrates", *The Last Days of Socrates* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 59.

4. Plato, *ibid*, p. 61

statements in order to reveal unclear assumptions, unexpected implications and fallacious inferences. The intellectual truth thus revealed, says Socrates, is only a very imperfect image of the Truth which is the Divine's; compared to God's, man's knowledge is mere ignorance. When the oracle of Apollo at Delphi¹ called Socrates the wisest of living men, Socrates set out to disprove that statement, convinced that he really knew nothing. In the end, Socrates discovered that his so-called "wisdom" lay in the simple fact that he was conscious of his own ignorance: to know that you do not know is the first step towards knowing yourself.

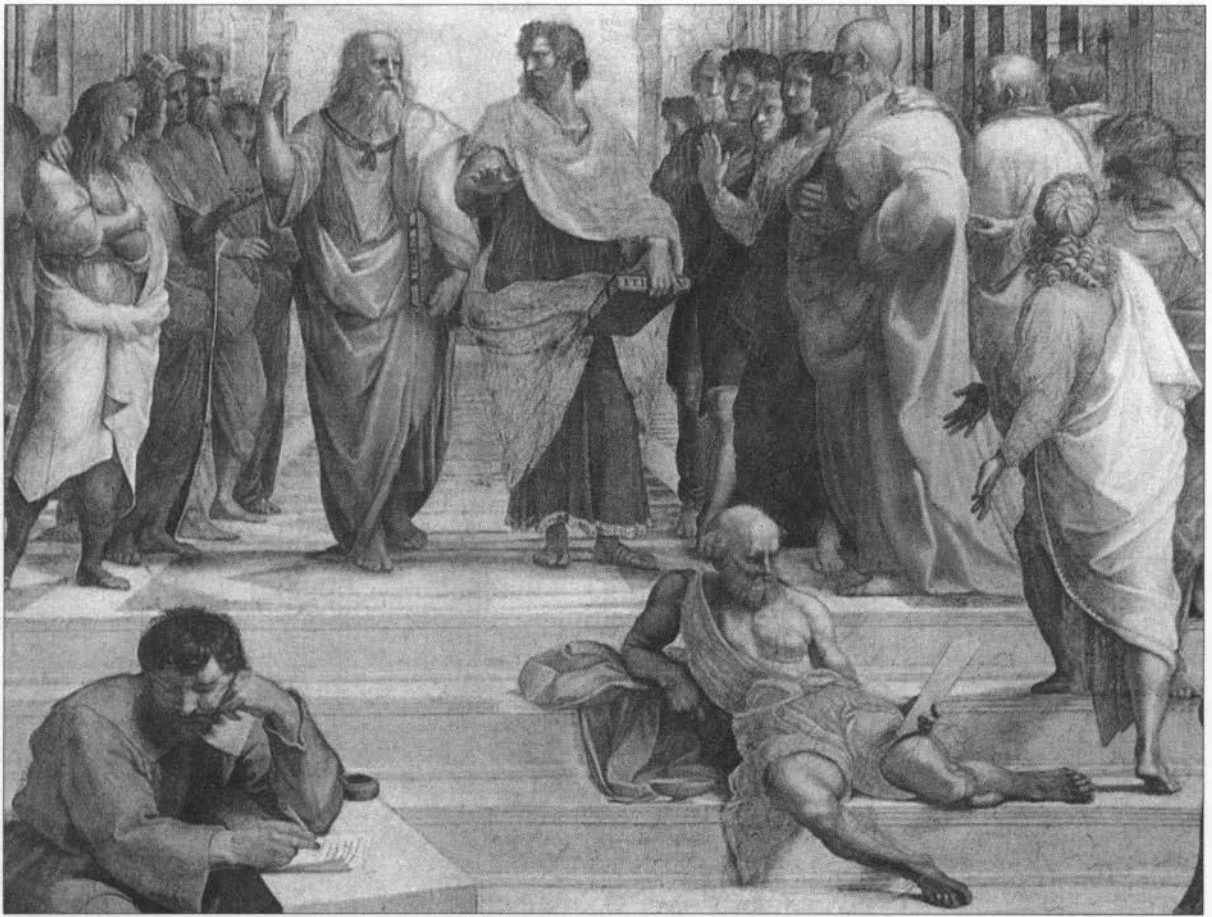
When, at the age of seventy, Socrates was tried in the court of Athens for heresy and corruption of the youth, it seems evident that these charges were linked to his constant criticism of any authoritarian claim to knowledge. His defense, the *Apology*, is one of three texts by Plato portraying Socrates in his last days. The dialogues *Crito* and *Phaedo* show Socrates facing death. He refuses to escape because, as he argues, it is more important to live justly than merely to live. The *Apology* shows Socrates in court. He rejects the accusations of the prosecution, then goes on to give an account of his life, revealing the divine mission he has followed, and explaining the methods he has used in fulfilling his quest. He is accused of taking fees, influencing and corrupting the youth, inquiring into things "below earth and above heaven", and of believing in gods of his own. Socrates defends himself, saying that these accusations are attempts of the ignorant to suppress diverse opinions and prevent free discussion in science, art and politics. In his life-long search for wisdom, Socrates had always exposed those who, without knowledge, claimed to have found the truth; in his eyes, ignorance disguised as knowledge is mere arrogance and the epitome of falsehood. Even when it became evident that he would be sentenced to death, he did not surrender to his accusers. As Socrates said, such an act, although it might have saved his life, would have destroyed his soul, for it would have meant surrendering wisdom to ignorance. For Socrates, who claimed to be "subject to a divine or supranatural experience",² the real difficulty "is not so much to escape death but to escape from doing wrong".³ For all we know, he says, death may be a blessing; therefore how foolish to fear it more than we fear those evils which we know to be evils: "To be afraid of death is just another form of thinking one is wise when one is not."⁴

1. *Oracle of Delphi*: Divinely inspired utterances given at Delphi, the Temple of Apollo, the most widely revered of the Greeks Gods.

2. Plato, *ibid*, p. 63. .

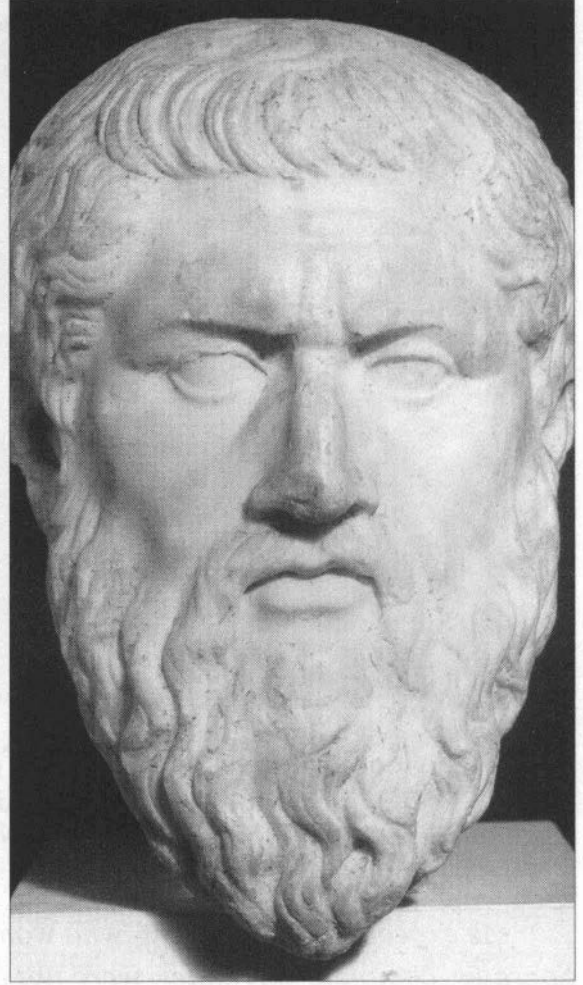
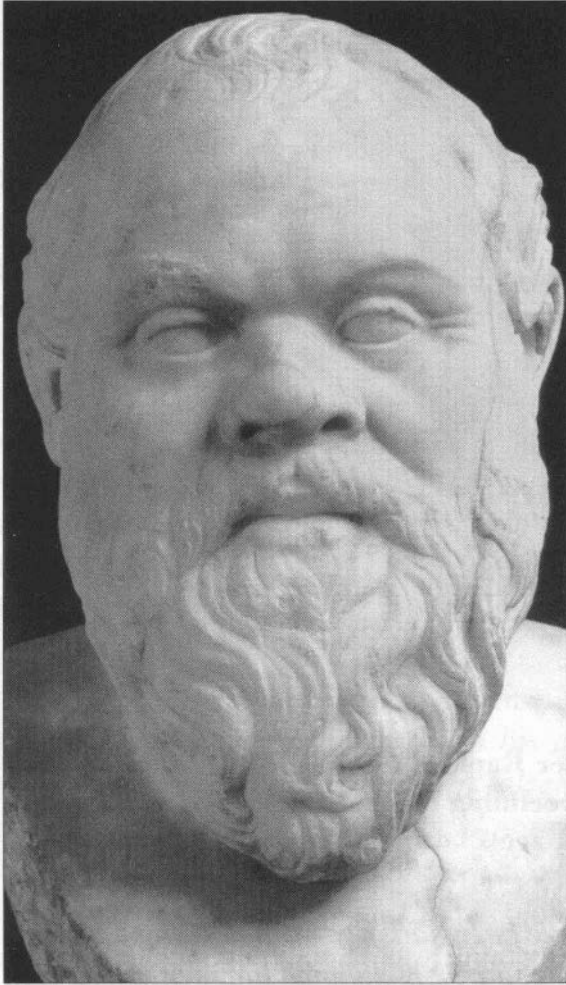
3. Plato, *ibid*, p. 73.

4. Plato, *ibid*, p. 60.



**In *The School of Athens* by the Italian painter Raphael (1483-1520), one can see Socrates on the right side, reclining on the stairs.
The two tall figures at the back are Plato and Aristotle.**

As expected, his accusers, who would have been satisfied with nothing less than Socrates' complete surrender, were not convinced by his defence and sentenced him to death. But Socrates' equanimous acceptance of the verdict increased his fame as a wise man; and he has come to be regarded as the perfect example of the truly philosophical life. Historically, he personifies a turning point in Western history, where mystical contemplation began to give way to logical reasoning. Socrates' concept of virtue through knowledge, modified down through the ages, has become a distinctive trait of the Western ideal of man.



Left: Socrates. Right: Plato

Apology

Plato

I do not know what effect my accusers have had upon you, gentlemen, but for my own part I was almost carried away by them; their arguments were so convincing. On the other hand, scarcely a word of what they said was true. I was especially astonished at one of their many misrepresentations: I mean when they told you that you must be careful not to let me deceive you — the implication being that I am a skilful speaker. I thought that it was peculiarly brazen of them to tell you this without a blush, since they must know that they will soon be effectively confuted, when it becomes obvious that I have not the slightest skill as a speaker unless, of course, by a skilful speaker they mean one who speaks the truth. If that is what they mean, I would agree that I am an orator, though not after their pattern.

My accusers, then, as I maintain, have said little or nothing that is true, but from me you shall hear the whole truth; not, I can assure you, gentlemen, in flowery language like theirs, decked out with fine words and phrases; no, what you will hear will be a straightforward speech in the first words that occur to me, confident as I am in the justice of my cause; and I do not want any of you to expect anything different. It would hardly be suitable, gentlemen, for a man of my age to address you in the artificial language of a schoolboy orator. One thing, however, I do most earnestly beg and entreat of you: if you hear me defending myself in the same language which it has been my habit to use, both in the open spaces of this city¹ (where many of you have heard me) and elsewhere, do not be surprised, and do not interrupt. Let me remind you of my position. This is my first appearance in a court of law, at the age of seventy; and so I am a complete stranger to the language of this place. Now if I were really from another country, you would naturally excuse me if I spoke in the manner and dialect in which I had been brought up; and so in the present case I make this request of you, which I think is only reasonable: to disregard the manner of my speech — it may be better or it may be worse — and to consider and concentrate your attention upon this one question, whether my claims are fair or not. That is the first duty of the jurymen, just as it is the pleader's duty to speak the truth.

The proper course for me, gentlemen of the jury, is to deal first with the earliest charges that have been falsely brought against me, and with my earliest accusers; and then with the later ones. I make this distinction because I have already been accused

in your hearing by a great many people for a great many years, though without a word of truth; and I am more afraid of those people than I am of Anytus and his colleagues,² although they are formidable enough. But the others are still more formidable; I mean the people who took hold of so many of you when you were children and tried to fill your minds with untrue accusations against me, saying "There is a wise man called Socrates who has theories about the heavens and has investigated everything below the earth, and can make the weaker argument defeat the stronger." It is these people, gentlemen, the disseminators of these rumours, who are my dangerous accusers; because those who hear them suppose that anyone who inquires into such matters must be an atheist. Besides, there are a great many of these accusers, and they have been accusing me now for a great many years; and what is more, they approached you at the most impressionable age, when some of you were children or adolescents; and they literally won their case by default, because there was no one to defend me. And the most fantastic thing of all is that it is impossible for me even to know and tell you their names, unless one of them happens to be a playwright.³ All these people, who have tried to set you against me out of envy and love of slander — and some too merely passing on what they have been told by others — all these are very difficult to deal with. It is impossible to bring them here for cross-examination; one simply has to conduct one's defence and argue one's case against an invisible opponent, because there is no one to answer. So I ask you to accept my statement that my critics fall into two classes: on the one hand my immediate accusers, and on the other those earlier ones whom I have mentioned; and you must suppose that I have first to defend myself against the latter. After all, you heard them abusing me longer ago and much more violently than these more recent accusers.

Very well then; I must begin my defence, gentlemen, and I must try, in the short time that I have, to rid your minds of a false impression which is the work of many years. I should like this to be the result, gentlemen, assuming it to be for your advantage and my own; and I should like to be successful in my defence; but I think that it will be difficult, and I am quite aware of the nature of my task. However, let that turn out as God wills; I must obey the law and make my defence.

Let us go back to the beginning and consider what the charge is that has made me so unpopular, and has encouraged Meletus to draw up this indictment. Very well; what did my critics say in attacking my character? I must read out their affidavit, so to speak, as though they were my legal accusers. "Socrates is guilty of criminal meddling, in that he inquires into things below the earth and in the sky, and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger, and teaches others to follow his example."

It runs something like that. You have seen it for yourselves in the play by Aristophanes, where Socrates goes whirling round,⁴ proclaiming that he is walking on air, and uttering a great deal of other nonsense about things of which I know nothing whatsoever. I mean no disrespect for such knowledge, if anyone really is versed in it — I do not want any more lawsuits brought against me by Meletus — but the fact is, gentlemen, that I take no interest in it. What is more, I call upon the greater part of you as witnesses to my statement, and I appeal to all of you who have ever listened to me talking (and there are a great many to whom this applies) to clear your neighbours' minds on this point. Tell one another whether any one of you has ever heard me discuss such questions briefly or at length; and then you will realise that the other popular reports about me are equally unreliable.

The fact is that there is nothing in any of these charges; and if you have heard anyone say that I try to educate people and charge a fee, there is no truth in that either. I wish that there were, because I think that it is a fine thing if a man is qualified to teach, as in the case of Gorgias of Leontini,⁵ and Prodicus of Ceos⁶ and Hippias of Elis⁷. Each one of these is perfectly capable of going into any city and actually persuading the young men to leave the company of their fellow-citizens, with any of whom they can associate for nothing, and attach themselves to him, and pay money for the privilege, and be grateful into the bargain. There is another expert too from Paros who I discovered was here on a visit. I happened to meet a man who has paid more in sophists' fees than all the rest put together — I mean Callias,⁸ the son of Hipponicus; so I asked him (he has two sons, you see): "Callias," I said, "if your sons had been colts or calves, we should have had no difficulty in finding and engaging a trainer to perfect their natural qualities; and this trainer would have been some sort of horse-dealer or agriculturalist. But seeing that they are human beings, whom do you intend to get as their instructor? who is the expert in perfecting the human and social qualities? I assume from the fact of your having sons that you must have considered the question. Is there such a person or not?" "Certainly", said he. "Who is he, and where does he come from?" said I, "and what does he charge?" "Evenus of Paros,"⁹ Socrates", said he, "and his fee is twenty guineas." I felt that Evenus was to be congratulated if he really was a master of this art and taught it at such a moderate fee. I should certainly plume myself and give myself airs if I understood these things; but in fact, gentlemen, I do not.

Here perhaps one of you might interrupt me and say "But what is it that you do, Socrates? How is it that you have been misrepresented like this? Surely all this talk and gossip about you would never have arisen if you had confined yourself to

ordinary activities, but only if your behaviour was abnormal. Tell us the explanation, if you do not want us to invent it for ourselves.” This seems to me to be a reasonable request, and I will try to explain to you what it is that has given me this false notoriety; so please give me your attention. Perhaps some of you will think that I am not being serious; but I assure you that I am going to tell you the whole truth.

I have gained this reputation, gentlemen, from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom do I mean? Human wisdom, I suppose. It seems that I really am wise in this limited sense. Presumably the geniuses whom I mentioned just now are wise in a wisdom that is more than human; I do not know how else to account for it. I certainly have no knowledge of such wisdom, and anyone who says that I have is a liar and wilful slanderer. Now, gentlemen, please do not interrupt me if I seem to make an extravagant claim; for what I am going to tell you is not my own opinion; I am going to refer you to an unimpeachable authority. I shall call as witness to my wisdom (such as it is) the god at Delphi.¹⁰

You know Chaerephon,¹¹ of course. He was a friend of mine from boyhood, and a good democrat who played his part with the rest of you in the recent expulsion¹² and restoration. And you know what he was like; how enthusiastic he was over anything that he had once undertaken. Well, one day he actually went to Delphi and asked this question of the god — as I said before, gentlemen please do not interrupt — he asked whether there was anyone wiser than myself. The priestess replied that there was no one. As Chaerephon is dead, the evidence for my statement will be supplied by his brother,¹³ who is here in court.

Please consider my object in telling you this. I want to explain to you how the attack upon my reputation first started. When I heard about the oracle’s answer, I said to myself “What does the god mean? Why does he not use plain language? I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, great or small; so what can he mean by asserting that I am the wisest man in the world? He cannot be telling a lie; that would not be right for him.”

After puzzling about it for some time, I set myself at last with considerable reluctance to check the truth of it in the following way. I went to interview a man with a high reputation for wisdom, because I felt that here if anywhere I should succeed in disproving the oracle and pointing out to my divine authority “You said that I was the wisest of men, but here is a man who is wiser than I am.”

Well, I gave a thorough examination to this person — I need not mention his name, but it was one of our politicians that I was studying when I had this experience — and in conversation with him I formed the impression that although in many

people's opinion, and especially in his own, he appeared to be wise, in fact he was not. Then when I began to try to show him that he only thought he was wise and was not really so, my efforts were resented both by him and by many of the other people present. However, I reflected as I walked away: "Well, I am certainly wiser than this man. It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know."

After this I went on to interview a man with an even greater reputation for wisdom, and I formed the same impression again; and here too I incurred the resentment of the man himself and a number of others.

From that time on I interviewed one person after another. I realised with distress and alarm that I was making myself unpopular, but I felt compelled to put my religious duty first; since I was trying to find out the meaning of the oracle, I was bound to interview everyone who had a reputation for knowledge. And by Dog,¹⁴ gentlemen! (for I must be frank with you) my honest impression was this: it seemed to me, as I pursued my investigation at the god's command, that the people with the greatest reputations were almost entirely deficient, while others who were supposed to be their inferiors were much better qualified in practical intelligence.

I want you to think of my adventures as a sort of pilgrimage¹⁵ undertaken to establish the truth of the oracle once for all. After I had finished with the politicians I turned to the poets, dramatic, lyric, and all the rest, in the belief that here I should expose myself as a comparative ignoramus. I used to pick up what I thought were some of their most perfect works and question them closely about the meaning of what they had written, in the hope of incidentally enlarging my own knowledge. Well, gentlemen! I hesitate to tell you the truth, but it must be told. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any of the bystanders could have explained those poems better than their actual authors. So I soon made up my mind about the poets too: I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean. It seemed clear to me that the poets were in much the same case; and I also observed that the very fact that they were poets made them think that they had a perfect understanding of all other subjects, of which they were totally ignorant. So I left that line of inquiry too with the same sense of advantage that I had felt in the case of the politicians.

Last of all I turned to the skilled craftsmen. I knew quite well that I had

practically no technical qualifications myself, and I was sure that I should find them full of impressive knowledge. In this I was not disappointed; they understood things which I did not, and to that extent they were wiser than I was. But, gentlemen, these professional experts seemed to share the same failing which I had noticed in the poets; I mean that on the strength of their technical proficiency they claimed a perfect understanding of every other subject, however important; and I felt that this error more than outweighed their positive wisdom. So I made myself spokesman for the oracle, and asked myself whether I would rather be as I was — neither wise with their wisdom nor stupid with their stupidity — or possess both qualities as they did. I replied through myself to the oracle that it was best for me to be as I was.

The effect of these investigations of mine, gentlemen, has been to arouse against me a great deal of hostility, and hostility of a particularly bitter and persistent kind, which has resulted in various malicious suggestions, including the description of me as a professor of wisdom. This is due to the fact that whenever I succeed in disproving another person's claim to wisdom in a given subject, the bystanders assume that I know everything about that subject myself. But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this: that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value. It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he would say to us "The wisest of you men is he who has realised, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless."

That is why I still go about seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command, if I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger; and when I think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not. This occupation has kept me too busy to do much either in politics or in my own affairs; in fact, my service to God has reduced me to extreme poverty.

There is another reason for my being unpopular. A number of young men with wealthy fathers and plenty of leisure have deliberately attached themselves to me because they enjoy hearing other people cross-questioned. These often take me as their model, and go on to try to question other persons; whereupon, I suppose, they find an unlimited number of people who think that they know something, but really know little or nothing. Consequently their victims become annoyed, not with themselves but with me; and they complain that there is a pestilential busybody called Socrates who fills young people's heads with wrong ideas. If you ask them what he does, and what he teaches that has this effect, they have no answer, not knowing what to say; but as they do not want to admit their confusion, they fall back on the stock

charges against any philosopher: that he teaches his pupils about things in the heavens and below the earth, and to disbelieve in gods, and to make the weaker argument defeat the stronger. They would be very loath, I fancy, to admit the truth: which is that they are being convicted of pretending to knowledge when they are entirely ignorant. So, jealous, I suppose, for their own reputation, and also energetic and numerically strong, and provided with a plausible and carefully worked-out case against me, these people have been dinning into your ears for a long time past their violent denunciations of myself. There you have the causes which led to the attack upon me by Meletus and Anytus and Lycon, Meletus being aggrieved on behalf of the poets, Anytus on behalf of the professional men and politicians, and Lycon on behalf of the orators. So, as I said at the beginning, I should be surprised if I were able, in the short time that I have, to rid your minds of a misconception so deeply implanted.

There, gentlemen, you have the true facts, which I present to you without any concealment or suppression, great or small. I am fairly certain that this plain speaking of mine is the cause of my unpopularity; and that I have described correctly the nature and the grounds of the calumny which has been brought against me. Whether you inquire into them now or later, you will find the facts as I have just described them.

So much for my defence against the charges brought by the first group of my accusers. I shall now try to defend myself against Meletus high-principled and patriotic as he claims to be — and after that against the rest.

Let us consider their deposition again, as though it represented a fresh prosecution. It runs something like this: "Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young, and of believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognised by the State." Such is the charge; let us examine its points one by one.

First it says that I am guilty of corrupting the young. But I say, gentlemen, that Meletus is guilty of treating a serious matter with levity, since he summons people to stand their trial on frivolous grounds, and professes concern and keen anxiety in matters about which he has never had the slightest interest. I will try to prove this to your satisfaction.

Come now, Meletus, tell me this. You regard it as supremely important, do you not, that our young people should be exposed to the best possible influence? "I do." Very well, then; tell these gentlemen who it is that influences the young for the better. Obviously you must know, if you are so much interested. You have discovered the vicious influence, as you say, in myself, and you are now prosecuting me before these gentlemen; speak up and inform them who it is that has a good influence upon the young. — You see, Meletus, that you are tongue-tied and cannot answer. Do you not

feel that this is discreditable, and a sufficient proof in itself of what I said, that you have no interest in the subject? Tell me, my friend, who is it that makes the young good? "The laws." That is not what I mean, my dear sir; I am asking you to name the *person* whose first business it is to know the laws. "These gentlemen here, Socrates, the members of the jury." Do you mean, Meletus, that they have the ability to educate the young, and to make them better? "Certainly." Does this apply to all jurymen, or only to some? "To all of them." Excellent! a generous supply of benefactors. Well, then, do these spectators who are present in court have an improving influence, or not? "Yes, they do." And what about the members of the Council? "Yes, the Councillors too." But surely, Meletus, the members of the Assembly¹⁶ do not corrupt the young? Or do all of them too exert an improving influence? "Yes, they do." Then it would seem that the whole population of Athens has a refining effect upon the young, except myself; and I alone demoralise them. Is that your meaning? "Most emphatically, yes." This is certainly a most unfortunate quality that you have detected in me. Well, let me put another question to you. Take the case of horses; do you believe that those who improve them make up the whole of mankind, and that there is only one person who has a bad effect on them? Or is the truth just the opposite, that the ability to improve them belongs to one person or to very few persons, who are horse-trainers, whereas most people, if they have to do with horses and make use of them, do them harm? Is not this the case, Meletus, both with horses and with all other animals? Of course it is, whether you and Anytus deny it or not. It would be a singular dispensation of fortune for our young people if there is only one person who corrupts them, while all the rest have a beneficial effect. But I need say no more; there is ample proof, Meletus, that you have never bothered your head about the young; and you make it perfectly clear that you have never taken the slightest interest in the cause for the sake of which you are now indicting me.

Here is another point. Tell me seriously, Meletus, is it better to live in a good or in a bad community? Answer my question, like a good fellow; there is nothing difficult about it. Is it not true that wicked people have a bad effect upon those with whom they are in the closest contact, and that good people have a good effect? "Quite true." Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed rather than benefited by his associates? Answer me, my good man; the law commands you to answer. Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed? "Of course not." Well, then, when you summon me before this court for corrupting the young and making their characters worse, do you mean that I do so intentionally or unintentionally? "I mean intentionally." Why, Meletus, are you at your age so much wiser than I at mine? You have discovered that

bad people always have a bad effect, and good people a good effect, upon their nearest neighbours; am I so hopelessly ignorant as not even to realise that by spoiling the character of one of my companions I shall run the risk of getting some harm from him? because nothing else would make me commit this grave offence intentionally. No, I do not believe it, Meletus, and I do not suppose that anyone else does. Either I have not a bad influence, or it is unintentional; so that in either case your accusation is false. And if I unintentionally have a bad influence, the correct procedure in cases of such involuntary misdemeanours is not to summon the culprit before this court, but to take him aside privately for instruction and reproof; because obviously if my eyes are opened, I shall stop doing what I do not intend to do. But you deliberately avoided my company in the past and refused to enlighten me, and now you bring me before this court, which is the place appointed for those who need punishment, not for those who need enlightenment.

It is quite clear by now, gentlemen, that Meletus, as I said before, has never shown any degree of interest in this subject. However, I invite you to tell us, Meletus, in what sense you make out that I corrupt the minds of the young. Surely the terms of your indictment make it clear that you accuse me of teaching them to believe in new deities instead of the gods recognised by the State; is not that the teaching of mine which you say has this demoralising effect? "That is precisely what I maintain." Then I appeal to you, Meletus, in the name of these same gods about whom we are speaking, to explain yourself a little more clearly to myself and to the jury, because I cannot make out what your point is. Is it that I teach people to believe in some gods (which implies that I myself believe in gods, and am not a complete atheist, so that I am not guilty on that score), but in different gods from those recognised by the State, so that your accusation rests upon the fact that they are different? Or do you assert that I believe in no gods at all, and teach others to do the same? "Yes; I say that you disbelieve in gods altogether." You surprise me, Meletus; what is your object in saying that? do you suggest that I do not believe that the sun and moon are gods,¹⁷ as is the general belief of all mankind? "He certainly does not, gentlemen of the jury, since he says that the sun is a stone and the moon a mass of earth." Do you imagine that you are prosecuting Anaxagoras, my dear Meletus? Have you so poor an opinion of these gentlemen, and do you assume them to be so illiterate as not to know that the writings of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae¹⁸ are full of theories like these? and do you seriously suggest that it is from me that the young get these ideas, when they can buy them on occasion in the market-place¹⁹ for a shilling at most, and so have the laugh on Socrates if he claims them for his own, to

say nothing of their being so silly? Tell me honestly, Meletus, is that your opinion of me? do I believe in no god? "No, none at all; not in the slightest degree." You are not at all convincing, Meletus; not even to yourself, I suspect. In my opinion, gentlemen, this man is a thoroughly selfish bully, and has brought this action against me out of sheer wanton aggressiveness and self-assertion. He seems to be devising a sort of intelligence test for me, saying to himself "Will the infallible Socrates realise that I am contradicting myself for my own amusement, or shall I succeed in deceiving him and the rest of my audience?" It certainly seems to me that he is contradicting himself in this indictment, which might just as well run "Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods, but believing in the gods." And this is pure flippancy.

I ask you to examine with me, gentlemen, the line of reasoning which leads me to this conclusion. You, Meletus, will oblige us by answering my questions. Will you all kindly remember, as I requested at the beginning, not to interrupt if I conduct the discussion in my customary way?

Is there anyone in the world, Meletus, who believes in human activities, and not in human beings? Make him answer, gentlemen, and don't let him keep on making these continual objections. Is there anyone who does not believe in horses, but believes in horses' activities? or who does not believe in musicians, but believes in musical activities? No, there is not, my worthy friend. If you do not want to answer, I will supply it for you and for these gentlemen too. But the next question you must answer: Is there anyone who believes in supernatural activities and not in supernatural beings?²⁰ "No." How good of you to give a bare answer under compulsion by the court! Well, do you assert that I believe and teach others to believe in supernatural activities? It does not matter whether they are new or old; the fact remains that I believe in them according to your statement; indeed you solemnly swore as much in your affidavit. But if I believe in supernatural activities, it follows inevitably that I also believe in supernatural beings. Is not that so? It is; I assume your assent, since you do not answer. Do we not hold that supernatural beings are either gods or the children of gods? Do you agree or not? "Certainly." Then if I believe in supernatural beings, as you assert, if these supernatural beings are gods in any sense, we shall reach the conclusion which I mentioned just now when I said that you were testing my intelligence for your own amusement, by stating first that I do not believe in gods, and then again that I do, since I believe in supernatural beings. If on the other hand these supernatural beings are bastard children²¹ of the gods by nymphs or other mothers, as they are reputed to be, who in the world would believe in the children of gods and not in the gods themselves? It would be as

ridiculous as to believe in the young of horses or donkeys and not in horses and donkeys themselves. No, Meletus; there is not avoiding the conclusion that you brought this charge against me as a test of my wisdom, or else in despair of finding a genuine offence of which to accuse me. As for your prospect of convincing any living person with even a smattering of intelligence that belief in supernatural and divine activities does not imply belief in supernatural and divine beings, and *vice versa*, it is outside all the bounds of possibility.

As a matter of fact, gentlemen, I do not feel that it requires much defence to clear myself of Meletus' accusation; what I have said already is enough. But you know very well the truth of what I said in an earlier part of my speech, that I have incurred a great deal of bitter hostility; and this is what will bring about my destruction, if anything does; not Meletus nor Anytus, but the slander and jealousy of a very large section of the people. They have been fatal to a great many other innocent men, and I suppose will continue to be so; there is not likelihood that they will stop at me. But perhaps someone will say "Do you feel no compunction, Socrates, at having followed a line of action which puts you in danger of the death-penalty?" I might fairly reply to him "You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action; that is, whether he is acting rightly or wrongly, like a good man or a bad one. On your view the heroes who died at Troy would be poor creatures, especially the son of Thetis.²² He, if you remember, made so light of danger in comparison with incurring dishonour that when his goddess mother warned him, eager as he was to kill Hector, in some such words as these, I fancy, 'My son, if you avenge your comrade Patroclus' death and kill Hector, you will die yourself;

Next after Hector is thy fate prepared,'

— when he heard this warning, he made light of his death and danger, being much more afraid of an ignoble life and of failing to avenge his friends. 'Let me die forthwith', said he, 'when I have requited the villain, rather than remain here by the beaked ships to be mocked, a burden on the ground.' Do you suppose that he gave a thought of death and danger?"

The truth of the matter is this, gentlemen. Where a man has once taken up his stand, either because it seems best to him or in obedience to his orders, there I believe he is bound to remain and face the danger, taking no account of death or anything

else before dishonour.

This being so, it would be shocking inconsistency on my part, gentlemen, if, when the officers whom you chose to command me assigned me my position at Potidaea²³ and Amphipolis²⁴ and Delium,²⁵ I remained at my post like anyone else and faced death, and yet afterwards, when God appointed me, as I supposed and believed, to the duty of leading the philosophic life, examining myself and others, I were then through fear of death or of any other danger to desert my post. That would indeed be shocking, and then I might really with justice be summoned into court for not believing in the gods, and disobeying the oracle, and being afraid of death, and thinking that I am wise when I am not. For let me tell you, gentlemen, that to be afraid of death is only another form of thinking that one is wise when one is not; it is to think that one knows what one does not know. No one knows with regard to death whether it is not really the greatest blessing that can happen to a man; but people dread it as though they were certain that it is the greatest evil; and this ignorance, which thinks that it knows what it does not, must surely be ignorance most culpable. This, I take it, gentlemen, is the degree, and this the nature of my advantage over the rest of mankind; and if I were to claim to be wiser than my neighbour in any respect, it would be in this: that not possessing any real knowledge of what comes after death, I am also conscious that I do not possess it. But I do know that to do wrong and to disobey my superior, whether God or man, is wicked and dishonourable; and so I shall never feel more fear or aversion for something which, for all I know, may really be a blessing, than for those evils which I know to be evils.

Suppose, then, that you acquit me, and pay no attention to Anytus, who has said that either I should not have appeared before this court at all, or, since I have appeared here, I must be put to death, because if I once escaped your sons would all immediately become utterly demoralised by putting the teaching of Socrates into practice. Suppose that, in view of this, you said to me "Socrates, on this occasion we shall disregard Anytus and acquit you, but only on one condition, that you give up spending your time on this quest and stop philosophizing. If we catch you going on in the same way, you shall be put to death." Well, supposing, as I said, that you should offer to acquit me on these terms, I should reply "Gentlemen, I am your very grateful and devoted servant, but I owe a greater obedience to God than to you; and so long as I draw breath and have my faculties, I shall never stop practising philosophy and exhorting you and elucidating the truth for everyone that I meet. I shall go on saying, in my usual way, My very good friend, you are an Athenian and belong to a city which is the greatest and most famous in the world for its wisdom

and strength. Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul?" And if any of you disputes this and professes to care about these things, I shall not at once let him go or leave him; and if it appears that in spite of his profession he has made no real progress towards goodness, I shall reprove him for neglecting what is of supreme importance, and giving his attention to trivialities. I shall do this to everyone that I meet, young or old, foreigner or fellow-citizen; but especially to you my fellow-citizens, inasmuch as you are closer to me in kinship. This, I do assure you, is what my God commands; and it is my belief that no greater good has ever befallen you in this city than my service to my God; for I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go "Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the State." Now if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful; but if anyone says that my message is different from this, he is talking nonsense. And so, gentlemen, I would say, "You can please yourselves whether you listen to Anytus or not, and whether you acquit me or not; you know that I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths."

Order, please, gentlemen! Remember my request to give me a hearing without interruption; besides, I believe that it will be to your advantage to listen. I am going to tell you something else, which may provoke a storm of protest; but please restrain yourselves. I assure you that if I am what I claim to be, and you put me to death, you will harm yourselves more than me. Neither Meletus nor Anytus can do me any harm at all; they would not have the power, because I do not believe that the law of God permits a better man to be harmed by a worse. No doubt my accuser might put me to death or have me banished or deprived of civic rights; but even if he thinks, as he probably does (and others too, I dare say), that these are great calamities, I do not think so; I believe that it is far worse to do what he is doing now, trying to put an innocent man to death. For this reason, gentlemen, so far from pleading on my own behalf, as might be supposed, I am really pleading on yours, to save you from misusing the gift of God by condemning me. If you put me to death, you will not easily find anyone to take my place. It is literally true (even if it sounds rather comical) that God has specially appointed me to this city, as though it were a large thoroughbred horse which because of its great size is inclined to be lazy and needs

the stimulation of some stinging fly. It seems to me that God has attached me to this city to perform the office of such a fly; and all day long I never cease to settle here, there, and everywhere, rousing, persuading, reproving every one of you. You will not easily find another like me, gentlemen, and if you take my advice you will spare my life. I suspect, however, that before long you will awake from your drowsing, and in your annoyance you will take Anytus' advice and finish me off with a single slap; and then you will go on sleeping till the end of your days, unless God in his care for you sends someone to take my place.

If you doubt whether I am really the sort of person who would have been sent to this city as a gift from God, you can convince yourselves by looking at it in this way. Does it seem natural that I should have neglected my own affairs and endured the humiliation of allowing my family to be neglected for all these years, while I busied myself all the time on your behalf, going like a father or an elder brother to see each one of you privately, and urging you to set your thoughts on goodness? If I had got any enjoyment from it, or if I had been paid for my good advice, there would have been some explanation for my conduct; but as it is you can see for yourselves that although my accusers unblushingly charge me with all sorts of other crimes, there is one thing that they have not had the impudence to pretend on any testimony, and that is that I have ever exacted or asked a fee from anyone. The witness that I can offer to prove the truth of my statement is, I think, a convincing one — my poverty.

It may seem curious that I should go round giving advice like this and busying myself in people's private affairs, and yet never venture publicly to address you as a whole and advise on matters of state. The reason for this is what you have often heard me say before on many other occasions: that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood — a sort of voice which comes to me; and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on. It is this that debars me from entering public life, and a very good thing too, in my opinion; because you may be quite sure, gentlemen, that if I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing any good either to you or to myself. Please do not be offended if I tell you the truth. No man on earth who conscientiously opposes either you or any other organised democracy, and flatly prevents a great many wrongs and illegalities from taking place in the state to which he belongs, can possibly escape with his life. The true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to

private life and leave politics alone.

I will offer you substantial proofs of what I have said; not theories, but what you can appreciate better, facts. Listen while I describe my actual experiences, so that you may know that I would never submit wrongly to any authority through fear of death, but would refuse even at the cost of my life. It will be a commonplace story, such as you often hear in the courts; but it is true.

The only office which I have ever held in our city, gentlemen, was when I was elected to the Council.²⁶ It so happened that our group was acting as the executive when you decided that the ten commanders who had failed to rescue the men who were lost in the naval engagement²⁷ should be tried *en bloc*; which was illegal, as you all recognised later. On this occasion I was the only member of the executive who insisted that you should not act unconstitutionally, and voted against the proposal; and although your leaders were all ready to denounce and arrest me, and you were all urging them on at the top of your voices, I thought that it was my duty to face it out on the side of law and justice rather than support you, through fear of prison or death, in your wrong decision.

This happened while we were still under a democracy. When the oligarchy came into power, the Thirty Commissioners in their turn summoned me and four others to the Round Chamber²⁸ and instructed us to go and fetch Leon of Salamis from his home for execution. This was of course only one of many instances in which they issued such instructions, their object being to implicate as many people as possible in their wickedness. On this occasion, however, I again made it clear not by my words but by my actions that death did not matter to me at all (if that is not too strong an expression); but that it mattered all the world to me that I should do nothing wrong or wicked. Powerful as it was, that government did not terrify me into doing a wrong action; when we came out of the Round Chamber the other four went off to Salamis and arrested Leon, and I went home. I should probably have been put to death for this, if the government had not fallen soon afterwards. There are plenty of people who will testify to these statements.

Do you suppose that I should have lived as long as I have if I had moved in the sphere of public life, and conducting myself in that sphere like an honourable man, had always upheld the cause of right, and conscientiously set this end above all other things? Not by a very long way, gentlemen; neither would any other man. You will find that throughout my life I have been consistent in any public duties that I have performed, and the same also in my personal dealings: I have never countenanced any action that was incompatible with justice on the part of any person, including

those whom some people maliciously call my pupils. I have never set up as any man's teacher; but if anyone, young or old, is eager to hear me conversing and carrying out my private mission, I never grudge him the opportunity; nor do charge a fee for talking to him, and refuse to talk without one; I am ready to answer questions for rich and poor alike, and I am equally ready if anyone prefers to listen to me and answer my questions. If any given one of these people becomes a good citizen or a bad one, I cannot fairly be held responsible, since I have never promised or imparted any teaching to anybody; and if anyone asserts that he has ever learned or heard from me privately anything which was not open to everyone else, you may be quite sure that he is not telling the truth.

But how is it that some people enjoy spending a great deal of time in my company? You have heard the reason, gentlemen; I told you quite frankly. It is because they enjoy hearing me examine those who think that they are wise when they are not; an experience which has its amusing side. This duty I have accepted, as I said, in obedience to God's commands given in oracles and dreams²⁹ and in every other way that any other divine dispensation has ever impressed a duty upon man. This is a true statement, gentlemen, and easy to verify. If it is a fact that I am in process of corrupting some of the young, and have succeeded already in corrupting others; and if it were a fact that some of the latter, being now grown up, had discovered that I had ever given them bad advice when they were young, surely they ought now to be coming forward to denounce and punish me; and if they did not like to do it themselves, you would expect some of their families — their fathers and brothers and other near relations — to remember it now, if their own flesh and blood had suffered any harm from me. Certainly a great many of them have found their way into this court, as I can see for myself: first Crito³⁰ — over there, my contemporary and near neighbour, the father of this young man Critobulus; and then Lysanias of Sphettus,³¹ the father of Aeschines here; and next Antiphon of Cephisia, over there, the father of Epigenes. Then besides there are all those whose brothers have been members of our circle: Nicostratus the son of Theozotides, the brother of Theodotus — but Theodotus is dead, so he cannot appeal to his brother — and Paralios here, the son of Demodocus; his brother was Theages. And here is Adimantus, the son of Ariston, whose brother Plato is over there; and Aeantodorus, whose brother Apollodorus is here on this side. I can name many more besides, some of whom Meletus most certainly ought to have produced as witness in the course of his speech. If he forgot to do so then, let him do it now — I am willing to make way for him; let him state whether he has any such evidence to offer. On the contrary, gentlemen, you will find

that they are all prepared to help me — the corrupter and evil genius of their nearest and dearest relatives, as Meletus and Anytus say. The actual victims of my corrupting influence might perhaps be excused for helping me; but as for the uncorrupted, their relations of mature age, what other reason can they have for helping me except the right and proper one, that they know Meletus is lying and I am telling the truth?

There gentlemen: that, and perhaps a little more to the same effect, is the substance of what I can say in my defence. It may be that some one of you, remembering his own case, will be annoyed that whereas he, in standing his trial upon a less serious charge than this, made pitiful appeals to the jury with floods of tears, and had his infant children produced in court to excite the maximum of sympathy, and many of his relatives and friends as well, I on the contrary intend to do nothing of the sort, and that although I am facing (as it might appear) the utmost danger. It may be that one of you, reflecting on these facts, will be prejudiced against me, and being irritated by his reflections, will give his vote in anger. If one of you is so disposed — I do not expect it, but there is the possibility — I think that I should be quite justified in saying to him “My dear sir, of course I have some relatives. To quote the very words of Homer, even I am not sprung ‘from an oak or from a rock’,³² but from human parents, and consequently I have relatives; yes, and sons³³ too, gentlemen, three of them, one almost grown up and the other two only children; but all the same I am not going to produce them here and beseech you to acquit me.”

Why do I not intend to do anything of this kind? Not out of perversity, gentlemen, nor out of contempt for you; whether I am brave or not in the face of death has nothing to do with it; the point is that for my own credit and yours and for the credit of the state as a whole, I do not think that it is right for me to use any of these methods at my age and with my reputation — which may be true or it may be false, but at any rate the view is held that Socrates is different from the common run of mankind. Now if those of you who are supposed to be distinguished for wisdom or courage or any other virtue are to behave in this way, it would be a disgrace. I have often noticed that some people of this type, for all their high standing, go to extraordinary lengths when they come up for trial, which shows that they think it will be a dreadful thing to lose their lives; as though they would be immortal if you did not put them to death! In my opinion these people bring disgrace upon our city. Any of our visitors might be excused for thinking that the finest specimens of Athenian manhood, whom their fellow-citizens select on their merits to rule over them and hold other high positions, are no better than women. If you have even the smallest reputation, gentlemen, you ought not to descend to these methods; and if



The Acropolis in Athens

we do so, you must not give us licence. On the contrary, you must make it clear that anyone who stages these pathetic scenes and so brings ridicule upon our city is far more likely to be condemned than if he kept perfectly quiet.

But apart from all question of appearances, gentlemen, I do not think that it is right for a man to appeal to the jury or to get himself acquitted by doing so; he ought to inform them of the facts and convince them by argument. The jury does not sit to dispense justice as a favour, but to decide where justice lies; and the oath which they have sworn is not to show favour at their own discretion, but to return a just and lawful verdict. It follows that we must not develop in you, nor you allow to grow in yourselves, the habit of perjury; that would be sinful for us both. Therefore you must not expect me, gentlemen, to behave towards you in a way which I consider neither reputable nor moral nor consistent with my religious duty; and above all you must not expect it when I stand charged with impiety by Meletus here. Surely it is obvious that if I tried to persuade you and prevail upon you by my entreaties to go against your solemn oath, I should be teaching you contempt for religion; and by my very defence I should be accusing myself of having no religious belief. But that is very far from the truth. I have a more sincere belief, gentlemen, than any of my accusers; and I leave it to you and to God to judge me as it shall be best for me and for yourselves.

*(The verdict is "Guilty", and Meletus
proposes the penalty of death)*

There are a great many reasons, gentlemen, why I am not distressed by this result — I mean your condemnation of me — but the chief reason is that the result was not unexpected. What does surprise me is the number of votes cast on the two sides. I should never have believed that it would be such a close thing; but now it seems that if a mere thirty votes³⁴ had gone the other way, I should have been acquitted. Even as it is, I feel that so far as Meletus' part is concerned I have been acquitted; and not only that, but anyone can see that if Anytus and Lycon had not come forward to accuse me, Meletus would actually have forfeited his 50 pounds for not having obtained one-fifth³⁵ of the votes.

However, we must face the fact that he demands the death-penalty. Very good. What alternative penalty shall I propose to you, gentlemen? Obviously it must be adequate. Well, what penalty do I deserve to pay or suffer, in view of what I have done?

I have never lived an ordinary quiet life. I did not care for the things that most people care about: making money, having a comfortable home, high military or civil rank, and all the other activities — political appointments, secret societies, party organisations — which go on in our city; I thought that I was really too strict in my principles to survive if I went in for this sort of thing. So instead of taking a course which would have done no good either to you or to me, I set myself to do you individually in private what I hold to be the greatest possible service: I tried to persuade each one of you not to think more of practical advantages than of his mental and moral well-being, or in general to think more of advantage than of well-being in the case of the state or of anything else. What do I deserve for behaving in this way? Some reward, gentlemen, if I am bound to suggest what I really deserve; and what is more, a reward which would be appropriate for myself. Well, what is appropriate for a poor man who is a public benefactor and who requires leisure for giving you moral encouragement? Nothing could be more appropriate for such a person than free maintenance³⁶ at the State's expense. He deserves it much more than any victor in the races at Olympia, whether he wins with a single horse or a pair or a team of four. These people give you the semblance of success, but I give you the reality; they do not need maintenance, but I do. So if I am to suggest an appropriate penalty which is strictly in accordance with justice, I suggest free maintenance by the State.

Perhaps when I say this I may give you the impression, as I did in my remarks about exciting sympathy and making passionate appeals, that I am showing a deliberate perversity. That is not so, gentlemen; the real position is this. I am convinced that I never wrong anyone intentionally, but I cannot convince you of this, because we have had so little time for discussion. If it was your practice, as it is with

other nations, to give not one day but several to the hearing of capital trials, I believe that you might have been convinced; but under present conditions it is not easy to dispose of grave allegations in a short space of time. So being convinced that I do no wrong to anybody, I can hardly be expected to wrong myself by asserting that I deserve something bad, or by proposing a corresponding penalty. Why should I? For fear of suffering this penalty proposed by Meletus, when, as I said, I do not know whether it is a good thing or a bad? Do you expect me to choose something which I know very well is bad by making my counter-proposal? Imprisonment? Why should I spend my days in prison, in subjection to the periodically appointed officers of the law? A fine, with imprisonment until it is paid? In my case the effect would be just the same, because I have no money to pay a fine. Or shall I suggest banishment?³⁷ You would very likely accept the suggestion.

I should have to be desperately in love with life to do that, gentlemen. I am not so blind that I cannot see that you, my fellow-citizens, have come to the end of your patience with my discussions and conversations; you have found them too irksome and irritating, and now you are trying to get rid of them. Will any other people find them easy to put up with? That is most unlikely, gentlemen. A fine life I should have if I left this country at my age and spent the rest of my days trying one city after another and being turned out every time! I know very well that wherever I go the young people will listen to my conversation just as they do here; and if I try to keep them off, they will make their elders drive me out, while if I do not, the fathers and other relatives will drive me out of their own accord for the sake of the young.

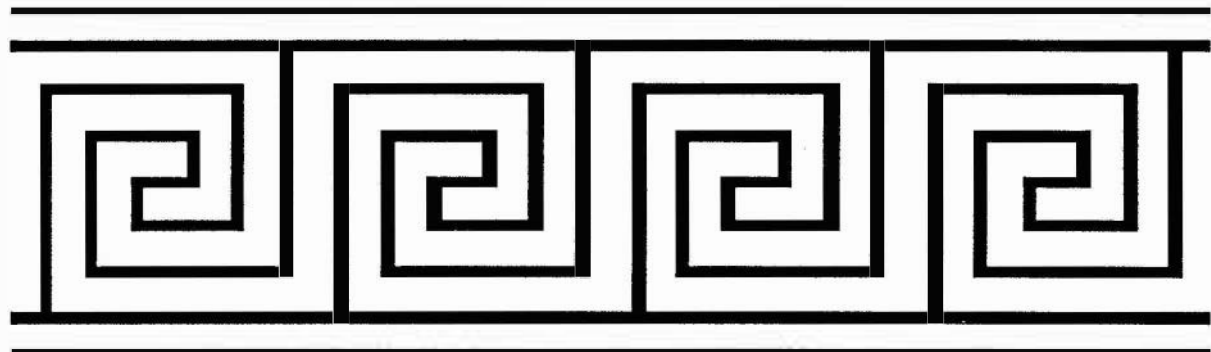
Perhaps someone may say "But surely, Socrates, after you have left us you can spend the rest of your life in quietly minding your own business." This is the hardest thing of all to make some of you understand. If I say that this would be disobedience to God, and that is why I cannot "mind my own business", you will not believe that I am serious. If on the other hand I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living, you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is, gentlemen, as I maintain; though it is not easy to convince you of it. Besides, I am not accustomed to think of myself as deserving punishment. If I had money, I would have suggested a fine that I could afford, because that would not have done me any harm. As it is, I cannot, because I have none; unless of course you like to fix the penalty at what I could pay. I suppose I could probably afford five pounds.³⁸ I suggest a fine of that amount.

One moment, gentlemen. Plato here, and Crito and Critobulus and Apollodorus, want me to propose 150 pounds, on their security. Very well, I agree to this sum, and you can rely upon these gentlemen for its payment.

(The jury decides for the death-penalty)

Well, gentlemen, for the sake of a very small gain in time you are going to earn the reputation — and the blame from those who wish to disparage our city — of having put Socrates to death, “that wise man” — because they will say I am wise even if I am not, these people who want to find fault with you. If you had waited just a little while, you would have had your way in the course of nature. You can see that I am well on in life and near to death. I am saying this not to all of you but to those who voted for my execution, and I have something else to say to them as well.

No doubt you think, gentlemen, that I have been condemned for lack of the arguments which I could have used if I had thought it right to leave nothing unsaid or undone to secure my acquittal. But that is very far from the truth. It is not a lack of arguments that has caused my condemnation, but a lack of effrontery and impudence, and the fact that I have refused to address you in the way which would give you most pleasure. You would have liked to hear me weep and wail, doing and saying all sorts of things which I regard as unworthy of myself, but which you are used to hearing from other people. But I did not think then that I ought to stoop to servility because I was in danger, and I do not regret now the way in which I pleaded my case; I would much rather die as the result of this defence than live as the result of the other sort. In a court of law, just as in warfare, neither I nor any other ought to use his wits to escape death by any means. In battle it is often obvious that you could

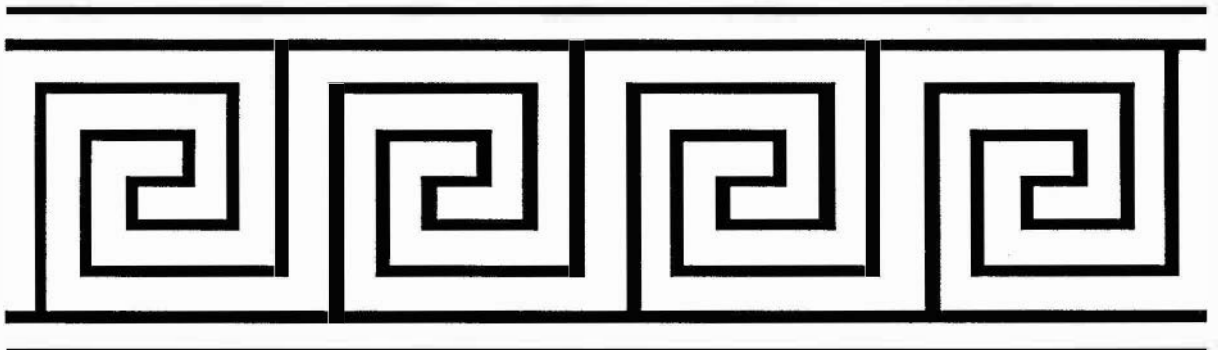


escape being killed by giving up your arms and throwing yourself upon the mercy of your pursuers; and in every kind of danger there are plenty of devices for avoiding death if you are unscrupulous enough to stick at nothing. But I suggest, gentlemen, that the difficulty is not so much to escape death; the real difficulty is to escape from doing wrong, which is far more fleet of foot. In this present instance, I, the slow old man, have been overtaken by the slower of the two, but my accusers, who are clever and quick, have been overtaken by the faster: by iniquity. When I leave this court I shall go away condemned by you to death, but they will go away convicted by Truth herself of depravity and wickedness. And they accept their sentence even as I accept mine. No doubt it was bound to be so, and I think that the result is fair enough.

Having said so much, I feel moved to prophesy to you who have given your vote against me; for I am now at that point where the gift of prophecy comes most readily to men: at the point of death. I tell you, my executioners, that as soon as I am dead, vengeance shall fall upon you with a punishment far more painful than your killing of me. You have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting your conduct to criticism; but I say that the result will be just the opposite. You will have more critics, whom up till now I have restrained without your knowing it; and being younger they will be harsher to you and will cause you more annoyance.

If you expect to stop denunciation of your wrong way of life by putting people to death, there is something amiss with your reasoning. This way of escape is neither possible nor creditable; the best and easiest way is not to stop the mouths of others, but to make yourselves as good men as you can. This is my last message to you who voted for my condemnation.

As for you who voted for my acquittal, I should very much like to say a few words to reconcile you to the result, while the officials are busy and I am not yet on



my way to the place where I must die. I ask you, gentlemen, to spare me these few moments; there is no reason why we should not exchange fancies while the law permits. I look upon you as my friends, and I want you to understand the right way of regarding my present position.

Gentlemen of the jury — for *you* deserve to be so called — I have had a remarkable experience. In the past the prophetic voice to which I have become accustomed has always been my constant companion, opposing me even in quite trivial things if I was going to take the wrong course. Now something has happened to me, as you can see, which might be thought and is commonly considered to be a supreme calamity; yet neither when I left home this morning, nor when I was taking my place here in the court, nor at any point in any part of my speech did the divine sign oppose me. In other discussions it has often checked me in the middle of a sentence; but this time it has never opposed me in any part of this business in anything that I have said or done. What do I suppose to be the explanation? I will tell you. I suspect that this thing that has happened to me is a blessing, and we are quite mistaken in supposing death to be an evil. I have good grounds for thinking this, because my accustomed sign could not have failed to oppose me if what I was doing had not been sure to bring some good result.

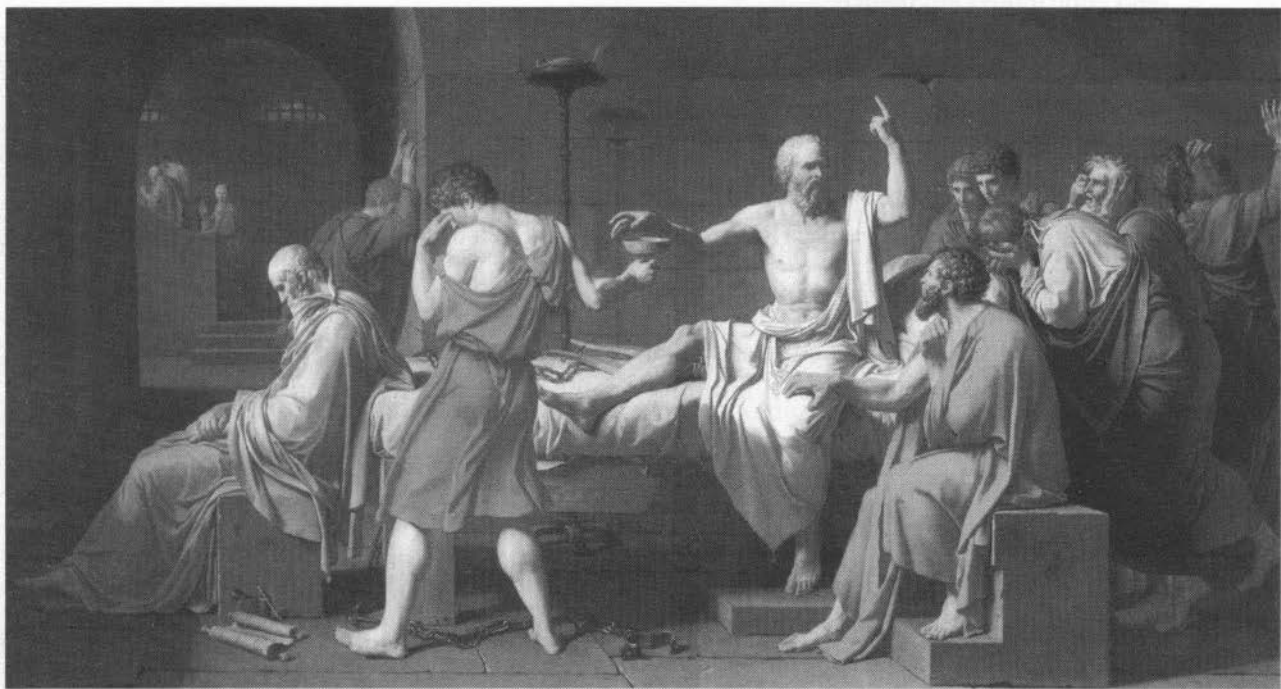
We should reflect that there is much reason to hope for a good result on other grounds as well. Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything; or, as we are told,⁴⁰ it is really a change: a migration of the soul from this place to another. Now if there is no consciousness but only a dreamless sleep, death must be a marvellous gain. I suppose that if anyone were told to pick out the night on which he slept so soundly as not even to dream, and then to compare it with all the other nights and days of his life, and then were told to say, after due consideration, how many better and happier days and nights than this he had spent in the course of his life — well, I think that the Great King⁴¹ himself, to say nothing of any private person, would find these days and nights easy to count in comparison with the rest. If death is like this, then, I call it gain; because the whole of time, if you look at it in this way, can be regarded as no more than one single night. If on the other hand death is a removal from here to some other place, and if what we are told is true, that all the dead are there, what greater blessing could there be than this, gentlemen? If on arrival in the other world, beyond the reach of our so-called justice, one will find there the true judges who are said to preside in those courts, Minos and Rhadamanthys and Aeacus⁴² and Triptolimus⁴³ and all those other half divinities who were upright in their earthly life, would that be an

unrewarding journey? Put it in this way: how much would one of you give to meet Orpheus⁴⁴ and Musaeus,⁴⁵ Hesiod⁴⁶ and Homer? I am willing to die ten times over if this account is true. It would be a specially interesting experience for me to join them there, to meet Palamedes⁴⁷ and Ajax⁴⁸ the son of Telamon and any other heroes of the old days who met their death through an unfair trial, and to compare my fortunes with theirs — it would be rather amusing, I think —; and above all I should like to spend my time there, as here, in examining and searching people's minds, to find out who is really wise among them, and who only thinks that he is. What would one not give, gentlemen, to be able to question the leader of that great host against Troy, or Odysseus, or Sisyphus,⁴⁹ or the thousands of other men and women whom one could mention, to talk and mix and argue with whom would be unimaginable happiness? At any rate I presume that they do not put one to death there for such conduct; because apart from the other happiness in which their world surpasses ours, they are now immortal for the rest of time, if what we are told is true.

You too, gentlemen of the jury, must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain: that nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods. This present experience of mine has not come about mechanically; I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions. That is why my sign never turned me back. For my own part I bear no grudge at all against those who condemned me and accused me, although it was not with this kind intention that they did so, but because they thought that they were hurting me; and that is culpable of them. However, I ask them to grant me one favour. When my sons grow up, gentlemen, if you think that they are putting money or anything else before goodness, take your revenge by plaguing them as I plagued you; and if they fancy themselves for no reason, you must scold them just as I scolded you, for neglecting the important things and thinking that they are good for something when they are good for nothing. If you do this, I shall have had justice at your hands, both I myself and my children.

Now it is time that we were going, I to die and you to live; but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but God.

Text from Plato: *The Last Days of Socrates*, translation by Hugh Tredennick (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 45-76.



The death of Socrates, by French artist Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825)

Plato has movingly told the story of Socrates' last day in prison. He rebuked his followers for their open display of grief and died with great dignity after drinking a cup of hemlock.

Notes

1. *in the open spaces of this city*: Literally “at the banker’s counters in the market-place”; but this sounds odd in English, and conveys the false impression that he had business there; it was simply a good place for meeting people.
2. *Anytus and his colleagues*: viz. Meletus and Lycon. Meletus, a fiery and unpleasant young man, who probably had a personal grudge against Socrates, was the leader of the prosecution; Anytus, an honest and influential democrat who hated the Sophists and perhaps regarded Socrates as one of them, gave it weight and an air of respectability; Lycon was a rhetorician and contributed eloquence.
3. *a playwright*: the comic poet, Aristophanes, burlesqued Socrates in his comedy the *Clouds*, produced in 423, by representing him as a Sophist of the worst type — a quack scientist and rhetorician with neither religion nor morals. No doubt he chose Socrates simply as a perfect subject for caricature, and meant him no harm (the two men are quite friendly in the *Symposium*); but the play probably had a damaging effect.
4. *Socrates goes whirling round*: He appears suspended in a basket, because his mind works better in the upper air.
5. *Gorgias of Leontini* was a sceptic and a brilliant rhetorician who first visited Athens on a diplomatic mission in 427 and later settled there for some time. In the dialogue called after him Plato represents him as a well-meaning simple-minded elderly don who is no match for Socrates.
6. *Prodicus of Ceos* specialised in the study of synonyms and distinctions of meaning; his style is parodied in the *Protagoras*. He was a distinguished teacher and one of the best of the Sophists in spite of his pedantry.
7. *Hippias of Elis* was supposed to know something about everything, including the useful arts. It is unlikely that his knowledge was profound.
8. *Callias* is the host in the *Protagoras*. He was a great patron of Sophists, and ruined himself by this and other expensive habits.
9. *Evenus of Paros* was a rhetorician and poet (mentioned also in the *Phaedo*) who was staying at this time in Athens.
10. *Delphi*: The oracle of Apollo at Delphi was the supreme authority whose advice was sought on all kinds of subjects — religious, moral, political, and personal. The source of its information remains a mystery; if it relied upon a secret service, the secret was efficiently kept. The only “natural” explanation of its reply about Socrates is that it was well aware of his true character and ideals and thoroughly approved of them.
11. *Chaerephon*: Little can be added to the account given here, except that he was one of the few democrats in Socrates’ circle, and that he too appeared in the *Clouds*.
12. *the recent expulsion*, etc., refers to the events of 404, when the oligarchs, seizing power, murdered or drove out large numbers of their political opponents; these, under the leadership of Thrasybulus, presently gained a footing in Attica, defeated the oligarchs, and restored the

- democracy in the following year.
13. *his brother*: Chaerecrates.
 14. *Dog!*: Such pseudo-oaths were not peculiar to Socrates, nor did he always avoid the name of a real deity. The practice was perhaps originally pious, but by this date had become humorous.
 15. *pilgrimage* seems a legitimate equivalent for the literal “labours” (e.g. of Hercules), though the latter were mainly for the benefit of mankind.
 16. *Council ... Assembly*: The Council (of 500 members) was the supreme administrative authority; the Assembly was open to all adult male citizens.
 17. *sun and moon are gods*: The cult of the sun was prevalent in Greece, though it tended to be merged in the worship of Apollo. The moon (associated with Artemis and Hecate) was of especial importance in magic. The object of the question is to lead up to the doctrines of Anaxagoras.
 18. *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae* (about 500-428), one of the most original thinkers of the century, resided in Athens for thirty years. In 450, he was accused of impiety and collaboration with Persia, and condemned to death (?), but escaped with the help of Pericles, who was his very good friend, and retired to Lampsacus, where he died. The details of the story are disputed, but there is little doubt that the motives underlying his accusation were not religious or patriotic but political, and formed part of a campaign against Pericles and his advisers. Clearly Plato intends us to compare the circumstances of the two trials and to contrast their consequences. The only features of Anaxagoras’ teaching that concern us are his astronomical views (that the sun and moon are fragments of the earth which have become white-hot by the rapidity of their movement) and his doctrine of Mind (referred in the *Phaedo*).
 19. *in the market-place*: Plato says “in the orchestra”, that is, the flat circular space (in which the chorus dances) in front of the stage in the open-air Theatre. It would have been both vacant and accessible on most days of the year, and was therefore quite a suitable place for bookstalls.
 20. *supernatural beings*: “daemons”. The word has a vague connotation, but it is generally used of any being or agency that is more than human but not quite identifiably divine. The corresponding adjective often simply means “mysterious”. It is used here with reference to Socrates’ “warning voice”.
 21. *bastard children*: the heroes and demigods of mythology.
 22. *son of Thetis*: Achilles. The passage which Socrates partly paraphrases and partly quotes is Iliad XViii. 94-106.
 23. *Potidaea* in Chalcidice revolted from Athens in 432 and was reduced two years later. In the preliminary fighting Socrates saved the life of Alcibiades, as the latter relates in the *Symposium* (220 D).
 24. *Amphipolis*: An Athenian colony at the mouth of the Strymon (Struma). The battle to which Socrates refers took place outside the walls in 422.
 25. *Delium* in Boeotia was the scene of a heavy Athenian defeat in 424. According to Alcibiades in the passage quoted above, Socrates showed great gallantry.
 26. *elected to the Council*: Appointment was actually by lot; but this and other technical details unimportant to the general sense (and in some cases tedious to explain) have been glossed over

in the translation of this paragraph.

27. *the naval engagement*: The Athenian victory at Arginusae in 406. Public feeling ran very high at this negligence of the admirals (or generals — land and sea commands were not distinguished at Athens). Only eight were in fact implicated, two being absent from the battle.
28. *Round Chamber*: A building used as a Government office, normally by the executive of the Council.
29. *dreams*: e.g. the one described in the *Phaedo*, which is a dialogue by Plato, describing through the mouth of an eye-witness, the events and discussions of the last day in Socrates' life, and the manner of his death.
30. *Crito*: Socrates' closest friend, who gives his name to the dialogue that comes immediately after *Apology*, taking place in the State prison at Athens, where Socrates stayed for one month before his execution.
31. *Sphettus* and *Cephisia* were "demes" or parishes in Attica.
32. *from a tree or from a rock*: *Odyssey* XiX 163. This proverbial expression, implying "so you must have some parents" is used by Penelope in encouraging the disguised Odysseus to reveal his name and family.
33. *sons*: Lamprocles, Sophroniscus, and Menexenus. Unfortunately they did not take after their father.
34. *thirty votes*: Apparently 220 voted for and 280 against acquittal; but 30 is probably a round number.
35. *one-fifth of the votes*: Socrates pretends that each of the accusers has obtained one-third of the votes cast for the prosecution, so that Meletus has only 93 odd instead of 100. He must have enjoyed this brazen illogicality. The fine was 1,000 drachmae.
36. *free maintenance*: This was actually provided for distinguished citizens and public benefactors in the Prytaneum, a sort of State hotel.
37. *banishment*: No doubt this was exactly what most of his enemies desired.
38. *five pounds*: "One mina". According to Xenophon *Oeconomica* ii.3, this would have been one-fifth of Socrates' entire resources.
39. *those who voted for my execution*: Apparently 80 more than had voted for his condemnation, so that 360 favoured death and only 140 the fine.
40. *as we are told*: The doctrines of the soul's immortality and rebirth, and of purification by punishment in the underworld belong to Orphism, a primitive but in some ways remarkably enlightened religion which perhaps came to Greece from Thrace and certainly inspired the "mystery cults" which were practised in various parts of Greece, especially at Eleusis in Attica.
41. *The Great King*: The king of Persia, regarded as a type of worldly prosperity.
42. *Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus* were by tradition mortal sons of Zeus (the gods' king), and became judges in the underworld as a reward for their earthly justice and piety.
43. *Triptolemus* was the introducer of agriculture and had an important part in the cult of Demeter (goddess of the earth) at the Eleusinian Mysteries. He is not described elsewhere as a judge of the dead.

44. *Orpheus* is no doubt mentioned not as a singer and poet but as the founder of Orphism.
45. *Musaeus* was a bard like *Orpheus*, but his benefactions consisted in giving oracles and instruction for the curing of disease.
46. *Hesiod of Ascra* in Boeotia was the first didactic poet; he was generally ranked next after *Homer* in antiquity and merit.
47. *Palamedes* a Greek warrior in the Trojan war, exposed a discreditable trick on the part of *Odysseus*, who by forged evidence got him executed for treason (*Virgil, Aeneid* ii. 811f).
48. *Ajax* expected to be awarded the arms of *Achilles*, which were supposed to pass, after their owner's death, to the next bravest of the Greeks; but the generals *Agamemnon* and *Menelaus* awarded them to *Odysseus*. *Ajax*, in a fit of madness, killed some cattle in mistake for the persons who had wronged him, and later, recovering his senses, was so ashamed that he killed himself.
49. *Sisyphus* was a king of *Corinth* who was famous for his unscrupulous cleverness. Presumably it was his brains rather than his character that interested *Socrates*.

A few dates

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|------------|---|
| 478-431 BC | — Age of Athenian domination in Greece. |
| 469 BC | — Birth of <i>Socrates</i> at Athens. |
| 431-404 BC | — Peloponnesian war (between Greek cities, but mostly Athens and Sparta). <i>Socrates</i> earns a good reputation as a soldier in several battles. |
| 427 B C | — Birth of <i>Plato</i> . |
| 405 BC | — As a member of the ruling "Council of 500, <i>Socrates</i> shows great courage in opposing alone the condemnation to death of ten generals by a collective verdict, which he considered unconstitutional. |
| 404 BC | — The Oligarchs seize power and establish a "Council of thirty". <i>Socrates</i> refuses to collaborate to the execution of unjust orders from the Oligarchs. |
| 403 BC | — Restoration of democracy at Athens. |
| 399 BC | — <i>Socrates</i> is judged and condemned. He refuses a possibility of escape and is executed. |
| 347 BC | — Death of <i>Plato</i> . |

Suggestions for further reading

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- Hare, R.M. *Plato*. Oxford University Press, 1982.
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Relentless Adventure and Ambition

Introduction

Alexander was born in 356 BC. His father, King Philip of Macedonia, had united Greece and had intended to free the Asiatic Greeks from Persian control. He also coveted the riches of the Persian Empire to pay for his professional army. At Philip's death, Alexander first quelled rebellions in Greece and then crossed the Dardenelles¹ to start, at the age of twenty years, his 2800 mile journey into Asia.

During his Asian campaigns, Alexander founded or refounded many cities to administer the conquered territories. The greatest of these was Alexandria in Egypt. From these cities, in territories later ruled by Alexander's successors, Greek culture spread and for the next three centuries was dominant throughout much of the Middle East. This hellenisation process lasted until the spread of Roman power towards the end of the first century BC. It all stemmed from the brief career of one man, who died at the age of 33.

Who really was the man known as Alexander the Great? In only thirteen years, between 336 and 323 BC, he earned enough fame to fuel legends down through the ages. Thirteen years of unrelenting drive, of amazing deeds. Here was a young man able to inspire large troops of men to follow him in a whirlwind of conquests that looks like a race against time. Perhaps he knew that fate would not grant him years enough to conquer the whole world, as he could well have attempted. In fact, it has

1. The Dardenelles: An isthmus in present North-West Turkey linking the Aegean Sea with the sea of Marmara.

been said that the greatest blessing in Alexander's life was his early death, and his greatest good fortune was that the practical common sense of his followers prevented him from crossing the Ganges. Had Napoleon been similarly forced to recognise his limits, his end might have been as great as his beginning.

In Alexander's case, it is remarkable that one of the greatest thinkers in world history, Aristotle, was his teacher. It can safely be assumed that Aristotle gave his pupil an enormous wealth of information and some degree of intimacy with the teachings of Socrates and Plato. Alexander surely must have known that man could attain his highest well-being only by acquiring a knowledge that would lead him to do the right action voluntarily. This was the very teaching of Socrates: "Virtue is knowledge." Alexander also must have learned the ethical doctrine of Aristotle himself, according to whom virtue meant a mean between extremes. Aristotle was the first logician of the Western world and he must have taught his pupil the art and science of reasoning as applied to metaphysics, science and mathematics. The vast encyclopedic knowledge that Aristotle could have put at Alexander's disposal would have made Alexander, if he so chose, a great master of knowledge. Why, we may ask, did this not happen? What exactly was the determining factor that made Alexander a conqueror of lands and men instead of an expert scholar or an illumined sage? Did Alexander ever ask himself, consciously and reflectively, what his aim of life should be? We do not know with any certainty. Considering, however, that he had access to wide fields of knowledge, such a question could hardly have escaped him. But even if he asked this question, did he set about to find an answer?

Physically, he was an ideal youth, good in every sport. He possessed a wild energy that would make him shoot arrows at any passing object, or alight from and remount his chariot at full speed. During campaigns, if the going was slow, he would go hunting alone and on foot and do combat with wild animals, however dangerous. He liked hard work and hazardous deeds. He was usually sober and, apparently, in very good health, since his body was credited with a pleasant fragrance. Beyond the exaggerations of fame and legend, Alexander was certainly quite handsome, with expressive features, soft blue eyes and luxuriant auburn hair.

Alexander is a striking example of what life-force can do in a man. More often than not, human beings are led to their career or their life's work by temperament, by likes and dislikes, and by their inner drives. The life-force in man seeks acquisition, possession, enjoyment, relationship, battle and conquest. It is often instinctive and therefore irresistible. Accordingly, it is not easy for a human being driven by an extraordinary executive power and force of accomplishment to become

intellectualised. This does not mean that the intellectualisation of life energy is impossible, but it is evident that the tasks involved in such a process are enormous and extremely difficult.

Alexander was primarily interested in adventure. He was verily a Prince of Air, ready to fly on the wings of time just to discover novelties and unexpected experiences. His ambitions were deep-seated and illimitable. In fact, it seems that his aim of life was determined by the pressure of his ambitions rather than by any rational system of thought or any ethical discipline. He was probably so prodigious that he found it difficult to contain his energy. He brings to mind quicksilver: pursue as you may, he is always one step ahead. He did not like the idea of rest and said that sleep only served to remind him of his mortal condition. So many things to do, so much to learn, so many possibilities.... He brings to mind too the echo of a perpetual galloping on the quickest of horses.... The bursting life-force inside him was quite evidently overwhelming, as was the call of the sirens of adventure and ambition.

Mentally, he was very active and had a passion for study. His intellectual abilities could never be used fully due to the early responsibilities that fell upon him — hence, a lack of maturity of mind. As often is the case with great men of action, he would always regret not having become a great thinker as well. Even after an exhausting day of marching or fighting, he would delight in spending half the night conversing with scholars or scientists. King at twenty, absorbed in warfare and administration, he had no chance to complete his education. He was brilliant, but prone to errors in politics and warfare. He tended to be excessively superstitious, despite his broadmindedness. Capable of leading armies, of conquering millions of people, he was often unable to control his temper. Generally blind to his own faults or limitations, he too frequently allowed his judgement to be obscured by praise. Similar contradictions can be seen in his moral character. Naturally sentimental and emotional, he could be moved to tears by poetry and music. He was exceptional in friendship, very trusting and warm. He cared for his soldiers and avoided risking their lives needlessly. Besieged cities would often open their gates to him, confident in his reputation for generosity. Yet he could suddenly turn ferocious and resort to excessive cruelty for which he would later feel great remorse.

Despite his youth and lack of experience, he was a good administrator, ruling his empire with kindness and firmness. He respected agreements, and did not allow his appointees to oppress his subjects. He had all the potential of a great statesman, but was not given enough time to mature in that dimension. He was driven by the

vision of a united eastern Mediterranean world and, above all, of a fertile cross-breeding of many cultures under the umbrella of Greek civilisation. This was more an instinctive feeling than a product of reflection. Men like Alexander are often seized by blazing intuitions, but these often get mixed with their more fundamental ambitious drive.

A study of Alexander the Great is instructive in several ways. Firstly, it shows us what the life-force in man can achieve under circumstances and conditions as favourable as Alexander's, and yet what failures attend unbridled adventure. Secondly, it shows us that the human personality has far richer potentials than is normally suspected. Thirdly, it gives us a chance to understand ourselves better, for though we have a hundred and more limitations, we may discover, if we look closely within ourselves, that there is in us the same life-force as we find in Alexander. In other words, we discover that somewhere within our being we have basic instincts and impulses, a universe of pressing desires, deep-seated attractions and repulsions, and longings and ambitions.

Had he lived longer, would Alexander have been able to control his wild nature? A better control of his passions probably would have given him a deeper sense of fulfilment in his achievements. Life-force may be exhilarating, but to attain superior human realisation it needs to be transformed and put in its proper place along with the other energies that meet in man. No doubt this prodigious young king was faced with a very difficult task in that respect. But the extraordinary profile of him painted for us by Plutarch may be very instructive when we ourselves are confronted with the quest of our aim of life.



The best likeness of Alexander which has been preserved for us is to be found in the statues sculpted by Lysippus, the only artist whom Alexander considered worthy to represent him. Alexander possessed a number of individual features which many of Lysippus' followers later tried to reproduce, for example, the poise of the neck which was tilted slightly to the left, or a certain melting look in his eyes, and the artist has exactly caught these peculiarities. On the other hand when Apelles painted Alexander wielding a thunderbolt, he did not reproduce his colouring at all accurately. He made Alexander's complexion appear too dark-skinned and swarthy, whereas we are told that he was fair-skinned, with a ruddy tinge that showed itself especially upon his face and chest. Aristoxenus also tells us in his memoirs that Alexander's skin was fresh and sweet-smelling, and that his breath and the whole of his body gave off a peculiar fragrance¹ which permeated the clothes he wore....

Even while he was still a boy, he gave plenty of evidence of his powers of self-control. In spite of his vehement and impulsive nature, he showed little interest in the pleasures of the senses and indulged in them only with great moderation, but his passionate desire for fame implanted in him a pride and a grandeur of vision which went far beyond his years. And yet it was by no means every kind of glory that he sought, and, unlike his father, he did not seek it in every form of action. Philip, for example, was as proud of his powers of eloquence as any sophist, and took care to have the victories won by his chariots at Olympia stamped upon his coins. But Alexander's attitude is made clear by his reply to some of his friends, when they asked him whether he would be willing to compete at Olympia, since he was a fine runner. "Yes," he answered, "if I have kings to run against me." He seems in fact to have disapproved of the whole race of trained athletes. At any rate although he founded a great many contests of other kinds, including not only the tragic drama and performances on the flute and the lyre, but also the reciting of poetry, fighting with the quarter-staff and various forms of hunting, yet he never offered prizes either for boxing or for the pancration.²

On one occasion some ambassadors from the king of Persia arrived in Macedon, and since Philip was absent, Alexander received them in his place. He talked freely with them and quite won them over, not only by the friendliness of his manner, but also because he did not trouble them with any childish or trivial inquiries, but questioned them about the distances they had traveled by road, the nature of the journey into the interior of Persia, the character of the king, his experience in war, and the military strength and prowess of the Persians. The

ambassadors were filled with admiration. They came away convinced that Philip's celebrated astuteness was as nothing compared to the adventurous spirit and lofty ambitions of his son. At any rate, whenever he heard that Philip had captured some famous city or won an overwhelming victory, Alexander would show no pleasure at the news, but would declare to his friends, "Boys, my father will forestall me in everything. There will be nothing great or spectacular for you and me to show the world." He cared nothing for pleasure or wealth but only for deeds of valour and glory, and this was why he believed that the more he received from his father, the less would be left for him to conquer. And so every success that was gained by Macedonia inspired in Alexander the dread that another opportunity for action had been squandered on his father. He had no desire to inherit a kingdom which offered him riches, luxuries and the pleasures of the senses: his choice was a life of struggle, of wars, and of unrelenting ambition....

There came a day³ when Philoneicus the Thessalian brought Philip a horse named Bucephalas,⁴ which he offered to sell for thirteen talents. The king and his friends went down to the plain to watch the horse's trials, and came to the conclusion that he was wild and quite unmanageable, for he would allow no one to mount him, nor would he endure the shouts of Philip's grooms, but reared up against anyone who approached him. The king became angry at being offered such a vicious animal unbroken, and ordered it to be led away. But Alexander, who was standing close by, remarked, "What a horse they are losing, and all because they don't know how to handle him, or dare not try!" Philip kept quiet at first, but when he heard Alexander repeat these words several times and saw that he was upset, he asked him, "Are you finding fault with your elders because you think you know more than they do, or can manage a horse better?" "At least I could manage this one better", retorted Alexander. "And if you cannot," said his father, "what penalty will you pay for being so impertinent?" "I will pay the price of the horse,"⁵ answered the boy. At this the whole company burst out laughing, and then as soon as the father and son had settled the terms of the bet, Alexander went quickly up to Bucephalas, took hold of his bridle, and turned him towards the sun, for he had noticed that the horse was shying at the sight of his own shadow, as it fell in front of him and constantly moved whenever he did. He ran alongside the animal for a little way, calming him down by stroking him, and then, when he saw he was full of spirit and courage, he quietly threw aside his cloak and with a light spring vaulted safely on to his back. For a little while he kept feeling the bit with the reins, without jarring or tearing his mouth, and got him collected. Finally, when he saw that the horse was free of his fears and

impatient to show his speed, he gave him his head and urged him forward, using a commanding voice and a touch of the foot.

At first Philip and his friends held their breath and looked on in an agony of suspense, until they saw Alexander reach the end of his gallop, turn in full control, and ride back triumphant and exulting in his success. Thereupon the rest of the company broke into loud applause, while his father, we are told, actually wept for joy, and when Alexander had dismounted he kissed him and said, "My boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is too small for you."

Philip had noticed that his son was self-willed, and that while it was very difficult to influence him by force, he could easily be guided towards his duty by an appeal to reason, and he therefore made a point of trying to persuade the boy rather than giving him orders. Besides this he considered that the task of training and educating his son was too important to be entrusted to the ordinary run of teachers of poetry, music and general education: it required, as Sophocles puts it

The rudder's guidance and the curb's restraint,

and so he sent for Aristotle,⁶ the most famous and learned of the philosophers of his time, and rewarded him with the generosity that his reputation deserved. Aristotle was a native of the city of Stageira, which Philip had himself destroyed. He now repopulated it and brought back all the citizens who had been enslaved or driven into exile.

He gave Aristotle and his pupil the temple of the Nymphs near Mieza as a place where they could study and converse, and to this day they show you the stone seats and shady walks which Aristotle used. It seems clear too that Alexander was instructed by his teacher not only in the principles of ethics and politics, but also in those secret and more esoteric studies which philosophers do not impart to the general run of students, but only by word of mouth to a select circle of the initiated. Some years later, after Alexander had crossed into Asia, he learned that Aristotle had published some treatises dealing with these esoteric matters, and he wrote to him in blunt language and took him to task for the sake of the prestige of philosophy. This was the text of his letter:

Alexander to Aristotle, greetings. You have not done well to write down and publish those doctrines you taught me by word of mouth. What advantage shall I have over other men if these theories in which I have been trained are to be made common property? I would rather excel the rest of mankind in my knowledge of what is best than in the extent of my power. Farewell...

(Throughout his life, Alexander was to show an interest in “all kinds of learning” and was “a lover of books” thanks to Aristotle’s influence. The relationship between Alexander and Philip, his father, took a turn for the worse, probably under the influence of Alexander’s mother, Olympias, whose relations with her husband soon became bitter. Alexander was only twenty when Philip was assassinated by a member of his court.)

His kingdom at that moment was beset by formidable jealousies and feuds and external dangers on every side. The neighbouring barbarian tribes were eager to throw off the Macedonian yoke and longed for the rule of their native kings: as for the Greek States, although Philip had defeated them in battle, he had not had time to subdue them or accustom them to his authority. He had swept away the existing governments, and then, having prepared their peoples for drastic changes, had left them in turmoil and confusion, because he had created a situation which was completely unfamiliar to them. Alexander’s Macedonian advisers feared that a crisis was at hand and urged the young king to leave the Greek States to their own devices and refrain from using any force against them. As for the barbarian tribes, they considered that he should try to win them back to their allegiance by using milder methods, and forestall the first signs of revolt by offering them concessions. Alexander, however, chose precisely the opposite course, and decided that the only way to make his kingdom safe was to act with audacity and a lofty spirit, for he was certain that if he were seen to yield even a fraction of his authority, all his enemies would attack him at once. He swiftly crushed the uprisings among the barbarians by advancing with his army as far as the Danube, where he overcame Syrmus, the king of the Triballi, in a great battle. Then when the news reached him that the Thebans had revolted and were being supported by the Athenians, he immediately marched south through the pass of Thermopylae. “Demosthenes,” he said, “called me a boy while I was in Illyria and among the Triballi, and a youth when I was marching through Thessaly; I will show him I am a man by the time I reach the walls of Athens....”

(Having taken Thebes, which resisted courageously, Alexander set a terrible example by sacking the city. Probably feeling some remorse about this, he showed leniency towards Athens.)

In the previous year a congress of the Greek states had been held at the Isthmus of Corinth: here a vote had been passed that the states should join forces with

Alexander in invading Persia and that he should be commander-in-chief of the expedition. Many of the Greek statesmen and philosophers visited him to offer their congratulations, and he hoped that Diogenes of Sinope, who was at that time living in Corinth, would do the same. However since he paid no attention whatever to Alexander, but continued to live at leisure in the suburb of Corinth which was known as Craneion, Alexander went in person to see him and found him basking at full length in the sun. When he saw so many people approaching him, Diogenes raised himself a little on his elbow and fixed his gaze upon Alexander. The king greeted him and inquired whether he could do anything for him. "Yes," replied the philosopher, "you can stand a little to one side out of my sun." Alexander is said to have been greatly impressed by this answer and full of admiration for the hauteur and independence of mind of a man who could look down on him with such condescension. So much so that he remarked to his followers, who were laughing and mocking the philosopher as they went away, "You may say what you like, but if I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes."

Next he visited Delphi, because he wished to consult the oracle of Apollo⁷ about the expedition against the Persians. It so happened that he arrived on one of those days which are called inauspicious, when it is forbidden for the oracle to deliver a reply. In spite of this he sent for the prophetess, and when she refused to officiate and explained that the law forbade her to do so, he went up himself and tried to drag her by force to the shrine. At last, as if overcome by his persistence, she exclaimed, "You are invincible, my son!" and when Alexander heard this, he declared that he wanted no other prophecy, but had obtained from her the oracle he was seeking. When the time came for him to set out, many other prodigies attended the departure of the army: among these was the phenomenon of the statue of Orpheus which was made of cypress wood and was observed to be covered with sweat. Everyone who saw it was alarmed at this omen, but Aristander urged the king to take courage, for this portent signified that Alexander was destined to perform deeds which would live in song and story and would cause poets and musicians much toil and sweat to celebrate them.

As for the size of his army, the lowest estimate puts its strength at 30,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry and the highest 43,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry.⁸ According to Aristobulus the money available for the army's supplies amounted to no more than seventy talents. Douris says that there were supplies for only thirty days, and Onesicritus that Alexander was already two hundred talents in debt. Yet although he set out with such slender resources, he would not go aboard his ship



Darius, king of Persia

until he had discovered the circumstances of all his companions and had assigned an estate to one, a village to another, or the revenues of some port or community to a third. When he had shared out or signed away almost all the property of the crown, Perdicas asked him, "But your majesty, what are you leaving for yourself?" "My hopes!" replied Alexander. "Very well, then," answered Perdicas, "those who serve with you will share those too." With this, he declined to accept the prize which had been allotted to him, and several of Alexander's other friends did the same. However those who accepted or requested rewards were lavishly provided for, so that in the end Alexander distributed among them most of what he possessed in Macedonia. These were his preparations and this was the adventurous spirit in which he crossed the Hellespont.

Once arrived in Asia, he went up to Troy, sacrificed to Athena and poured

libations to the heroes of the Greek army. He anointed with oil the column which marks the grave of Achilles, ran a race by it naked with his companions, as the custom is, and then crowned it with a wreath: he also remarked that Achilles was happy in having found a faithful friend while he lived and a great poet to sing of his deeds after his death. While he was walking about the city and looking at its ancient remains, somebody asked him whether he wished to see the lyre which had once belonged to Paris.⁹ "I think nothing of that lyre," he said, "but I wish I could see Achilles' lyre, which he played when he sang of the glorious deeds of brave men."

Meanwhile Darius' generals had gathered a large army and posted it at the crossing of the river Granicus, so that Alexander was obliged to fight at the very gates of Asia, if he was to enter and conquer it. Most of the Macedonian officers were alarmed at the depth of the river and of the rough and uneven slopes of the banks on the opposite side, up which they would have to scramble in the face of the enemy. There were others too who thought that Alexander ought to observe the Macedonian tradition concerning the time of year, according to which the kings of Macedonia never made war during the month of Daesius.¹⁰ Alexander swept aside these scruples by giving orders that the month should be called a second Artemisius. And when Parmenio advised him against risking the crossing at such a late hour of the day, Alexander declared that the Hellespont would blush for shame if, once he had crossed it, he should shrink back from the Granicus; then he immediately plunged into the stream with thirteen squadrons of cavalry.¹¹ It seemed the act of a desperate madman rather than a prudent commander to charge into a swiftly flowing river, which swept men off their feet and surged about them, and then to advance through a hail of missiles towards a steep bank which was strongly defended by infantry and cavalry. But in spite of this he pressed forward and with a tremendous effort gained the opposite bank, which was a wet treacherous slope covered with mud. There he was immediately forced to engage the enemy in a confused hand to hand struggle, before the troops who were crossing behind him could be organised into any formation. The moment his men set foot on land, the enemy attacked them with loud shouts, matching horse against horse, thrusting with their lances and fighting with the sword when their lances broke. Many of them charged against Alexander himself, for he was easily recognisable by his shield and by the tall white plume which was fixed upon either side of his helmet.

(The battle went on.... Alexander was saved by Cleitus. Finally, the Persians were routed....)

The Persians are said to have lost twenty thousand infantry and two thousand five hundred cavalry, whereas on Alexander's side, according to Aristobulus, only thirty-four soldiers in all were killed, nine of them belonging to the infantry. Alexander gave orders that each of these men should have his statue set up in bronze and the work was carried out by Lysippus. At the same time he was anxious to give the other Greek states a share in the victory. He therefore sent the Athenians in particular three hundred of the shields captured from the enemy, and over the rest of the spoils he had this proud inscription engraved:

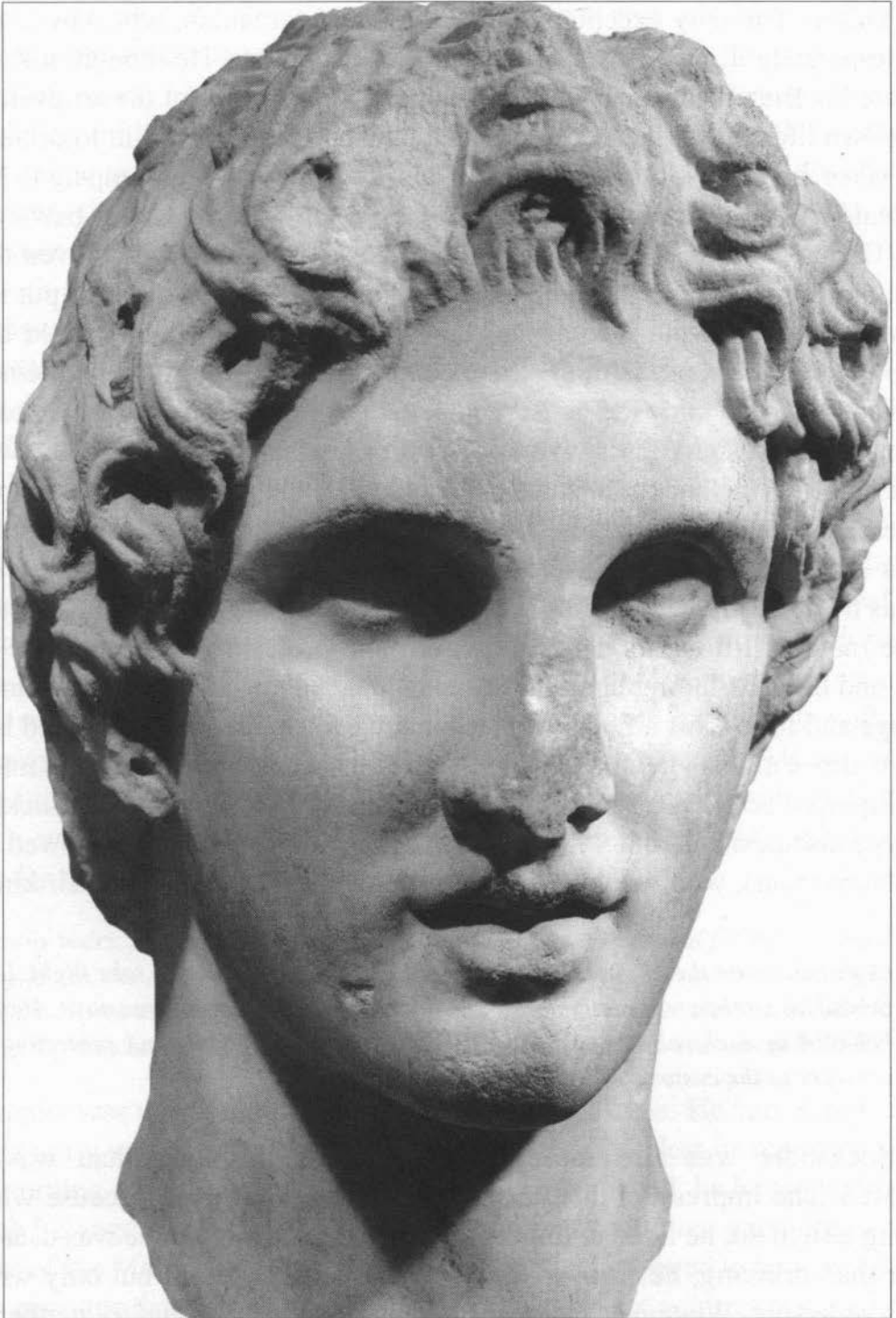
Alexander, the son of Philip, and all the Greeks, with the exception of the Spartans, won these spoils of war from the barbarians who dwell in Asia....

(The result of this victory was "a great and immediate change in Alexander's situation". Many cities made their submission. Alexander marched on and cleared the coast of Asia Minor as far as Cilicia and Phoenicia.)

Next he marched into Pisidia where he subdued any resistance which he encountered, and then made himself master of Phrygia. When he captured Gordium, which is reputed to have been the home of the ancient king Midas, he saw the celebrated chariot which was fastened to its yoke by the bark of the cornel-tree, and heard the legend which was believed by all the barbarians, that the fates had decreed that the man who untied the knot was destined to become the ruler of the whole world. According to most writers the fastenings were so elaborately intertwined and coiled upon one another that their ends were hidden: in consequence Alexander did not know what to do, and in the end loosened the knot by cutting through it with his sword, whereupon the many ends sprang into view....

(Then Alexander wanted to invade the interior. But Darius was marching upon the coast from Susa.)

Darius was encouraged by the many months of apparent inactivity which Alexander had spent in Cilicia, for he imagined that this was due to cowardice. In fact the delay had been caused by sickness, which some said had been brought on by exhaustion, and others by bathing in the icy waters of the river Cydnus. At any rate none of his other physicians dared to treat him, for they all believed that his condition was so dangerous that medicine was powerless to help him, and dreaded the accusations that would be brought against them by the Macedonians in the event of



Alexander young

their failure. The only exception was Philip, an Acarnanian, who saw that the King was desperately ill, but trusted to their mutual friendship. He thought it shameful not to share his friend's danger by exhausting all the resources of his art even at the risk of his own life, and so he prepared a medicine and persuaded him to drink it without fear, since he was so eager to regain his strength for the campaign. Meanwhile Parmenio had sent Alexander a letter from the camp warning him to beware of Philip, since Darius, he said, had promised him large sums of money and even the hand of his daughter if he would kill Alexander. Alexander read the letter and put it under his pillow without showing it to any of his friends. Then at the appointed hour, when Philip entered the room with the king's companions carrying the medicine in a cup, Alexander handed him the letter and took the draught from him cheerfully and without the least sign of misgiving. It was an astonishing scene, and one well worthy of the stage — the one man reading the letter and the other drinking the physic, and then each gazing into the face of the other, although not with the same expression. The king's serene and open smile clearly displayed his friendly feelings towards Philip and his trust in him, while Philip was filled with surprise and alarm at the accusation, at one moment lifting his hands to heaven and protesting his innocence before the gods, and the next falling upon his knees by the bed and imploring Alexander to take courage and follow his advice. At first the drug completely overpowered him and, as it were, drove all his vital forces out of sight: he became speechless, fell into a swoon, and displayed scarcely any sign of sense or of life. However, Philip quickly restored him to consciousness, and when he had regained his strength he showed himself to the Macedonians, who would not be consoled until they had seen their king....

(Alexander won the big battle that followed. Darius was forced to take flight, leaving behind his mother, wife, daughters and a luxurious tent with many treasures. Alexander behaved in a chivalrous way towards the women, respecting and protecting them contrary to the customs of his time.)

Alexander was also more moderate in his drinking than was generally supposed. The impression that he was a heavy drinker arose because when he had nothing else to do, he liked to linger over each cup, but in fact he was usually talking rather than drinking; he enjoyed holding long conversations, but only when he had plenty of leisure. Whenever there was urgent business to attend to, neither wine, nor sleep, nor sport, nor sex, nor spectacle, could ever distract his attention, as they did for other generals. The proof of this is his life-span which although so short, was

filled to overflowing with the most prodigious achievements. When he was at leisure, his first act after rising was to sacrifice to the gods, after which he took his breakfast sitting down.¹² The rest of the day would be spent in hunting, administering justice, planning military affairs or reading. If he were on a march which required no great haste, he would practise archery as he rode, or mounting and dismounting from a moving chariot, and he often hunted foxes or birds, as he mentions in his journals. When he had chosen his quarters for the night and while he was being refreshed with a bath or rubbed down, he would ask his cooks and bakers whether the arrangements for supper had been suitably made.

His custom was not to begin supper until late, as it was growing dark. He took it reclining on a couch, and he was wonderfully attentive and observant in ensuring that his table was well provided, his guests equally served, and none of them neglected. He sat long over his wine, as I have remarked, because of his fondness for conversation. And although at other times his society was delightful and his manner full of charm beyond that of any prince of his age, yet when he was drinking he would sometimes become offensively arrogant and descend to the level of a common soldier, and on these occasions he would allow himself not only to give way to boasting but also to be led on by his flatterers. These men were a great trial to the finer spirits among his companions, who had no desire to compete with them in their sycophancy, but were unwilling to be out-done in praising Alexander. The one course they thought shameful, but the other was dangerous. When the drinking was over it was his custom to take a bath and sleep, often until midday, and sometimes for the whole of the following day....

(For many years, Alexander continued his campaigns and further and further enlarged his empire. To make submission easier for his subjects, he proclaimed himself a God. He adopted more and more fully the customs and ways of living of the "barbarians", much to the displeasure of many Macedonians. Finally, he set his eyes upon India.)

Alexander was now about to launch his invasion of India. He had already taken note that his army was over-encumbered with booty and had lost its mobility, and so early one morning after the baggage waggons had been loaded, he began by burning those which belonged to himself and the Companions¹³ and then gave orders to set fire to those of the Macedonians. In the event his decision proved to have been more difficult to envisage than it was to execute. Only a few of the soldiers resented it: the great majority cheered with delight and raised their battle-cry: they gladly shared out the necessities for the campaign with those who needed them and then they helped

to burn and destroy any superfluous possessions with their own hands. Alexander was filled with enthusiasm at their spirit and his hopes rose to their highest pitch. By this time he was already feared by his men for this relentless severity in punishing any dereliction of duty. For example he put to death Menander, one of the Companions, because he had been placed in command of a garrison and had refused to remain there, and he shot down with his own hand one of the barbarians named Orsodates who had rebelled against him.¹⁴

(Certain portents, at first unsettling, were finally considered encouraging. But the campaign was likely to be arduous....)

This was certainly how events turned out. Alexander encountered many dangers in the battles he fought and was severely wounded, but the greatest losses his army suffered were caused by lack of provisions and by the rigours of the climate. But for his part he was anxious to prove that boldness can triumph over fortune and courage over superior force: he was convinced that while there are no defences so impregnable that they will keep out the brave man, there are likewise none so strong that they will keep the coward safe. It is said that when he was besieging the fortress of a ruler named Sisimithres, which was situated upon a steep and inaccessible rock, his soldiers despaired of capturing it. Alexander asked Oxyartes whether Sisimithres himself was a man of spirit and received the reply that he was the greatest coward in the world. "Then what you are telling me", Alexander went on, "is that we can take the fortress, since there is no strength in its defender."

(And, in fact, he did capture it by playing upon the other's fear.)

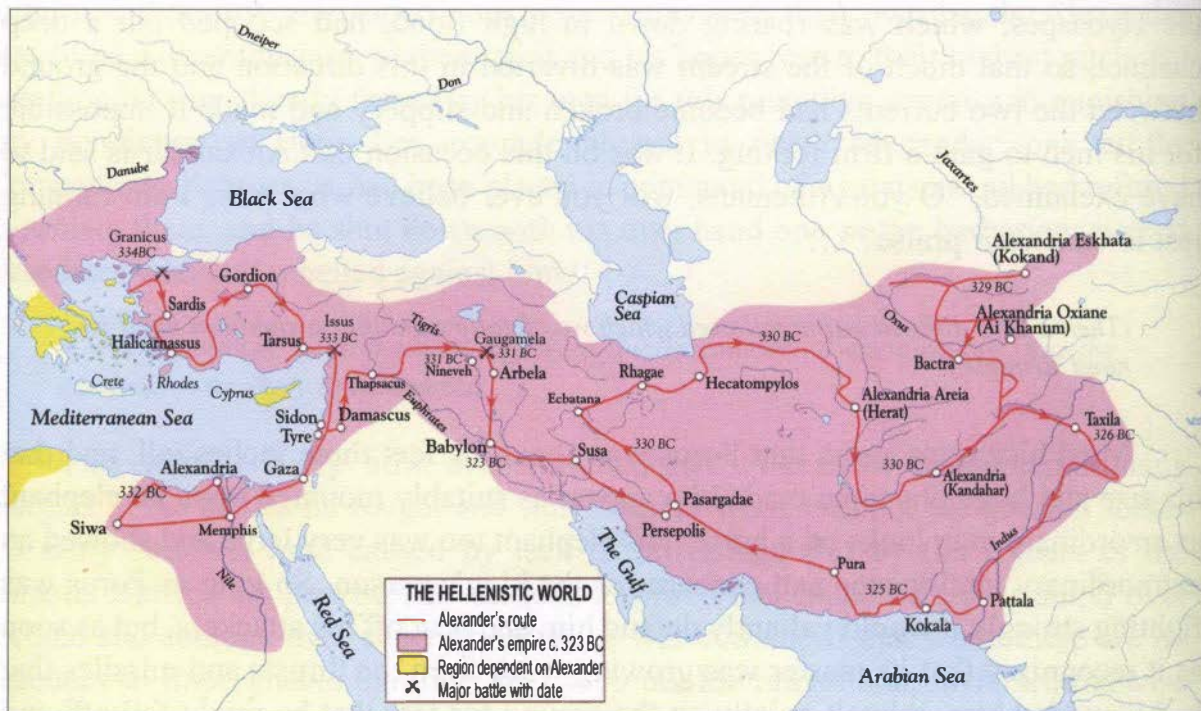
The events of the campaign against Porus are described in Alexander's letters. He tells us that the river Hydaspes flowed between the two camps, and that Porus stationed his elephants on the opposite bank and kept the crossing continually watched. Alexander caused a great deal of noise and commotion to be made day after day in his camp and in this way accustomed the barbarians not to be alarmed by his movements.¹⁵ Then at last on a stormy and moonless night he took a part of his infantry and the best of his cavalry, marched some distance along the river past the enemy's position, and then crossed over to a small island. Here he was overtaken by a violent storm of rain accompanied by tremendous bursts of thunder and lightning. Although he saw that a number of his men were struck dead by the lightning, he continued the advance and made for the opposite bank. After the storm

the Hydaspes, which was roaring down in high flood, had scooped out a deep channel, so that much of the stream was diverted in this direction and the ground between the two currents had become broken and slippery and made it impossible for his men to gain a firm footing. It was on this occasion that Alexander is said to have exclaimed, "O you Athenians, will you ever believe what risks I am running just to earn your praise?"...

(Then a very difficult battle followed which was finally won after a stubborn hand-to-hand struggle.)

Most historians agree that Porus was about six feet three inches tall, and that his size and huge physique made him appear as suitably mounted upon an elephant as an ordinary man looks on a horse. His elephant too was very large and showed an extraordinary intelligence and concern for the king's person. So long as Porus was fighting strongly it would valiantly defend him and beat off his attackers, but as soon as it recognised that its master was growing weak from the thrusts and missiles that had wounded him, it knelt quietly on the ground for fear that he might fall off, and with its trunk took hold of each spear and drew it out of his body. When Porus was taken prisoner, Alexander asked him how he wished to be treated. "As a king", Porus answered, and when Alexander went on to ask whether he had anything more to say, the reply came, "Those words, 'as a king' include everything." At any rate Alexander not only allowed him to govern his former kingdom, but he also added to it a province, which included the territory of the independent peoples he had subdued. These are said to have numbered fifteen nations, five thousand towns of considerable size, and innumerable villages. His other conquests embraced an area three times the size of this, and he appointed Philip, one of the Companions, to rule it as satrap....

Another consequence of this battle with Porus was that it blunted the edge of the Macedonians' courage and made them determined not to advance any further into India. It was only with great difficulty that they had defeated an enemy who had put into the field no more than twenty thousand infantry and two thousand cavalry, and so, when Alexander insisted on crossing the Ganges,¹⁶ they opposed him outright. The river, they were told, was four miles across and one hundred fathoms deep, and the opposite bank swarmed with a gigantic host of infantry, horsemen and elephants. It was said that the kings of the Gandaridae and the Praesii were waiting for Alexander's attack with an army of eighty thousand cavalry, two hundred thousand



Alexander's empire

infantry, eight thousand chariots and six thousand fighting elephants, and this report was no exaggeration, for Sandrocottus, the king of this territory who reigned there not long afterwards, presented five hundred elephants to Seleucus, and overran and conquered the whole of India with an army of six hundred thousand men.

At first Alexander was so overcome with disappointment and anger that he shut himself up and lay prostrate in his tent. He felt that unless he could cross the Ganges, he owed no thanks to his troops for what they had already achieved; instead he regarded their having turned back as an admission of defeat. However his friends set themselves to reason with him and console him and the soldiers crowded round the entrance to his tent, and pleaded with him, uttering loud cries and lamentations, until finally he relented and gave orders to break camp. But when he did so he devised a number of ruses and deceptions to impress the inhabitants of the region. For example he had arms, horses' mangers and bits prepared, all of which exceeded the normal size or height or weight, and these were left scattered about the country. He also set up altars for the gods of Greece and even down to the present day the kings of the Praesii whenever they cross the river do honour to these and offer sacrifice on them

in the Greek fashion. Sandrocottus, who was then no more than a boy, saw Alexander himself, and we are told that in later years he often remarked that Alexander was within a step of conquering the whole country, since the king who ruled it at that time was hated and despised because of his vicious character and his lowly birth...

(Wanting to see the outer Ocean, Alexander built rafts to travel on the river, landing here and there to take cities... When he finally returned from India, he brought back only a quarter of his fighting force. He was confronted with the abuses of many of those that he had put in charge of parts of his empire. Alexander became more and more like a "barbarian" and showed an increasing concern with the occult...)

Meanwhile Alexander had become so much obsessed by his fears of the supernatural and so overwrought and apprehensive in his own mind, that he interpreted every strange or unusual occurrence, no matter how trivial, as a prodigy or a portent, with the result that the place was filled with soothsayers, sacrificers, purifiers and prognosticators. Certainly it is dangerous to disbelieve or show contempt for the power of the gods, but it is equally dangerous to harbour superstition, and in this case just as water constantly gravitates to a lower level, so unreasoning dread filled Alexander's mind with foolish misgivings, once he had become a slave to his fears. However, when the verdict of the oracle concerning Hephaestion was brought to him,¹⁷ he laid aside his grief and allowed himself to indulge in a number of sacrifices and drinking-bouts. He gave a splendid banquet in honour of Nearchus, after which he took a bath as his custom was, with the intention of going to bed soon afterwards. But when Medius invited him, he went to his house to join a party, and there after drinking all through the next day, he began to feel feverish. This did not happen "as he was drinking from the cup of Hercules",¹⁸ nor did he become conscious of a sudden pain in the back as if he had been pierced by a spear: these are details with which certain historians felt obliged to embellish the occasion, and thus invent a tragic and moving finale to a great action. Aristobulus tells us that he was seized with a raging fever, that when he became very thirsty he drank wine which made him delirious, and that he died on the thirtieth day of the month Daesius.

Text from Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, translation by Ian Scott-Kilvert in *The Age of Alexander* (Penguin Books, 1983), p. 255 ff.

Notes

1. This fragrance was also regarded as a sign of his superhuman nature.
2. A contest which combined wrestling and boxing.
3. The date is uncertain. Alexander may have been about fourteen. Thessaly was the finest breeding-ground for horses in Greece.
4. The name of a famous breed of Thessalian horses which were branded on the shoulder with the sign of an ox's head.
5. The speed of change of money-values makes it futile to try to convert the asking price of thirteen talents into modern figures. It is enough to say that by the Greek standards of the time this was a very high price.
6. When Alexander was thirteen.
7. About the Oracle of Delphi, see foot-note n°1, p.62.
8. Modern estimates give totals of about 43,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry: about one quarter of these were the advance guard, which had already crossed to Asia. The cavalry included as many Thessalians as Macedonians, while the other Greek city-states contributed about 7,000 infantry and 600 cavalry. Besides the operational troops the expedition included reconnaissance staff and many other specialists — geographers, historians, astronomers, zoologists, etc.
9. There is a pun here: Paris was also known as Alexander.
10. May-June: this was the time for the gathering of the harvest.
11. Diodorus gives an account which is more plausible in military terms. According to this Alexander marched downstream under cover of darkness, found a suitable ford, crossed at dawn, and had most of his infantry over before the Persians discovered the new position.
12. That is, not reclining, as for the evening meal.
13. The Companions were the members of Alexander's own cavalry regiment.
14. Alexander had reorganised the army to include some oriental troops especially among the cavalry. His force for the invasion of India may have numbered some 35,000 fighting men.
15. Alexander could not get his horses to cross in the face of the elephants: the object of his repeated feints was that Porus should cease to send out the elephants to meet every threat.
16. The date was September 326 BC. Alexander did not, of course, reach the Ganges. The river where the troops mutinied was the Hyphasis: the upper Ganges was some two hundred and fifty miles further east. There is much dispute as to his real intentions and whether he planned to advance as far as the "eastern ocean".
17. Hephaestion: Macedonian General who was Alexander's closest friend. After his death in 324 BC, Alexander sent to inquire of the oracle of Ammon whether it was permitted to worship Hephaestion as a god. According to certain sources, the answer was that Ammon permitted sacrifice to be offered him as to a "hero" or demi-god, which pleased Alexander.
18. A "cup of Hercules" was a very large beaker, drained without heel-taps. It would imply in that case that the wine drunk by Alexander was poisoned.

Plutarch

Plutarch was one of the last classical Greek historians. He was born around AD 46 at Chaeronea in Boetia, and died sometime after AD 120. He was a student in the School of Athens, became a philosopher, and wrote a large number of essays and dialogues on philosophical, scientific and literary subjects (the *Moralia*). We know that he traveled widely in Egypt and went to Rome. Plutarch wrote his historical works relatively late in life, and his *Parallel Lives* of eminent Greeks and Romans is probably his best known and most influential work. As he states, his intention in the *Lives* was to write biography, not history as such, and this is reflected in the choice of his sources. He drew upon a very wide range of authorities, of quite unequal value. He felt his task was more to create an inspiring portrait than to evaluate facts. At any rate, in the case of Alexander the Great, his achievements, his influence on the world, and his personal character were certainly awe-inspiring. That much was clearly perceived by Plutarch, and he did manage to communicate it in the chapter on Alexander.

Ancient Greece and Alexander: A brief outline

A civilisation appears to have emerged on mainland Greece about 1600 BC. This came to be known as the Mycenaean civilisation. Feudal warrior leaders ruled their districts from hilltop fortresses, the principal fort being Mycenae itself. Minoan Crete exercised a strong influence in these early times; but, as Mycenaean Greece gradually acquired knowledge of the sea, power shifted in its favor. Feared as warriors, large mercenary detachments fought for Crete and Egypt, among other states.

The height of Mycenaean expansion and power was reached between 1500 and 1300 BC. Eventually Crete, the Cyclades, Rhodes, and Cyprus were annexed, and vigorous trade was established throughout the Mediterranean, even with the tribes of north and west Europe. Weakened by internal strife and wars in Asia Minor, Mycenae was overrun by invaders from central Asia toward the end of the 12th century BC.

After the Mycenaean period, Greece was invaded by Indo-European tribes from the north. The distribution of peoples in Greece before the city states made for little



unity, but they all took part in the Olympic Games. Greek colonies were established along much of the perimeter of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and Athens became the leading state after the Persian advance was halted in the 5th century BC.

Fifth-century Greece was dominated by the Athenians. The Acropolis was the ancient hilltop citadel of Athens, and its ruin still dominates the city today. Its buildings were constructed in the second half of the 5th century BC. The greatest was the Parthenon, the temple dedicated to the goddess Athena. Sparta, one of the city-states, had military ambitions and a well-trained professional army. Athens and Sparta fought together against Persian attacks, but afterwards became rivals. In the long Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) between Athens and Sparta, Athens was defeated by Sparta, and Athens lost its empire.

The city-states of Greece continued to fight between themselves and particularly against Sparta whose rule was very harsh. All the city states were much weakened by these constant battles and, despite a last effort to unite against the invader from Macedonia, Philip, they lost and thus Greece became at last unified under Macedonian rule, just before the birth of Alexander the Great in 356 BC.

State of the Civilised world in Alexander's time (around 330 BC)

For the Greeks of that time, civilisation was concentrated in the Mediterranean world. Besides Greece and its city states, there was the immense Persian Empire which embraced nearly all of the Middle East: Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, the Phoenician cities and finally Egypt were successively conquered by the Persians.

In the days of Alexander and Darius, no one would have thought that two centuries later Rome would be able to unify the Ancient World. It was then a small city without a good harbour and not much given to commerce. Nevertheless, two centuries after Alexander the Romans, having dominated all of Italy, had already conquered Greece and were on their way to take over and unify the Mediterranean world.

In India in 350 Bc Buddhism was flourishing. At the time of Alexander's death, the Mauryan dynasty was established (322 BC) and the first King of that dynasty, Chandragupta Maurya (322-298 BC), came closer to uniting India than had any earlier ruler. Only the extreme South escaped his domination.

What happened after Alexander

Alexander's sudden death meant that he had no time to consolidate his empire or to arrange for an orderly succession. His Macedonian generals fought among themselves. Political disunity, however, did not interfere with Alexander's vision of a commonwealth of peoples united by Greek culture. All the successor states were dominated by Greeks and by natives who imitated the Greek

way of life. And although the peasants and much of the urban population of the Middle East held fast to their native cultures and native languages, scholars, administrators, and businessmen all used Greek and were guided, to some degree, by Greek ideas and customs. This era in which the Middle East was permeated by Greek influence is known as the Hellenistic period (The Greeks called themselves Hellenes; Hellenistic means “Greek-like”). It ended politically in 30 BC, when Rome annexed Egypt, the last nominally independent Hellenistic state. But the cultural unity of the Middle East lasted far longer; it was broken only when the Moslems conquered Syria and Egypt in the seventh century AD.

A few dates

356 BC	— Birth of Alexander.
336 BC	— Alexander (aged 20) becomes king of Macedon following the assassination of his father Philip.
334 BC	— Alexander crosses the Hellespont into Asia.
332 BC	— Invasion of Egypt. Foundation of Alexandria.
331-328 BC	— Campaigns in Asia.
327 BC	— Invasion of India.
324 BC	— Return to Persia.
323 BC	— Death of Alexander.

Suggestions for further reading

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Sermon on the Mount

Introduction

Jesus Christ's' personality is indescribable. One cannot but be deeply attracted to this enigmatic, gentle, yet powerful figure. In the past, questions were raised as to whether his life is not mainly a fiction, a legend constructed around a much lesser personality. But today there seems to be a consensus that Jesus not only existed, but that he was truly as great as the accounts of his life portray him. Jesus has been described variously as a "true man of God", as the "Son of God", and even as what in India is called an Avatar. Whether or not Christ was quite similar to the person represented in the Gospels is perhaps not so important, for in any case what remains is his extraordinary influence on mankind.

How do we know about Jesus? Mainly through the Gospels. The word "gospel" (which means "good news") is used throughout the New Testament to describe the life and works of Jesus Christ as well as the contents of the Christian message. The coming of the Christ was considered the fulfilment of God's promise to mankind as foretold by the Prophets of the Old Testament; it is also viewed as the inauguration of a new epoch in the relation between God and man. The most relevant facts about Jesus Christ were preserved by oral tradition before being recorded. The written Gospels that have come down to us are based primarily on this oral tradition. The earliest Gospel, that of St. Mark, is thought to have been written between AD 65 and 70.

1. "Christ", a name given to Jesus, means "the anointed one", or "The Messiah", the expected Savior of the Jews.

There are four Gospels, those of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. The first three show many similarities. However, the Gospel according to St. John is quite different from the others. It seems to be more an interpretation than a record of the life of Jesus, and it makes implicit reference to certain ideals of religious philosophy current at the time. This last Gospel is thought to have been written at the end of the first century AD.

According to the Gospels, Jesus' public life was very short — a mere three years. So it is all the more amazing that Christ was able to set in motion what represents one of the major turns of human history. He spent the first thirty years of his life in Nazareth, a village of Galilee in Palestine. His father Joseph was a carpenter and Jesus became one in turn. One striking incident occurred when Jesus was about twelve years old (Luke 2: 41-51). On the occasion of a family trip, Jesus disappeared. After searching for three days, his anxious parents found him in the temple, deep in discussion with a group of religious scholars who were very much impressed by the knowledge and wisdom of this youth. When Jesus' mother, Mary, softly reprimanded him for causing them worry, Jesus answered enigmatically: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Mary did not fully understand, but, as the Gospel says, she quietly "kept all these things in her heart."

According to the accounts, something remarkable had happened to Mary even before Jesus was born. An angel had appeared to Mary to tell her that she would conceive a child through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1: 26-35). Shortly after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph took the infant to the temple to fulfill the Jewish rituals that follow the birth of a male child. An old and revered sage was in the temple that day. At the sight of the child he went into ecstasy, and made mysterious predictions about him. The sage expressed his gratitude to God for being allowed to see with his own eyes the Savior of Israel (Luke 2: 22-35). Whenever Mary appears in the Gospels she is shown as a most beautiful example of surrender to the Divine's will. For this reason she has rightly inspired profound devotion among Christians the world over. Before entering public life, Jesus went alone into the desert and fasted for forty days. There, Satan, the Lord of Falsehood severely tempted him, even offering him the kingdom of the world. Jesus resisted these temptations (Matt. 4: 1-12). Soon after, he selected a small group of young men, mostly manual workers, who would later be known as the Twelve Apostles.¹ With them and a growing band

¹ *Apostles*: the group of twelve men Jesus chose to be his special followers and helpers. The word "apostle" means "messenger". The twelve apostles were: Simon (called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew, the tax collector; James, son of Alphaeus; Thaddaeus; Simon the Patriot; and Judas Iscariot.

of followers, Christ traveled through Palestine over a period of three years. He performed miracles and delivered his message, often through parables.¹

It is indeed moving to see Jesus in action, as described in the Gospels. What tenderness and sweetness this handsome young man in the prime of his life lavishes on his fellow human beings, calling forth the best in them, pleading with them to understand the marvel of God's love and to respond to it! He is particularly kind to those who acknowledge their inner misery and ask for forgiveness. But at times he can be fearlessly harsh towards those who feel self-content, calling them "white-washed tombs", "hypocrites", and so on. Jesus' interaction is generally characterised by gentleness. What a wonderful thing it must have been to have those eyes of Christ, full of light, rest upon you and call you!

But the men of the world cannot bear to be told and shown their real worth. The increasing popularity of Jesus was a cause of great envy. Soon enough, the priests and Pharisees² were conspiring, and by skillfully manipulating the fickle moods of the crowd, they finally managed to have Jesus arrested. Jesus was taken before the priests, and when questioned declared that he was indeed the Messiah, the son of God. The priests found him guilty of blasphemy, a capital crime under Jewish law. He was then led before Pilate, the Roman Governor, who alone could pronounce the death sentence. Pilate asked Jesus whether he was the King of the Jews and Jesus did not deny it, but he said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Under Roman law, Jesus' claim to be King could merit the death sentence. Yet Pilate was reluctant. He brought Jesus before the Jewish chief priests and said, "I find no crime in him." But when the priests saw Jesus they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" "Shall I crucify your King?" asked Pilate. They answered, "We have no King but Caesar." Pilate relented and handed Jesus over to be crucified (John cc 18 & 19.) But as the Gospels tell us, Jesus rose from his tomb three days after the crucifixion. He spent forty more days among his disciples, giving his final teaching. Then, after a last admonition, he literally vanished ascending into the air.

Among the many inspiring sermons that Christ gave, the Sermon on the Mount is perhaps the most remarkable. In the Christian world, the scene of the Sermon on the Mount is one of the best known. According to St. Matthew (5: 1 to 7: 29), in whose Gospel we find the most complete account, a great multitude had assembled.

1. *Parable*: an allegorical story dealing with ordinary life from which a moral message or religious truth is taught.

2. *Pharisee*: one of a Jewish religious school of those times, marked by their strict observance of the law of Moses and other religious ordinances which had been added through the centuries. They were known to be more careful of the outward forms than the spirit of religion, and found the unconventional teachings of Jesus a threat. In modern English the word Pharisee has come to mean a self-righteous, hypocritical person.

Already Jesus was famous for his words and for his miracles. Expectations were high that he might be the Messiah so ardently awaited in Israel. We may well imagine the eagerness of the crowd when he began to speak. And then the surprise: what kind of words are these? In the harsh world of those days, where oppression, cruelty and revenge were the norm, Jesus demanded a radical change of consciousness, accompanied by a reversal of the accepted patterns of behaviour.

Those listening to him must have been taken aback by such words, spoken with calm authority. The style and tone of the whole sermon are those of a major pronouncement, a fundamental declaration.

In the Sermon on the Mount we can find the essential themes of the Christian message, such as the equality of all men before God, and the essential unity or brotherhood of mankind. Also strongly underlined is the significance of human life as a preparation for an afterlife in heaven, seen as a reward for having led a life dedicated to God. Hence pervading the text is the idea of a "Last Judgement" where everything will be put in its proper place and those chosen by God will enter the "Kingdom of Heaven". By "Kingdom of Heaven" Jesus was in effect referring to the true "Kingdom of God", which is to be experienced in another dimension, the spiritual realm. According to Jesus' teaching, the aim of life is to discover the kingdom of God within oneself, and thus become worthy to be accepted into the kingdom of heaven after this life.

And yet, we may ask, what is it that makes the Sermon on the Mount such an inspiring part of the religious literature of all times? Is it not the underlying message that God is not a distant and indifferent ruler, but rather that He is truly like a father, that He cares for everyone and everything, and that His love is all-encompassing and can be experienced in the intimacy of each human heart? Suddenly God becomes much closer to man. Even the numerous references to punishment do not really obscure — as they could have — the luminous message that is so predominant throughout this long passionate exhortation. Addressing a vast crowd, Jesus is obviously trying to speak to each individual present, calling each one to go within himself, to look at his life and, from that inner poise, to begin a different life altogether. What pervades the Sermon on the Mount and makes it so convincing is its call for utter truthfulness, for inner sincerity. How penetrating are these words:

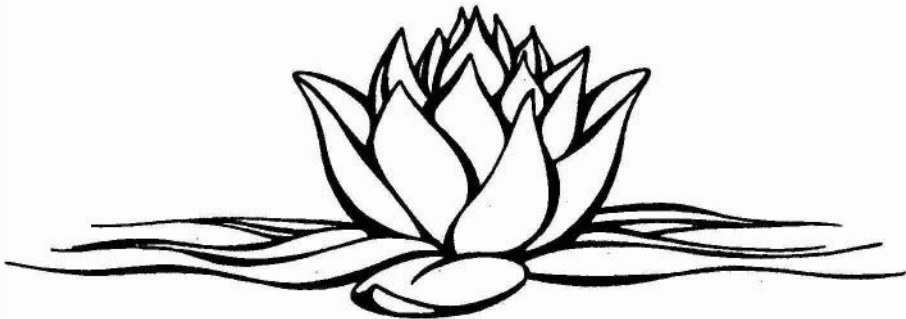
You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do

men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Such a message goes beyond the boundaries of any creed or religion: it is a universal message.

The Sermon on the Mount provides Christ's followers with, to use a Sanskrit word, a "Dharma", a law of discipline for growing out of the lower into the higher life. In it there is a rule of action and of relations with ones fellow human beings which tends to result in a spiritual companionship, a fellowship of those united by the teachings of the Divine Instructor. Jesus proposes a severe self-discipline: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." The Sermon's call for fraternity corresponds to a deep aspiration in mankind, even if it is difficult to achieve.

Indeed as we study the history of mankind we find that this Sermon has been a potent instrument for bringing the followers of Christ, whether from East or West, into some kind of living brotherhood. We know that persecutions have been suffered by those who dared to follow Christ; but the sufferings only helped to impress on the human mind the idea of making sacrifices for high ideals. By creating a mental soil fit for the growth of altruism, it sowed the seeds of love, sweetness and humanity in the hard, selfish human soil. In our own day, the influence of the message of Christ is to be found in the professed ideals of modern society such as humanitarianism and aspirations to liberty, equality and fraternity. These are the translations into the social and political sphere of the spiritual truth that Christ put forward to mankind. Such is the strength of the exceptional message of Jesus Christ that it has been the keystone of one of the most important turns in the evolution of humanity. If only for that, such inspired pieces as the Sermon on the Mount deserve to be read with utmost respect.





Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

“You have heard that it was said to the men of old, ‘You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that every one

who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. 'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery?' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

"Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven;

for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

“Beware of practising your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

“Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will

your Father forgive your trespasses.

“And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce



Painting by Rolf, Auroville

you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

"Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you. Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! So whatever you wish that men would do to



The Descent from the Cross (detail), by Italian artist Fra Angelico

you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

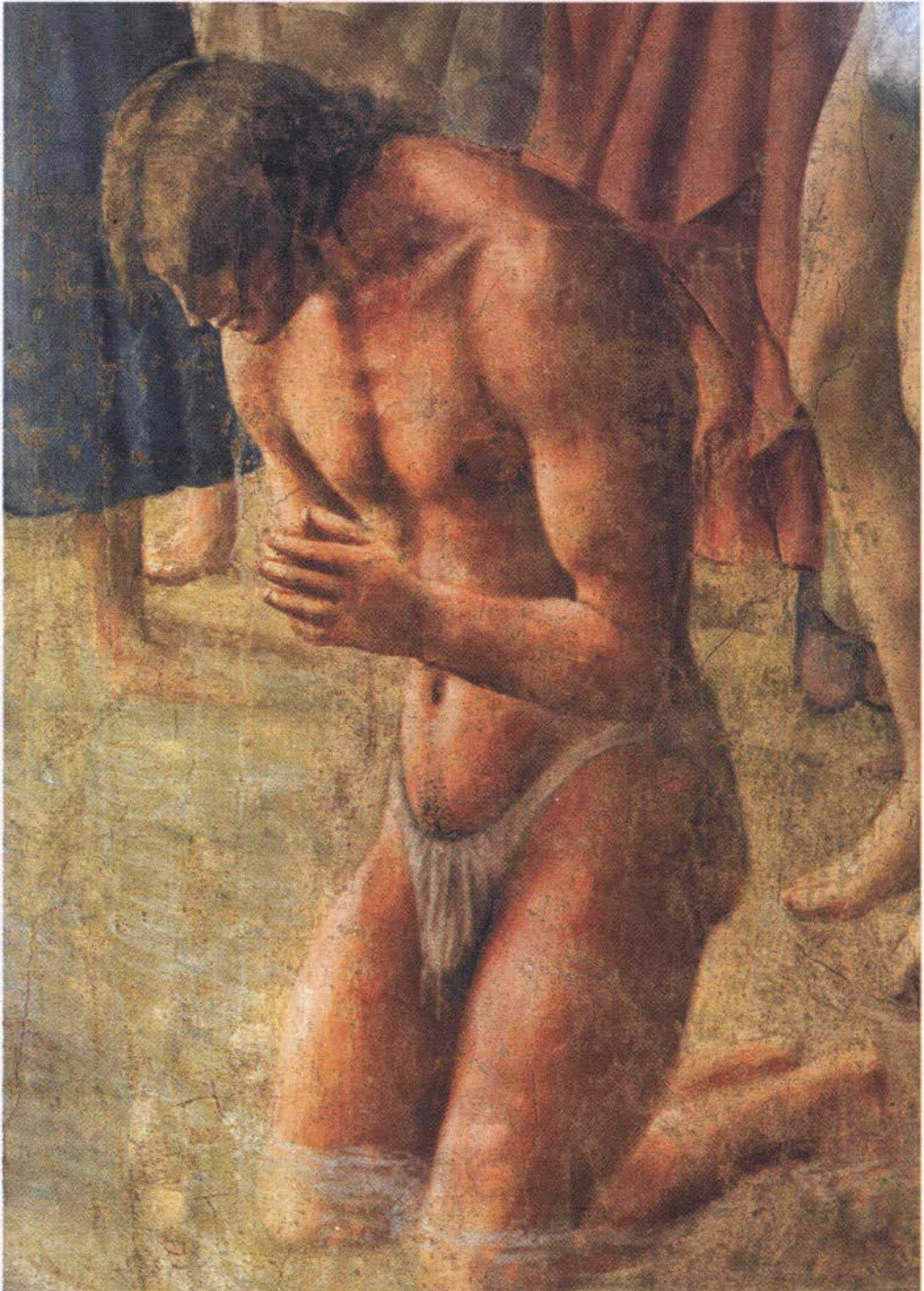
“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

“Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

“Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.”

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

St Matthew 5:1 to 7:29, from *The Holy Gospel*, Revised Standard Version
(Bombay; St Paul Publications, 1975) pp. 21-30



***The Baptism of the Neophytes*, (detail) fresco by the Italian painter Masaccio (1401-1428). Neophytes were new converts to Christianity.**

The Hebrews : Brief History

The importance to the world of the Hebrews is not primarily political. It comes from the fact that from 1200 to 400 BC, the Hebrews developed a religion that was unique among ancient peoples and that has given their history enormous significance to the modern world. Their religion has helped the Hebrews to maintain their identity, even to the present day, and it has provided the basis for three of the major religions of the modern world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The largest part of the Hebrew scriptures (called today the Old Testament by Christians) was written down by many different authors between about 1000 and 150 BC. It includes rules of law and of religious behaviour, legend, history, poetry, prophecy and apocalyptic visions. But it is given unity by the fundamental belief in an enduring relationship between God and his people. In the first books there are stories preserved by the Hebrews about the beginnings of their history. Recent archeological discoveries have confirmed the historical value of many of these stories but there is not enough evidence to have any certainty about the history of the Hebrews before 1000 BC. According to the scriptures, all Hebrews were descended from Abraham, who had migrated from Ur in Mesopotamia. His grandson, Jacob, had twelve sons who were believed to be the progenitors of the twelve tribes into which the Hebrews were later divided. After a spell in Egypt, first as invitees, later as slaves, the Hebrews were led through the Sinai Desert for forty years by Moses, chosen by Jahweh (God) to guide them out of Egypt. It is in the desert that Jahweh gave Moses the Law, which included the Ten Commandments and a long catalogue of religious, ethical and juridical regulations.

From the thirteenth to the eleventh century BC, the Hebrews established themselves in what is now known as Palestine, which they conquered from the Cannanites. The twelve tribes were then united in one kingdom with its capital at Jerusalem. After the first three kings (Saul, David, Solomon), there was secession and two kingdoms were created (Israel and Judah). After 750 BC, the kingdom of Israel disappeared forever, with the establishment of the Assyrian Empire. The smaller kingdom of Judah was able to survive, at times independent, at times a vassal kingdom, under the five empires that successively dominated the area (the Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Seleucid and Roman empires). By the second century AD, it had ceased to exist as an independent entity.

State of the known world at the time of Jesus Christ

The main characteristic of these times is the overwhelming importance of the Roman Empire. It encompassed the whole of the Mediterranean World including Gaul, Spain, Greece, Asia Minor and Egypt.

In India, two dynasties were ruling the larger part of the sub-continent: the Kushan Dynasty over north-western India, and the Andhra dynasty over central India.

In China, for already two centuries, the Han emperors had been ruling and they would continue for two more centuries. Under them, China was unified and relatively peaceful and prosperous.

A brief account of the early stages of Christianity

Pilate and the Pharisees thought that Jesus' crucifixion was the end of the matter. But the disciples remained faithful; for they were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead and had repeatedly appeared to his followers. The Resurrection gave them courage and confidence. Strong in their faith, they began to make converts among the Jews of Palestine and Syria. At this time they began to be called Christians.

The new religion was at first only a Jewish sect, ignored by the rest of the world and bitterly opposed by many Jews. At this critical point the conversion of Saul of Tarsus enabled Christianity to broaden its appeal. Saul, though Greek in education and Roman in citizenship, was a fiercely orthodox Jew who felt it was his duty to attack the Christians. In the midst of his campaign he suffered a physical collapse (in the Acts of the Apostles it is said he was blinded); on his recovery he announced his conversion to the faith he had opposed. He took the name of Paul and began preaching Christianity in the cities of Asia Minor and Greece, and eventually in Rome itself.

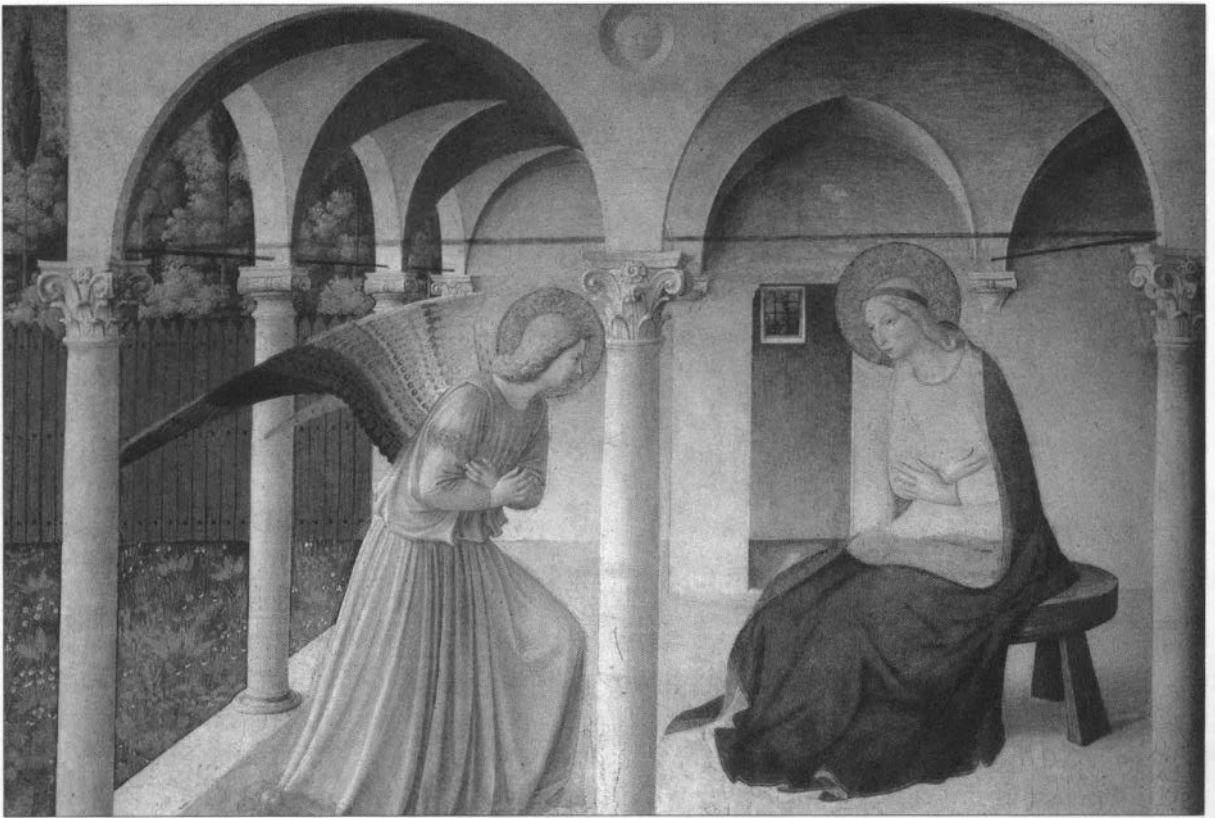
It was Paul who made Christianity attractive to the non-Jewish inhabitants of the Roman world. He persuaded early Christian leaders that many Jewish ritual practices could be abandoned; one could be a Christian without first having to become a Jew. He also explained Christian doctrine in terms that were understandable to men thinking in terms of Greek philosophy. In his Epistles, he began the work of building a Christian philosophy and theology that could appeal to men of all races.

Meanwhile, other disciples were spreading the faith outside Palestine. Peter, the leader of the group, probably went to Rome; very early tradition holds that he was head of the Roman Church and was martyred there. Churches were established in Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, and later in Gaul and in Spain. Stories of the sayings and doings of Jesus were collected and by the end of the first century began to take shape as the Gospels. To these were added the letters and Acts of the Apostles, and so the body of writings that eventually became the New Testament was formed.

Christianity was a vigorous, active faith at a time when the old state religions were losing their credibility and the mystery cults were not very precise about their doctrines. Its appeal was greatest among slaves and labourers from eastern Mediterranean countries. Like the Jews, they were a people apart who refused to take part in the public rituals honouring the state and the emperor.

Although this Christian refusal to worship was technically the equivalent of treason, the imperial government paid only intermittent attention to the sect in the first and second centuries. Most Christians belonged to the lower classes during this period, and the government took note of them only when there was political or social unrest (as in Rome under Nero or in Bithynia under Trajan). Even then, it persecuted Christians largely for political reasons; it made no attempt to wipe out the religion.

As a result the early Church had been able to develop its theology and to create a remarkable administrative system, modeled more or less on the administrative system of the Empire. It was important for the scattered members of the new faith to keep in touch with one another and to preserve uniformity of doctrine. The most respected members of each congregation became priests



***The Annunciation* : the angel announces to Mary that she is going to give birth to Jesus, fresco by the Italian painter and monk Fra Angelico (1395-1455)**

("elders"), and in each city one priest was designated as bishop ("overseer"). The bishop was responsible for supervising all the Christian congregations in his city and in the surrounding villages. By the end of the second century some bishops (precursors of the later archbishops) were recognised as leaders in their provinces. The systematic organisation of the early Church was an innovation in the ancient world and helped establish the supremacy of Christianity over the many other religions of the Empire. No similar system existed for the pagan or mystery cults; the priests of Jupiter in one city, for example, were entirely independent of those in other cities.

During the third century Christianity began to attract members from all classes. Earlier the educated classes of the Empire, broadminded by tradition, had been offended by the exclusiveness of the Christians, by their unwillingness to admit that there might be truth in other religions. But in the troubled third century — when economic decline, civil war, barbarian raids, and plague affected nearly every family and signaled confusion and decay in almost every aspect of civilised life — the very firmness of Christian beliefs began to make them attractive. Similarly, the unswerving morality of the Christians and their belief in the fatherly love of God offered security in a time of

confusion. Finally, the extreme other-worldliness of the Christians, which had seemed mere foolishness to all but the slaves and the poor in the affluent second century, fitted well with the intense desire in the chaotic third century for future happiness.

Christianity grew rapidly enough during the third century to alarm some of the emperors. They were annoyed by Christian lack of patriotism; these zealots would neither sacrifice to the emperor nor serve the state. This disregard of religion (it was even called “atheism”) was sure to rouse the anger of the gods. There were some severe and prolonged periods of persecution during the century. The worst and longest began under Diocletian, who hated any kind of disobedience, and reached a peak with Galerius. But this persecution does not seem to have reduced the number of Christians greatly, even in the East, where it was most intense.

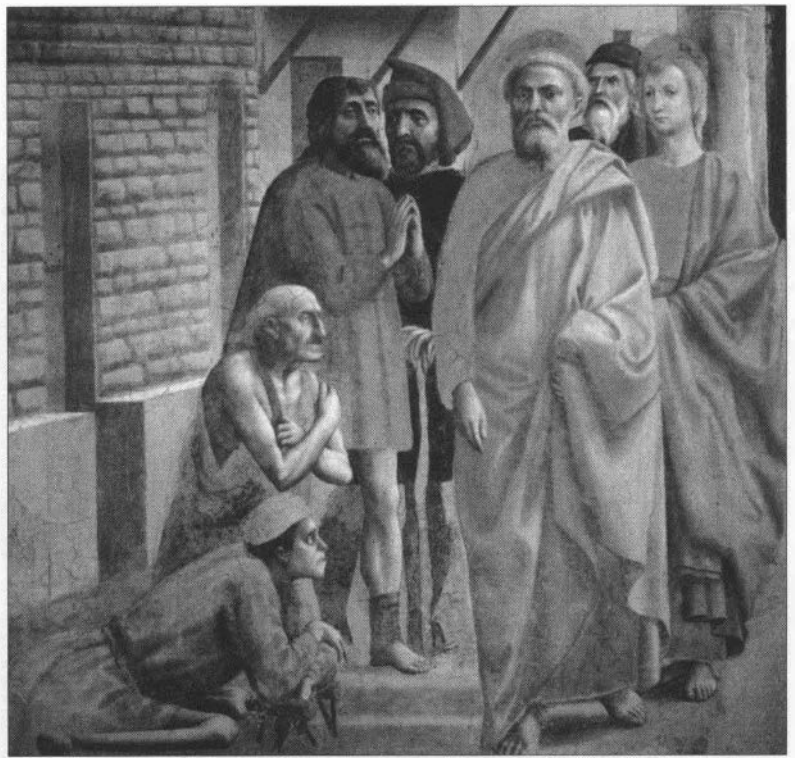
Diocletian, an innovator to the end, abdicated in 305 and became one of the few Roman emperors to die peacefully. But his elaborate provisions for an orderly succession were soon disregarded, and a series of civil wars put five different generals in control of various parts of the Empire. One of these generals was Constantine, who completely reversed Diocletian’s policy of persecuting Christians.

Scholars have long argued about the reasons for and the sincerity of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity. His mother is said to have been a Christian, and certainly he had some idea of the doctrines and the power of the religion before he became emperor. On the other hand, he had held command in Gaul, where Christians were neither numerous nor influential. Constantine cannot have believed that there were enough politically active Christians in his part of the Empire to make any difference in the struggle for power with rival generals. When he invoked the help of the Christian God, he must have been motivated by religious conviction, not by political expediency. Perhaps he thought that he was only tapping a new source of semi-magical power, but he surely did not think that he was gaining thousands of Christian recruits for his army. The decisive moment in Constantine’s religious life came when he was about to meet his strongest opponent for the imperial title at the battle of the Milvian Bridge (near Rome) in 312. Just before the battle Constantine is said to have had a vision of a cross in the sky surrounded by the words *in hoc signo vinces* (“in this sign shalt thou conquer”). Convinced that the Christian God had helped him to victory, he ordered his troops to carry Christian insignia from that time on. Soon, in 313, Constantine (and the remaining co-emperor who still ruled with him) issued the Edict of Toleration ending the persecution of Christians.

Constantine himself received baptism only on his deathbed, a not uncommon precaution at that time. But, though not a full member, he supported the Church throughout his reign, thus enabling it to become the dominant religion of the Empire during the fourth century.

*
* *

*St Peter healing the sick
with his shadow (detail),
fresco by the Italian
Renaissance painter
Masaccio (1401-1428)*



A few dates

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 27 BC-AD 14 | — Principate of Augustus over the Roman Empire. |
| 4 BC | — Birth of Jesus. |
| AD 14-AD 37 | — Principate of Tiberius. |
| AD 26 | — After having been a carpenter at Nazareth, Jesus begins his public life. |
| AD 30 | — Crucifixion of Jesus. |
| | — Resurrection and ascension. |
| | — Paul's conversion. |
| AD 45-47 | — Paul's first mission. |
| AD 58-60 | — Paul imprisoned by Felix, procurator of Judea. |
| AD 61-64 | — Persecution of Christians by Nero. |
| | — Death of Peter and Paul in Rome. |
| AD 60-100 | — The four Gospels. |

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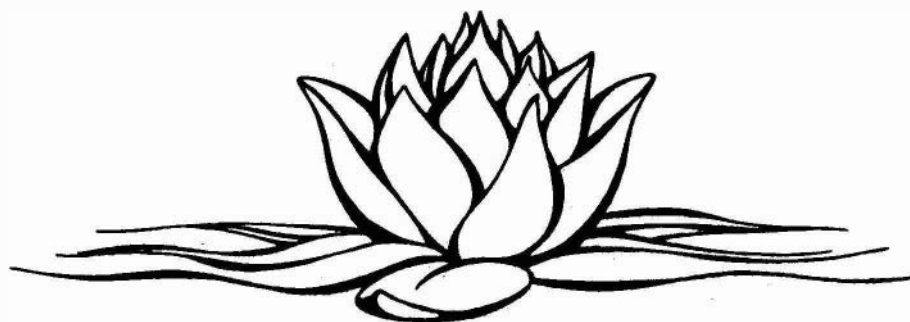
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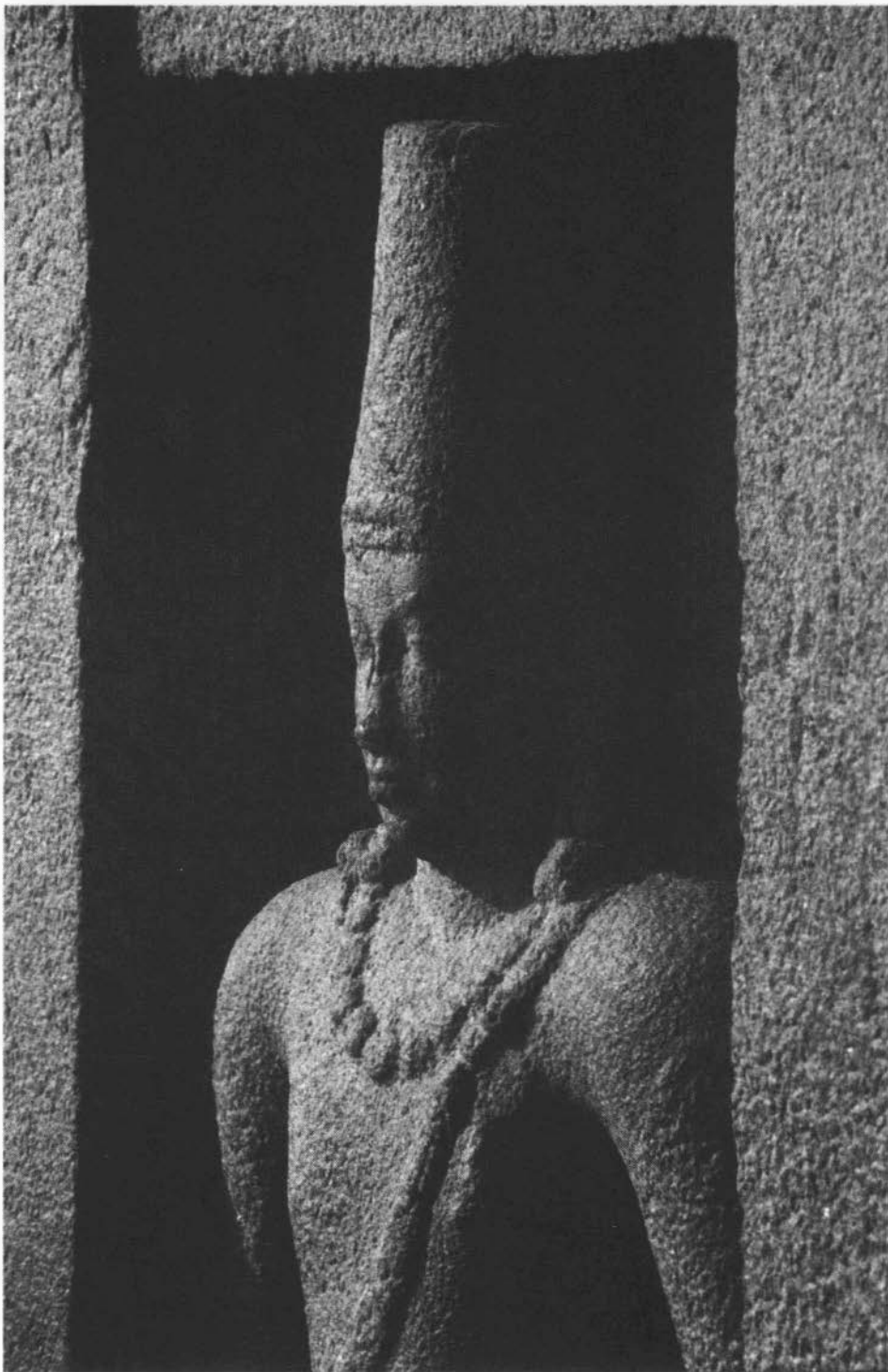
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King Narasimha (Mahabalipuram), photo O. Barot, Auroville

Pursuit of Goodness

(A Selection from *Nitishatakam* of Bhartrihari)

Introduction

Harmony, balance and equilibrium marked the ethos of Indian culture in ancient times, and indeed in varying degrees throughout the long and continuous history of India. From time to time, we see India returning to the theme of synthesis, and in every succeeding age the new synthesis assimilated larger and larger numbers of component elements. It is true that there have been pursuits of exclusive claims and counterclaims, there have also been trenchant oppositions between various schools of thought, and there have also been periods of intolerance and persecutions. But the dominant tendency towards mutual understanding, tolerance and comprehensiveness reasserted itself at the end of every period of conflict and battle. First, we see the earliest synthesis in the Veda. This was followed by the synthesis of the Upanishad. At a later stage, the Bhagavad Gita provided a new synthesis. The conflict that arose in Indian thought as a result of the growth and development of Buddhism was sought to be resolved by the composite philosophy that we find embedded in the Puranas and Tantras. Still later, when the conflict between the various schools of Vedanta became acute, we find in Sri Chaitanya a profound and subtle synthesis. At the same time, the coming of Islam in India provided a ground for the emergence of new trends of synthesis, represented by Guru Nanak, Akbar, and a number of Sufi saints and philosophers. Even today, as we stand at the head of a new age, we have in India an imperative drive towards an unprecedented synthesis, in which both East and West can meet in a symphonic harmony.

This turn and tendency towards synthesis requires to be understood if we are not to be baffled by the complex system of ethics that grew and tended to prevail in the Indian society. Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha, these four commonly understood words in the Indian aim of life have rich connotations, indicating that Indian ethics assigned due place to the pursuit of pleasure, kama, and of wealth or prosperity, artha, provided that they were adequately controlled and governed by the pursuit of the ideal law of the truth and the right and of the harmonic balance of the individual and collective development, dharma. At a still higher level, dharma was allowed to be surpassed by an unconditional imperative emerging from unfettered search for spiritual freedom and liberation, moksha. It is against the background of this synthetic aim of life that we can understand how the great representatives of Indian culture came to embody and manifest tendencies towards richness of material life, on the one hand, and overarching detachment and renunciation, on the other.

Bhartrihari, some of the extracts from whose writing we are presenting here, is one such representative of Indian culture. He was a king and yet a great lover and a consummate poet. The three groups of verses which have been attributed to him are devoted to three fundamental moods and motives of life. Each group consists of hundred verses, and all the three combined together have been called shatakatraya, three centuries. The first century of verses is devoted to the theme of human love and romance, the beauty and joy of sensuous pleasure and ecstasy. The Sanskrit word, shringara, expresses more meaningfully the opulence of ornament, restrained dignity, beauty and delight of love and romance. This century of verses is therefore aptly entitled, shringara shatakam. The second group of hundred verses is sometimes called "the century of morals", since the Sanskrit title is niti shatakam. But the Sanskrit word niti has a more complex sense; it includes not only morals but also policy and worldly wisdom, the rule of successful as well as the law of ideal conduct. In other words, the word niti includes in its scope observations of all the turns and forces determining the movements of human character and action. Niti shatakam can, therefore, be best translated as "the century of life". The third group of hundred verses attributed to Bhartrihari is entitled vairagya shatakam. It deals with the theme of disillusionment, detachment and renunciation, which are considered to be necessary pre-requisites of the pursuit of liberation, moksha.

The few verses which are presented in the following text have been taken from niti shatakam. Their main theme is the supremacy of learning and character. Readers will find in them the familiar ideas which are deeply interwoven with the

ethos of the Indian people. It is an acknowledged fact that India has laid a greater stress on the pursuit of knowledge rather than on the pursuit of power or wealth. The Indian mind considers purity to be worthier of reverence than anything else. That character is of supreme importance requires no debate in India. This value-system has grown up and developed from the life and teachings of numberless sages, seers, saints, thinkers, poets and writers. Today, when this value-system is passing through a difficult stage of transition, it would seem worthwhile to go back to some of the original texts in which this value-system has been described or discussed. This would enable us to ensure that the value-system relevant to the new age which must emerge, assimilates from the past all that is of fundamental importance to the growth of human personality towards excellence and perfection. It is in this context that a study of Bhartrihari may be considered to be directly relevant.

Of Bhartrihari's life, we do not know anything with definiteness. We do not even know when exactly he lived and flourished. There are conflicting opinions; some place him in the 1st century AD, while some others place him in the 6th or 7th century AD. According to some, he was a grammarian; according to some others, he was a king. According to one tradition, Bhartrihari was a brother of Vikramaditya. The famous Chinese traveller, Itsing, who came to India in the 7th century AD, speaks of Bhartrihari and his works of grammar. According to his account, Bhartrihari must have lived in the first half of the 7th century AD. But there are evidence to show that the grammarian Bhartrihari lived a few centuries earlier. According to some, Bhartrihari was a Shaiva Brahmana; according to some others, he was a Buddhist. There are also interesting tales that make Bhartrihari a disciple of Gorakhnatha, a Shaiva saint, whose dates, too, are quite uncertain.

According to a famous legend, Bhartrihari was a great king who loved his queen Pingala intensely. One day a visiting yogin offered to him a fruit which had special quality of eliminating old age and death. The king offered it to his beloved queen. The queen was, however, in love with somebody else, and she gave the fruit to him. He was, however, in love with another woman. He, therefore, gave the fruit to her. She thought that the best person who deserved that fruit was the king. She, therefore, offered that fruit to the king. When he received the fruit, the king was shocked, and when he came to know the full details of the story, he felt greatly disillusioned and renounced his worldly life to become a sannyasin. There might be some truth in this legend, and there seems to be a reference to this truth in one of the opening verses of niti shatakam, where Bhartrihari says:



*She with whom all my thoughts dwell, is averse,
She loves another. He whom she desires
Turns to a fairer face. Another worse
For me afflicted is with deeper fires.
Fie on my love and me and him and her!
Fie most on love, this madness' minister!*

Niti shatakam is extremely readable, and it is replete with smiles and epigrams. There are a number of translations of all the three shatakas in Hindi and English from the original Sanskrit. The original Sanskrit is relatively simple, although full of poetic beauty. Those who have some acquaintance with Sanskrit can be advised to read them in the original.

Bodies without mind

One who is devoid of poetry, music, and art is verily a beast, even though he does not grow horns and is without tail. He lives without eating grass, and that is the good fortune for the other beasts.

The praises of knowledge

Learning is verily the highest beauty for man; it is a treasure concealed and well protected; it places within his reach enjoyment, honour and happiness; it is an object of reverence even for those who are worthy of reverence; while journeying in strange lands it is a friend; and it is the highest deity; learning is honoured by kings, but not wealth; one destitute of learning is a beast.

Great and meaner spirits

For fear of obstacles, nothing is begun at all by persons who are low-spirited: ordinary people begin and stop when thwarted by difficulties; but the best of men, though repeatedly repelled by adverse circumstances, do not give up what they have undertaken.

Adornment

The hand is laudable when it gives in charity, the head when it submits at the feet of elders, the mouth when it utters the truth, arms when victorious with incomparable valour, heart, when it is quiescent with purity, ears when they listen to Vedic knowledge; these are the ornaments of high-souled persons, even though they have no wealth.

The ways of the good

Who would not adore and revere good men who rise by bending low with humility, evidence their own merits by extolling those of others, gain their ends by projecting extensive schemes for others, and censure with sweet patience and calm fortitude the calumniators, whose tongues are noisy with harsh syllables of accusation? Such are their marvellous moods, their noble ways, whom men delight to honour and praise.

Of benevolent persons

Trees become bent with the harvest of fruits; with newly-formed waters the clouds hang very low; good men with wealth become gentle; this is the nature of benevolent persons.

Wealth of kindness

The ear is graced by Vedic knowledge alone, and not by an ear-ring; the hand by charity, not by a bracelet; the body of beneficent people by kindness towards others, and not by sandal-paint.

The good friend

Wise people thus describe the characteristics of a true friend: he dissuades you from sin, urges you to good action, keeps your secrets, publishes your merits, does not forsake you in distress, and helps you in time of need.

The nature of beneficence

The sun causes sun-lotuses to expand without solicitation; the moon, though unasked, causes the moon-lotuses to bloom; the clouds yields water without being solicited; good people direct their efforts towards the good of others of their own accord.

The abomination of wickedness

Those are the noblest persons who, giving up self-interest, bring about the good of others; those that undertake a business for the sake of others, not inconsistent with their own good, are men of the middle order; those that stand in the way of the good of others for their own benefit are demons in a human form; but we know not what to call them that oppose the good of others without any advantage to themselves.

The Aryan ethic

Cut down desire, have recourse to patience, give up pride, fix not attachment on sinful deeds, speak the truth, follow the footsteps of the good, serve the learned, reverence those that deserve respect, conciliate enemies, do not parade your good qualities, preserve fame and sympathise with those in distress; this is the characteristic of the good.

Ornaments

Courtesy is the ornament of the great, temperate speech of the hero, peace and content of the learned, wrathlessness in hermits, noble expense of the rich, forgiveness of the strong, modesty of the righteous; but good character, which is the root of all these, is the highest ornament of all.

The immutable courage

Those of high soul remain immutable and do not deviate even by one step from the right, whether they are praised or condemned, whether fortune smiles on them or retreats from them, whether death is imminent or is still to come after thousands of years.

The virtue of courage of a heroic person cannot be obliterated though he be worried; though pointed downwards, the flame of fire does not point to the ground.



Saraswati (Halebid), photo Olivier Barot, Auroville

Character above all

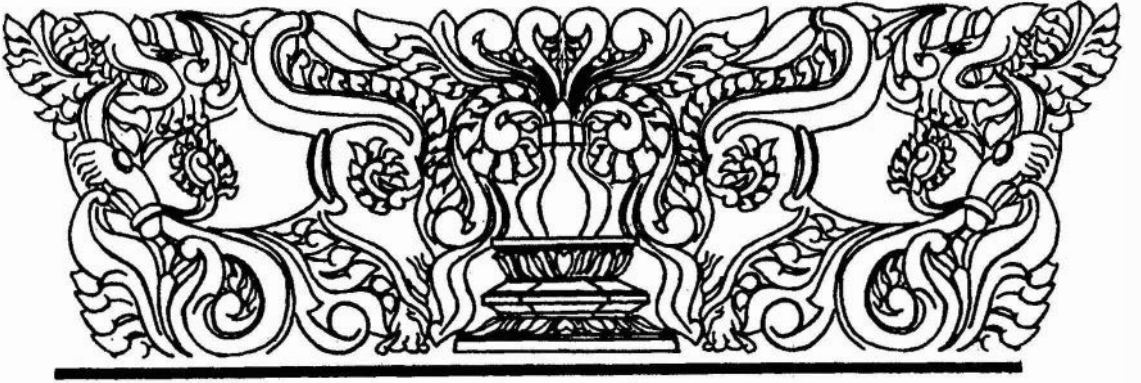
Better if this body falls from the lofty peak of a high mountain against some rugged surface and is shattered to pieces in the midst of rough rocks; better is the hand thrust into the fangs of a huge serpent of deadly bite; better falling into the fire; but not the wrecking of one's character.

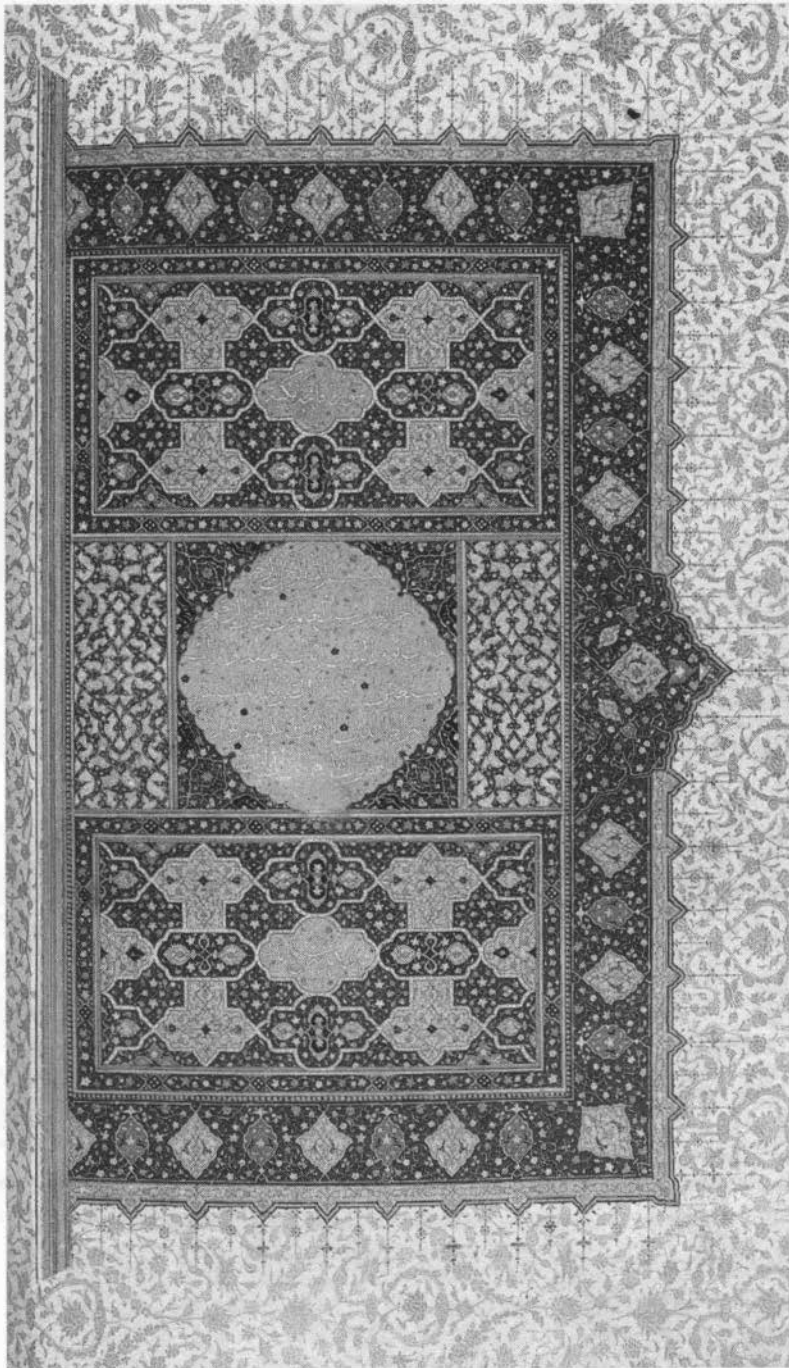
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One of the first *surah*, or chapters, of the Koran in a manuscript produced in the 16th century

Submission to the Will of the Supreme

Introduction

The Koran is a transcript of the messages revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. These revelations were supernaturally received, in states of trance, over a considerable number of years intermittently, the first dating from about AD 610, and the last shortly before Muhammad's passing away in AD 632.

The quintessence of Muhammad's teaching is that there is one God, who transcends the world, and that the aim of life is to commit oneself to Him and to submit to His will. The oneness and transcendence of God is stated again and again throughout the Koran.

*He is God;
there is no god but He.
He is the knower of the Unseen and the Visible;
He is the All-merciful, the All-compassionate.*

*He is God;
there is no god but He.
He is the King, the All-holy, the All-peaceable,
The All-faithful, the All-preserver,
the All-mighty, the All-compeller,
the All-sublime.
Glory be to God, above that they associate!*

*He is God,
the Creator, the Maker, the Shaper.
To Him belong the Names Most Beautiful.
All that is in the heavens and the earth magnifies Him;
He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.¹*

(LIX.30)

In the surah (chapter) called "Sincerity", the devout Muslim is admonished to say: "God is one God, the Eternal God. He begetteth not, neither is He begotten. None is equal to Him." (CXII) This is a part of the everyday prayers of every Muslim, repeated five times a day. The first surah of the Koran, "The Opening", is also an ingredient of the salat, the daily obligatory prayers:

*IN THE NAME OF GOD
THE COMPASSIONATE
THE MERCIFUL*

*Praise be to God, Lord of Creation,
The Compassionate, the Merciful,
King of Judgment-day:
You alone we worship, and to You alone
we pray for help.
Guide us to the straight path
The path of those whom You have favoured
Not of those who have incurred Your wrath,
Nor of those who have gone astray.²*

"God is the light of the heavens and the earth", declares the surah "Light":

*the likeness of His Light is as a niche
wherein is a lamp
(the lamp in a glass,
the glass as it were a glittering star)
kindled from a Blessed Tree,
an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West*

1. Translation of A. J. Arberry in *The Koran Interpreted*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1983).

2. Translation of N. J. Dawood in *The Koran*, (Penguin Books, 4th edn., 1983).

*whose oil wellnigh would shine,
even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light;
(God guides to His Light whom He will.)
(And God strikes similitudes for men,
and God has knowledge of everything.)¹*

(V.35)

According to the Koran, God is the creator of time and space, far beyond the grasp of the minds of men. He is supreme over all, nowhere and yet everywhere:

*To God belong the East and the West;
whithersoever you turn, there is the Face of God;
God is All-embracing, All-knowing.²*

(ii. 109)

God is transcendent, never incarnated, and yet, as the voice of God in the Koran declares:

*We indeed created man; and
We know what his soul whispers within him,
and We are nearer to him than the jugular vein.³*

(L.15)

And again:

God, there is no god, but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He will. His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious.⁴

(ii.256)

It is a far, far cry from the gods of pagan Arabia carved in stone who were worshipped until the voice of the Prophet swept across the land.

1. Translation of A. J. Arberry in *The Koran Interpreted*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1983)

2. Translation of A. J. Arberry, op. cit.

3. Translation of A. J. Arberry, op. cit.

4. Translation of A. J. Arberry, op. cit.

The life of a devout Muslim is entirely God-centered. Muhammad has taught him that at every instant of his life he should be aware that he has his being in God, that the Will of God moves him, that he comes from God and to God he will return.

Muhammad also taught the succession of the Messengers of God, down the ages, from Adam to his own person. Another constant theme in the Koran is the promise and warning of a Day of Judgment and Reckoning. This is what the surah called "The Winds" says:

By the dust-scattering winds and the heavily-laden clouds; by the swiftly-gliding ships, and by the angels who deal out blessings to all men; that with which you are threatened shall be fulfilled and the Last Judgment shall surely come to pass.¹

(L.i)

The belief in a final Day of Judgment is, of course, inextricably linked with a belief in a life after death in which the individual being is punished or rewarded for the life he has led. According to the Koran, the life led in accordance with the will of the Supreme is rewarded by heaven.

These three principles — the unity, oneness and transcendence of God; the Messengership of Muhammad (which entails belief in the messengers of the past); a Day of Judgment and a life after death in a paradise or a hell — are what all Muslims, of whatever persuasion, accept as the pillars of their faith. There are also certain subsidiary principles. Salat is the saying of prescribed obligatory prayers, five times a day (before sunrise, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset, in the evening). Sawm is fasting during the month of Ramadan from dawn to dusk. Hajj is making a pilgrimage, once in a lifetime, to the holy city of Mecca, for all those who can afford the journey. Zakat is making specified payment to the Common Treasury.

The faith of the Arabian Prophet is called Islam, which means the religion of the submission to the Will of God. The perfect submission to the will of the Supreme is not attained simply by observing the prescriptions laid down. Here is how the Koran describes the essence of the teaching of Muhammad:

*It is not piety, that you turn your faces
to the East and to the West.*

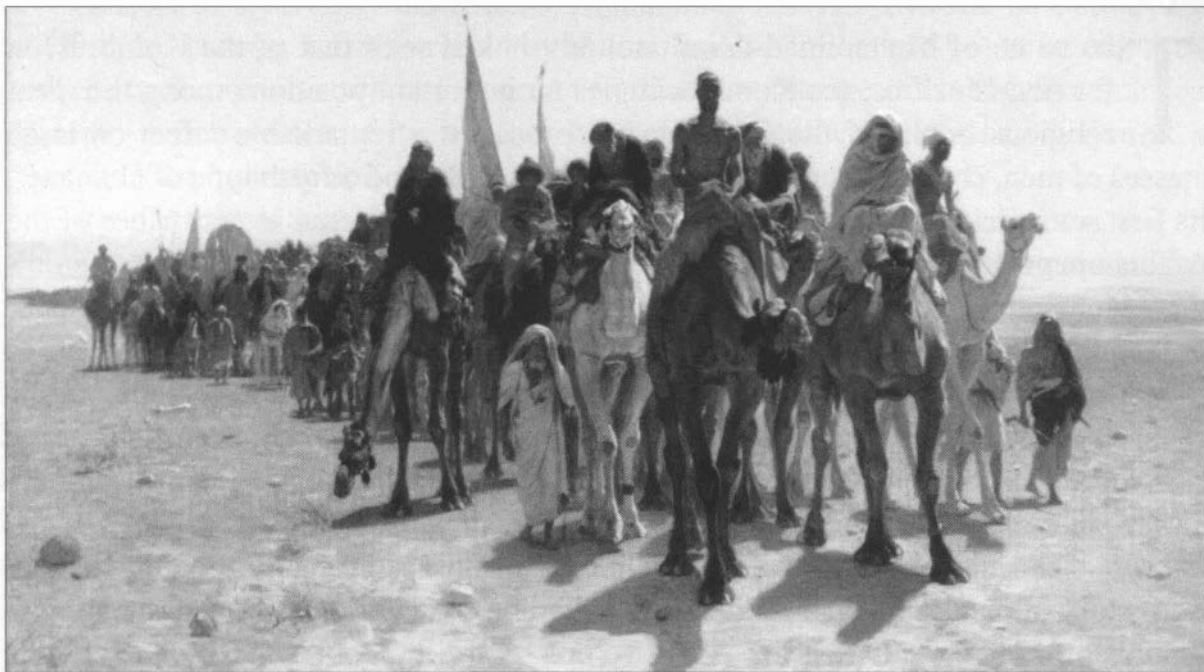
*True piety is this:
to believe in God, and the Last Day,*

¹ Translation of N. J. Dawood in *The Koran*, (Penguin Books, 4th edn., 1983).

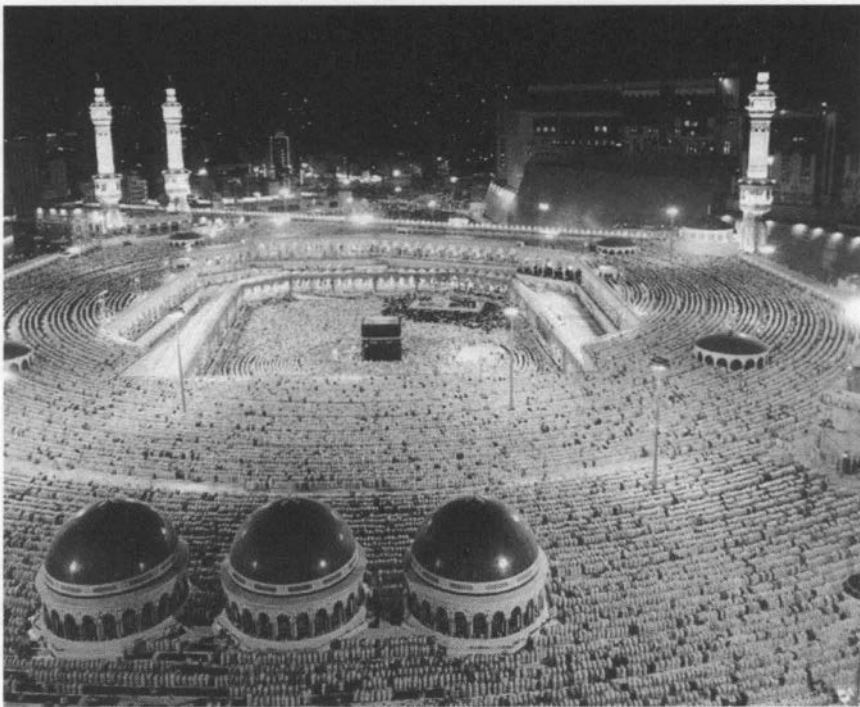
*the angels, the Book, and the Prophets,
to give of one's substance, however cherished,
to kinsmen, and orphans,
the needy, the traveller, beggars,
and to ransom the slave,
to perform the prayer [salat], to pay the alms [zakat].
And they who fulfil their covenant
when they have engaged in a covenant,
and endure with fortitude
misfortune, hardship and peril,
these are they who are true in their faith,
these are the truly godfearing.¹*

(ii. 172)

As we study the teaching of the Koran, we are struck by the sincerity and profundity of the Prophet Muhammad. We begin to ask how he developed and how he came in contact with the revelations. In the text that follows we have a brief description of the life and work of the Prophet.



1. Translation of A. J. Arberry in *The Koran Interpreted*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1983)



Mecca

The name of Muhammad is indissolubly linked with that of the Koran. Even for non-Muslims, the Koran occupies an important position among the great religious books of the world. It has produced a remarkable effect on large masses of men, creating a new phase of human thought and a fresh type of character. Its first immediate effect was to transform a few heterogeneous desert tribes of the Arabian peninsula into a nation of heroes.

Muhammad is for every Muslim the prophet to whom the Koran was revealed; in fact, the Koran is unique in being entirely transmitted through one man.

Muhammad could not read or write and had to use a scribe. Yet the Koran is considered the supreme classic of Arabic literature. What is even more remarkable is that the Koran enjoys the distinction of having been the starting point of a new literary and philosophical movement which has powerfully affected some of the finest and most cultivated minds all over the world. It is probably the only case in the history of mankind that an illiterate man can be considered as the founder of new schools of thought and art.

Originally the Koran was not a book but a strong living voice, a kind of authoritative proclamation, a series of admonitions, promises, and instructions

addressed to turbulent and largely hostile assemblies of untutored Arabs. The Koranic revelations followed each other at brief intervals and were at first committed to memory by professional remembrancers. During Muhammad's lifetime, verses were written on palm leaves, stones and any material that came to hand. An authorised version was finally established some twenty years after the Prophet's death. To this day, that version remains as the authoritative word of God for all the Muslims of the world.

Who was this man of such rare destiny? From an historical point of view, little is known about the youth of the Prophet, although many legends exist about it. In one of these legends we see Muhammad as a school-boy in the classroom. The teacher, for reasons undisclosed, asked each boy to take a living pigeon and to slaughter it in a place where no one can see him. Muhammad goes off with a bird and a knife like the other boys, but later returns with the pigeon still alive. The angry teacher asks Muhammad to explain his disobedience. The boy answers: "Sir, you asked me to slaughter this bird at a place where no one would be a witness to it and I tried, but wherever I went I found God present. I was never alone, hence I could not carry out your command." This simple but emphatic pointer to the Omnipresence of God left the teacher speechless.

In spite of such early indications, Muhammad led a normal life as a child. He lost both his parents and was raised by his uncle, Abu Talib. As a youth he travelled with the trading caravans from Mecca to Syria and at the age of twenty-five married Khadija, a rich widow fifteen years his senior. Meanwhile, he had acquired a reputation for honesty and wisdom.

People trusted him and called him al Amin: the One who was honest and in whom they could have confidence, a quality illustrated by the following story. The Kaaba, the most holy shrine of Arabia, was and still is, a solid cubic structure. In a corner of it is the most revered Black Stone, which is supposed to be the stone that the Angel Gabriel brought to Abraham from Paradise. By the days of Muhammad, ravages of time and the elements necessitated extensive repairs to the cubic masonry. The Black Stone was removed, the structure was renovated, and then a furious argument began about putting the sacred stone back into place. The honour was coveted by all. Who was to do it? They turned to Muhammad for judgment. He spread his cloak on the ground and told them to put the stone upon it. Then he invited all to take hold of the cloak, lift it up and carry the stone to the spot where it was to be placed. Thus they were all participants in the act and were equally honoured. An ugly clash was averted by his wisdom and tact, and the respect which people already

had for him was heightened. The story also gives an indication of the value Muhammad placed on a sense of brotherhood among the faithful.

We have one description of Muhammad by Ali, the cousin whom he adopted as his son and who married his daughter Fatima. Ali describes his adopted father as “of middle structure, neither tall nor short”. He further says, “His complexion was rosy-white, his eyes black; his hair, thick, brilliant, and beautiful, fell to his shoulders. His profuse beard fell to his breast... There was such sweetness in his visage that no one, once in his presence, could leave him. If I hungered, a single look at the Prophet’s face dispelled the hunger. Before him, all forgot their griefs and pains.”

As he approached forty he became more and more absorbed in religion. During the holy month of Ramadan he would withdraw, sometimes with his family, to a cave at the feet of Mount Hira, three miles from Mecca, and spend many days and nights in fasting, meditation, and prayer. One night in the year 610, as he was alone in the cave, the pivotal experience of all Muhammadan history came to him. Muhammad related the event as follows:

Whilst I was asleep, with a coverlet of silk brocade whereon was some writing, the angel Gabriel appeared to me and said, “Read!” I said, “I do not read.” He pressed me with the coverlet so tightly that I thought it was death. Then he let me go, and said, “Read!” ... So I read aloud, and he departed from me at last. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart. I went forth until, when I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, “O Muhammad! Thou art the messenger of Allah, and I am Gabriel.” I raised my head toward heaven to see, and lo, Gabriel in the form of a man, with feet set evenly on the rim of the sky, saying, “O Muhammad! Thou art the messenger of Allah, and I am Gabriel.”¹

Returning to his wife, Khadija, he informed her of the visions. We are told that she accepted them as a true revelation from heaven and encouraged him to announce his mission.

Thereafter he had many similar visions. Often, when they came he fell to the ground in a convulsion or swoon, perspiration covered his brow; even the camel on which he was sitting felt the excitement, and moved fitfully. Muhammad later attributed his gray hairs to these experiences. When pressed to describe the process of revelation, he answered that the entire text of the Koran existed in heaven, and that one fragment at a time was communicated to him, usually by Gabriel. Asked

1. Quoted by Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, Part IV *The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950).

how he could remember these divine discourses, he explained that the archangel made him repeat every word.

During the next four years Muhammad more and more openly announced himself as the prophet of Allah, divinely commissioned to lead the Arab people to a new morality and a monotheistic faith. Difficulties were many. Muhammad lived in a mercantile, sceptical community, which derived some of its revenues from pilgrims coming to worship the Kaaba's many gods. He opened his house to all who would hear him — rich and poor and slaves, Arabs and Christians and Jews; and his impassioned eloquence moved a few to believe. His first convert was his aging wife, the second his cousin, Ali, the third, his servant, Zaid, whom he had bought as a slave and had immediately freed; the fourth was his kinsman, Abu Bekr, a man of high standing. Abu Bekr brought to the new faith five other Meccan leaders; he and these became the prophet's "Companions", whose memories of him would later constitute the most revered traditions of Islam. Muhammad went often to the Kaaba, accosted pilgrims, and preached the one God. This was tolerated for a while, but eventually gave rise to much resentment among the traditional elements of the community. Muhammad's attack on idolatry threatened their income, and they rose against him and would have done him injury had not his uncle Abu Talib shielded him. Abu Talib would have none of the new faith, but his very fidelity to old ways required him to defend any member of his clan.

When Muhammad was fifty he had the misfortune to lose his wife Khadija, his most faithful supporter, as well as Abu Talib. Muhammad found himself in a difficult situation. Finally, after about three years, the persecutions of him and his followers became so intense that they had to flee Mecca. The date was 16 July, AD 622. This flight is a very important event for all Muslims, since later Kaliph Omar designated the first day of the Hegira (*hijra* — flight) as the official beginning of the Muhammadan era.

He went to a place named Yathrib that later took the name Medinat al-Nabi or "City of the Prophet". Compared with Mecca it was a climatic Eden, with hundreds of gardens, palm groves, and farms. As Muhammad rode into the town one group after another called to him, "Alight here, O Prophet! Abide with us!" — and even some caught the halter of his camel to detain him. He answered, "The choice lies with the camel; let him advance freely"; the advice quieted jealousy and hallowed his new residence as chosen by God. Where his camel stopped, Muhammad built a mosque and two adjoining homes — one for Sauda, one for Aisha, his new wives.

In leaving Mecca he had snapped many kinship ties; now he tried to replace

bonds of blood with those of religious brotherhood in a theocratic state. To mitigate the jealousy already rampant between the Refugees from Mecca and the Helpers or converts in Medina, he coupled each member of the one group with a member of the other in adoptive brotherhood, and called both groups to worship in sacred union in the mosque. In the first ceremony held there he mounted the pulpit and cried in a loud voice, "Allah is most great!" The assembly burst forth in the same proclamation. Then, still standing with his back to the congregation, he bowed in prayer. He descended the pulpit backward and at its feet he prostrated himself thrice, while continuing to pray. In these prostrations were symbolized that submission of the soul to Allah which gave to the new faith its name Islam — "To surrender", "To make peace" — and to its adherents the kindred name of *Muslimin* or Muslims — "The Surrendering Ones", "Those who have made their peace with God". Turning then to the assembly, Muhammad bade it observe this ritual to the end of time; and to this day it is the form of prayer that Muslims follow, whether at the mosque, or travelling in the desert, or mosqueless in alien lands.

During the ten years that Muhammad remained in Medina his authority created a civic rule for the town; and more and more he was compelled to address his time and inspirations to the practical problems of social organisation, daily morals, even to inter-tribal diplomacy and war. He himself planned sixty-five campaigns and personally led twenty-seven, which made him an able general. After several conflicts with the Meccans a ten-year truce was agreed upon, following which, in 629, the Medina Muslims, to the number of 2000, entered Mecca peacefully, and Muhammad and his followers made seven circuits of the Kaaba. The Prophet touched the Black Stone reverently with his staff, but led the Muslims in shouting, "There is no God but Allah alone!" Meccans were impressed by the orderly behaviour and patriotic piety of the exiles; several influential Meccans adopted the new faith; and some tribes in the neighbouring desert offered the pledge of their belief in return for the support of his arms. When Muhammad returned to Medina he felt that he was now strong enough to return definitely to Mecca.

The ten-year truce still had eight years to run, but due to an attack on a muslim tribe, Muhammad declared the truce void in AD 630. He gathered 10.000 men and marched to Mecca. Abu Sufyan, then the head man in Mecca, perceiving the strength of Muhammad's forces, allowed him to enter unopposed. Muhammad responded handsomely by declaring a general amnesty for all but two or three of his enemies. He destroyed the idols in and around the Kaaba, but spared the Black Stone, and sanctioned the kissing of it. He proclaimed Mecca the Holy City of Islam, and

سِتِّ كَبِيرٍ
تَقُولُونَ أَفَنُ
تَارِكُوا آلَ الْهَيْتِ
شَاكِرٌ مُجْنُونٌ

decreed that no unbeliever should ever be allowed — to set foot on its sacred soil.

His two remaining years — spent mostly at Medina — were a continuing triumph. After some minor rebellions all Arabia submitted to his authority and creed. His days were filled with chores of Government. He gave himself conscientiously to details of legislation, judgment and civil, religious, and military organisation. Till the end, he was a man of unassuming simplicity. The apartments in which he successively dwelt were cottages of unburnt brick, twelve or fourteen feet square, eight feet high, and thatched with palm branches; the door was a screen of goat or camel hair, the furniture was a mattress and pillows spread upon the floor. He was often seen mending his clothes or shoes, kindling the fire, sweeping the floor, milking the family-goat in his yard, or shopping for provisions in the market. His staple foods were dates and barley bread; milk and honey were occasional luxuries, and he obeyed his own interdiction of wine. Courteous to the great, affable to the humble, dignified to the presumptuous, indulgent to his aides, kindly to all but his foes — so his friends and followers describe him. He visited the sick, and joined any funeral procession that he met. He put on none of the pomp of power, rejected any special mark of reverence, accepted the invitation of a slave to dinner, and asked no service of a slave that he had time and strength to do for himself. Despite all the booty and revenue that came to him, he spent little upon his family, less upon himself.

His health and energy had borne up well over the years, but at the age of fifty-nine his health began to fail. A year previously he thought that he had been served poisonous meat, and since then he had been subject to strange fevers and spells. In the dead of night, Aisha reported, he would steal from the house, visit a graveyard, ask for forgiveness of the dead, pray aloud for them, and congratulate them on being dead. In his sixty-third year, these fevers became more exhausting. One night he complained of a headache. For fourteen days thereafter the fevers came and went. Three days before his passing he rose from his sickbed, walked into the mosque, saw Abu Bekr leading the prayers in his stead, and humbly sat beside him during the ceremony. On 7 June 632 after a long agony, he passed away.

Muhammad was surely one of the giants of history. He undertook to raise the spiritual and moral level of a people harassed into barbarism by heat and foodless wastes, and he succeeded more completely than any other reformer; seldom has any man so fully realised his dream. When he began, Arabia was a desert flotsam of idolatrous tribes; when he passed away it was a nation. He built a religion simple, clear and strong which in a generation marched to a hundred victories, in a century

to empire, and remains to this day a virile force through half the world.

Is there in Muhammad's message something that can be considered as central? What comes across most powerfully is a deep sense of the one God, omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent and correspondingly, the call for surrender to the divine will. The quality of faith, of surrender to the will of God, represents an eternal value in the history of mankind. For all those who believe in a supreme consciousness at the core of all that is, whatever name they may give to It, the example of faith and surrender set by Muhammad and his followers can only be inspiring.

For introduction, text and notes, our main sources have been the following books:

H. M. Balyuzi, *Muhammad and the Course of Islam* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1976).

Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Part IV: *The Age of Faith* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1950), pp. 155-205.

Joseph R. Strayer and Hans W. Catze, *The Main Stream of Civilization* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, INC., third edition, 1979).

A few dates

- c. 570 — Birth of Muhammad.
- 595 — Marriage to Khadija.
- c. 610 — Muhammad has a vision of Angel Gabriel who reveals to him that he is the messenger of God.
- 619 — Death of Khadija and of Abu Talib, his protector.
- 622 — Muhammad flees to Medina (Hegira).
 - Beginning of Muslim era.
- 630 — Muhammad and his followers take Mecca, which is proclaimed the Holy City of Islam.
- 632 — Muhammad passes away.



Pre-Islamic Arabia

In the year 565, Justinian, the great byzantine emperor, died master of a great empire. Five years later, Muhammad was born into a poor family in a country three-quarter desert, sparsely peopled by nomad tribes whose total wealth could hardly have furnished the sanctuary of St Sophia, the famous church of Constantinople. No one in those years would have dreamed that within a century these nomads would conquer half of Byzantine Asia, all Persia and Egypt, most of North Africa and be on their way to Spain. The explosion of the Arabian peninsula into the conquest and conversion of half the Mediterranean world is the most extraordinary phenomenon in medieval history.

Arabia is the largest of all peninsulas, geologically a continuation of the Sahara, part of the sandy belt that runs through Persia to the Gobi desert. *Arab* means arid. Around some grassy oases, the sands stretch in every direction. The nights cool down to 38 degrees Fahrenheit; the daily sun burns the face and boils the blood. Along the coast an occasional torrent of rain brings the possibility of civilisation, most of all on the western littoral, in the Hejar district with the cities of Mecca and Medina.

Aside from some petty kingdoms the political organisation of Pre-Islamic Arabia was a primitive kinship-structure of families united in clans and tribes. The Arab felt no duty or loyalty to any group larger than his tribe. Each tribe or clan was loosely ruled by a sheik chosen by its leaders from a family traditionally prominent through wealth, or wisdom or war.

In spite of all this disunity certain strong ties bound them together. The desert Arab had his own primitive and yet subtle religion. He feared and worshipped incalculable deities in stars and moons and the depths of the earth; now and then he offered human sacrifice; and here and there he worshipped sacred stones. Most of the tribes accepted a few common religious observances. There was a sacred period in each year, for example, when fighting was suspended and when many Arabs made a pilgrimage to the religious centre of Mecca; in Mecca, was the Kaaba, an ancient building full of images, including one of Christ. Here almost every god known to the Arabs could be worshipped. Here, too, was the most venerated object in the Arab world, the sacred Black Stone that had come from heaven. This habit of worshipping together at Mecca was the strongest unifying force in Arabia and one that was carefully preserved by Muhammad.

A brief account of how the Islamic civilisation developed

Muhammad left no very clear instructions about how his successor should be chosen. At his death there was confusion in the rank of his followers and rebellion on the part of recently converted tribes. The faithful finally decided to choose a caliph, or successor to the Prophet, who would act as both spiritual and political leader of Islam. The first caliph was Abu Bekr, one of the earliest and most pious of Muhammad's converts. Though he ruled only 2 years (AD 632-634), he succeeded in suppressing the revolt and completing the unification of Arabia.

Under his successor, Omar, (634-644) the great conquest began. In their first probing attacks against the Byzantine and the Persian states, the Arabs met such slight resistance that they soon turned to wars of conquest. By 649, i.e. seventeen years only after Muhammad's passing, the Arabs

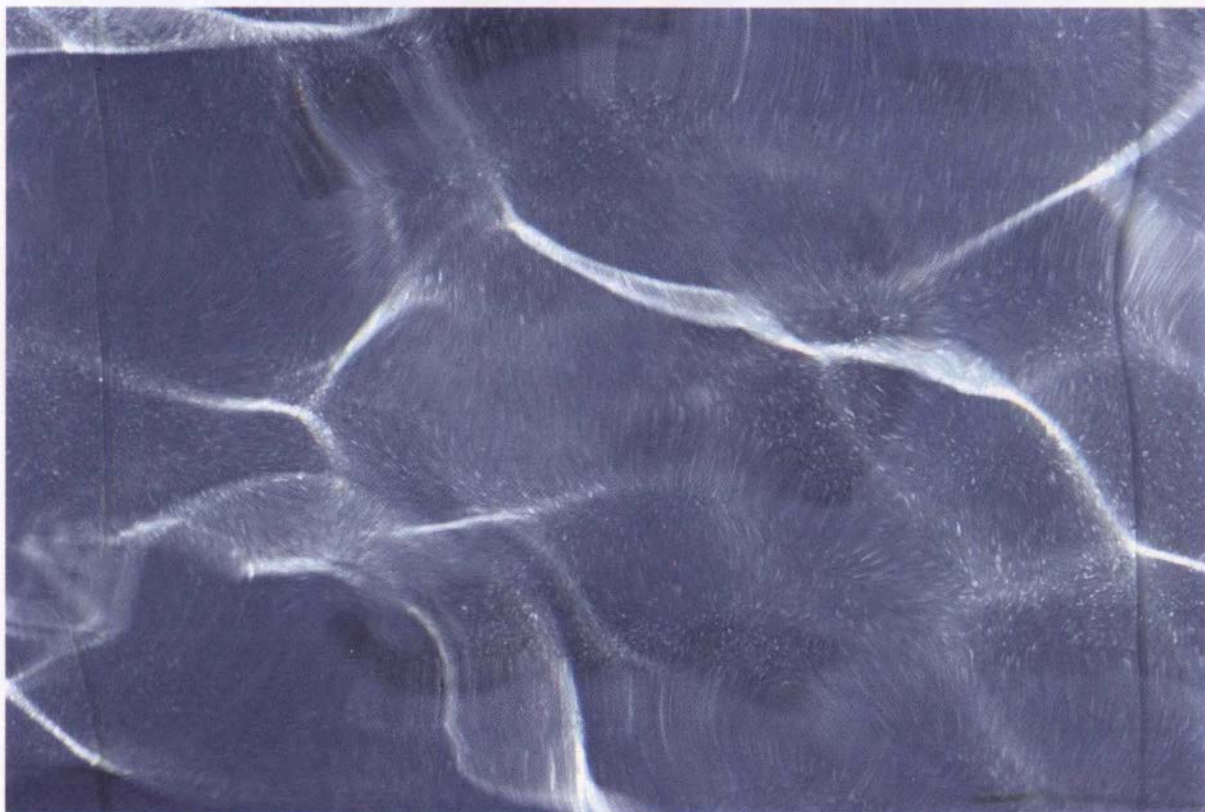
had conquered Syria, Armenia, Palestine and Egypt. Persia gave even less trouble and was completely in Arab hands by 642. Only the outbreak of civil war in Arabia slowed this first wave of conquest. It will be only after the foundation of the Ommiad dynasty that the entire Muslim world will again be united. Stability and prosperity made it then possible for the Arabs to undertake further conquest. By 750, the Arab empire was extended from the frontiers of India to North Africa and Spain.

At the same time, the old cultures of the conquered were eagerly absorbed by the quick-witted Arabs; (and the conquerors showed such tolerance that of the poets, scientists, and philosophers who now made Arabic one of the most learned and literary tongues in the world only a small minority were of Arab blood.) The result of this borrowing was not mere imitation but the flourishing of a rich and unique culture. For instance, the caliphs realised the wealth of Greek culture surviving in Syria, and soon translations were made into Arabic of many Greek books, especially in philosophy, medicine and mathematics and made possible further studies on these subjects. Baghdad became soon the centre of an intellectual effervescence which has been compared to the one of the European Renaissance. Much was learned from Persian and Jewish sources. Many ideas were borrowed from the Indians, notably the system of arithmetic notation, that we call Arabic figures. Their work in algebra was particularly impressive for they fashioned a whole mathematical discipline out of the few hints provided by their predecessors. Their contribution is recorded in the very word *algebra*, which is arabic. When the Muslims captured Samarkand (712) they entered into contact with the Chinese and learned from them the technique of beating flax and drying the pulp in thin sheets. Introduced to the Near East as a substitute for parchment and leather at a time when papyrus was not yet forgotten, the product received the name *papyros* — paper. The first paper manufacturing plant in Islam was opened at Baghdad in 794. The craft was then brought by the Arabs to Sicily and Spain (950), and thence passed into Italy (1154) and France.

The Arabs, so recently nomads or merchants, started to adapt art forms and traditions of the conquered countries, and soon a brilliant synthesis emerged, and from the Alhambra in Spain to the Taj Mahal in India, Islamic art developed a unique character and expressed the human spirit with a profuse delicacy difficult to surpass.

Suggestions for further reading

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Shadows in the water. Photo: Carlos, Auroville

Brahman is Real The World is a Lie

Introduction

Brahma satyam jaganmithya jivo brahmaiva naparah, “*Brahman alone is real, the universe is unreal, and the individual soul is no other than the Brahman*”: the call of the centuries that has held the soul of India in its spell. Some resounding echo of this powerful and impelling cry can still be heard in the remote corners of our own being — even though we belong to another age. The One Transcendent Reality, knowing which, all else seems unreal. The immobile and eternal Silence, the ineffable Peace, the Absolute Existence beyond all possibility of relation, of feature, of differentiation. The One that eternally is.

The innate power of this experience, the stamp of utter finality that it carries and the overwhelming convincingness of argument and analysis with which it has been presented, has not only dominated the mind of India for over a thousand years but has moulded the entire temperament of the race. There have been, no doubt, other experiences of great power; other philosophies that have left their deep and lasting impress, but the kind of conclusiveness, the absoluteness that this experience carries for the human mind has been difficult to match. The individual who embodied it and gave it an overwhelmingly powerful expression was Sri Shankaracharya: a name deeply revered, a remarkable personality that combined in itself the soul of an ardent and most intrepid spiritual seeker with a powerful and keen intellect, capable of the most subtle and incisive reasoning. The presence of these two elements is strongly reflected in his presentation of this experience in the form of a philosophy and of a practice or way of life.

Shankara, as he is habitually known, had a short span of life — barely 32 years. He lived towards the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century AD. Not much is known of his life but the little that comes down to us conjures, up a most interesting and striking image.

Shankara belonged to the simple, learned and hardworking Nambudri sect of Brahmins of Malabar and is supposed to have been born at Kaladi, on the West Coast of India. At a very early age, he went to a Vedic school, which was presided over by Govinda, who was himself a pupil of Gaudapada, the great masterly commentator of the Upanishads. Even as a very young boy, Shankara studied the Vedas with avidity and with delight. He was evidently a youthful prodigy of Vedic learning. He became a sannyasin in his eighth year — even before he knew of the world and its ways. We have, coming to life before our eyes, the picture of a young Brahmin boy, devoted to a life of learning and practice in one of those Vedic schools that flourished at the time. An ascetic from birth, so to speak, with a passion for truth — a sole passion in which all others were drowned.

The period of studentship over, he wandered as a teacher throughout India engaging in debate with the pandits and clarifying points of ambiguity in the interpretation of the scriptures and trying to wean them away from the rather sterile ritualistic practices which were then prevalent. In place of these practices, he attempted to show them a pathway to a yogic experience, and helped them to arrive at a rational understanding of the same.

During his travels throughout the length and breadth of the country, Shankara founded four mutts or centres of learning which exist to our day and enjoy deep veneration. These mutts are situated at Sringeri in modern Karnataka, at Puri in the East, Dwarka in the West and Badrinath in the Himalayas. In four giant strides, he covered the entire sweep of the land. In the temple at Badrinath, the priests even today come from the Nambudri sect of Brahmins from the South. Shankara himself is supposed to have disappeared in the eternal snows of the Himalayas at Kedar-nath, where a small monument by the side of the main temple marks this disappearance.

We have before us the image of a giant of a man — in learning and in the pursuit of truth — who stalks through the country on foot in an attempt to rejuvenate spiritual seeking and right intellectual understanding. At the time, Buddhism was still powerful and Jainism was at its zenith, Vedic rites were falling into disrepute and a sterile ritualism, accompanied by much futile discussion, was widespread. The way of devotion to God, connected with Puranic Hinduism, was becoming popular

in the form of festivals and temple-worship. In this setting, Shankara appears — to take the people back to the mystic and experiential truth of the Upanishads. According to him, this would offer a truer fulfilment to the individual than would the paths of Buddhism, Vedic ritualism and Bhakti. In this process, however, he assimilated into his work some of the elements present in these three forms. In the case of Buddhism there is even an obvious line of continuity, both in terms of the actual experience that underlies it and the intellectual form in which it is presented. In the history of Indian experience and thought, this fact is recognised and Shankara is sometimes seen as carrying forward the work done by the Buddha.

It would be interesting for us now to make a direct approach to the work of Shankara. We would like to get a living feel of the experience of the world and of existence as made by him and to understand the formulation of it in terms of a reasoned presentation. This presentation is made in the book, Vivekachudamani. Viveka means “discrimination”, Chuda is “crest” and Mani is “jewel”. The title literally means, “Crest Jewel of Discrimination”. This is a masterpiece among works treating of discrimination between the Real and the unreal. It contains 580 verses, of which a small selection is being given here to help us savour the experience embodied in this writing.

We must make mention of the other major works of Shankara. His commentary on the Brahma-sutras is considered a classic of Vedantic thought and literature. There are also his commentaries (or, Bhasya) on the ten principal Upanishads: Isha, Kena, Katha, Prasna, Mundaka, Mandukya, Aitareya, Taittiriya, Brihadaranyaka and Chhandogya; and the commentary on the Bhagavadgita. A large body of popular hymns and stotras too were composed by him.

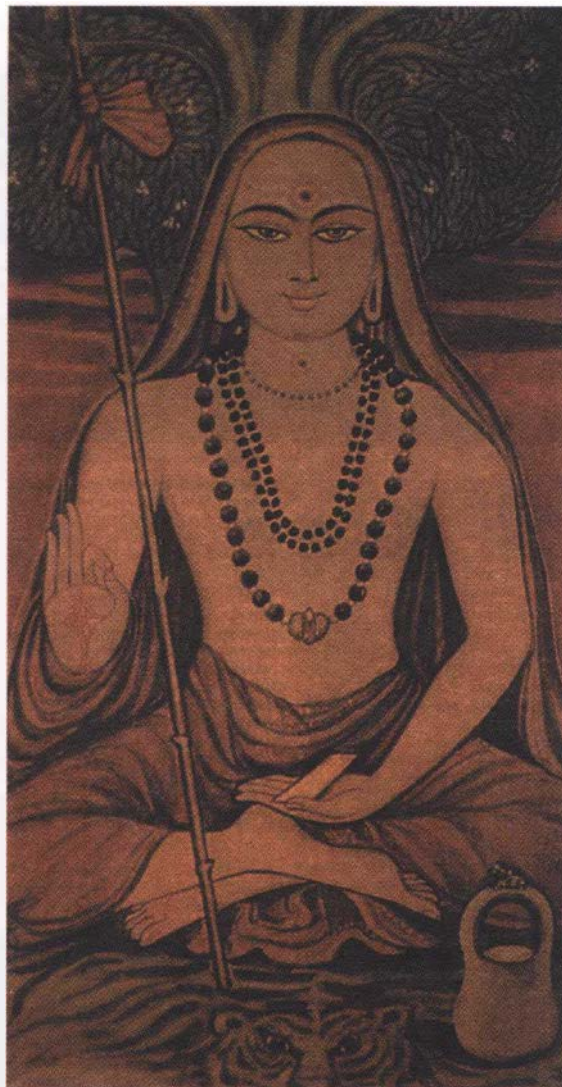
In our attempt to reach out to the experience made by Shankara, we must first see what was the nature of his quest and how did he formulate it. He states it thus: is there anything in experience which may be regarded as “foundational”? Something on which all rests or to which all returns? This quest led him to the discovery, by an intense intuitive experience, of a transcendent Reality, immutable and eternal, a sole existence beyond name and form, feature and relation, change and motion. The experience of this eternal immutability, a vastness beyond all possibility of differentiation, carried in it such a conclusive power of truth and absoluteness, that all the rest — our experience of the phenomenal world — seemed unreal by contrast. At best, a real-unreal world that is and is not but can in no satisfactory manner be “related” to this transcendent Reality — for this Reality, in its featureless stillness, is beyond all possibility of relation. Yet in some sense the world “is”: we live in it, we move

and act in it, have our being in it. Ourselves and the world appear as a mirage that is "somehow" super-imposed upon this Absolute Reality — something that floats, something that can be said to be real only as a dream is real to the person who sleeps and who, on waking, finds that it was only a dream. The state of "wakefulness" possesses a quantum and degree of reality which the dream does not. The dream "seems to be real" while it lasts; but, on waking, it vanishes. Similarly, when the individual has had the experience of the Real — in its pure transcendence and eternality — then the world of phenomena and his own separate self lose all "appearance" of reality that they possessed for him prior to such experience and he recovers his identity with the One Real. This disentanglement from appearance through just discrimination of the Real from the unreal leads to this supreme merger, which is the goal of all existence and human effort, and which brings with it ineffable Peace and completest fulfilment. Finally, even the individual is no more, for That alone is: the One Existence without a second, *ekam eva advitiyam*.

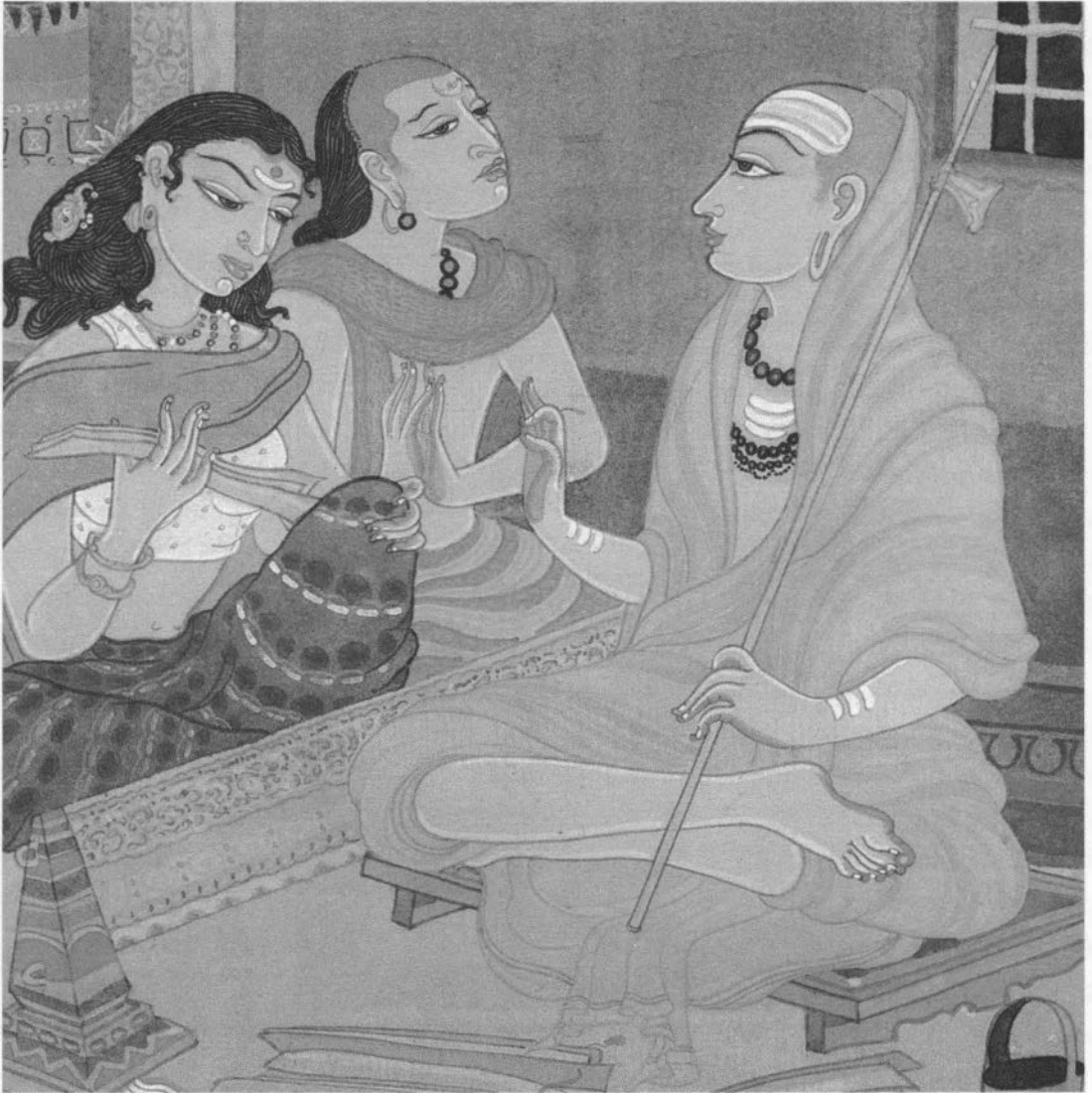
What Shankara thus communicates to us with such power and impact is his experience of the One shining transcendent Reality, besides which there is no other. But to us of the present times, imbued as we are with the sense of actuality that the phenomenal world represents for us, this experience holds us only for a brief spell. The manifest world is too real, too intense, extremely compelling, and the Transcendence seems to be a far cry — something even irrelevant, even unreal.

But if our quest is for knowledge that is not enclosed within any pre-conceived and given formulas, then we may find that Transcendence is also a part or, rather, the inescapable base of a total knowledge, which perhaps we have too hastily, rejected in our centuries of scientific effort. Science itself seems now to be groping toward some distant figure of It.

Shankara's philosophy has been called the philosophy of the Advaita, since it is based upon the monistic experience of the unqualified Reality, described as the One without a second. There are other philosophies which came after Shankara, and they maintained that the Ultimate Reality is qualified by inherent qualities or that it is dual or plural. They did not accept Shankara's view that the highest spiritual experience is that of the unqualified static and motionless Absolute. There has thus been a long history of conflict between Shankara's monism and other systems of philosophy such as qualified monism and dualism. In recent times, it has been held that the solution can come only through an integral experience in which the varieties of spiritual experience can be synthesised. But, even then, the experience of the Advaita is admitted as foundational.



Let, us now turn to some verses from Vivekachudamani for a taste of the original. The selection is brief and can only serve as an introduction: the joy of discovery that comes from reading the entire work is incomparable. The work itself is like a mighty orchestra, mounting up in a crescendo to the One Note, in the passion for Oneness that exhausts all other passions.



Shankaracharya debates with Mandana Mishra, a leading exponent of Mimamsa philosophy

- 1 I bow to Govinda, whose nature is Bliss Supreme, who is the *Sadguru*,¹ who can be known only from the import of all Vedanta, and who is beyond the reach of speech and mind.
- 6 Let people quote the scriptures and sacrifice to the gods, let them perform rituals and worship the deities, but there is no liberation without the realisation of one's identity with the Atman, no, not even in the lifetime² of a hundred Brahmas put together.
8. Therefore the man of learning should strive his best for liberation having renounced his desire for pleasures from external objects, duly³ approaching a good and generous preceptor, and fixing his mind on the truth inculcated by him.
17. The man who discriminates between the Real and the unreal, whose mind is turned away from the unreal, who possesses calmness and the allied virtues, and who is longing for liberation, is alone considered qualified to inquire after Brahman.
18. Regarding this, sages have spoken of four means of attainment, which alone being present, the devotion to Brahman succeeds, and in the absence of which, it fails.
- 19 First is enumerated discrimination between the Real and the unreal; next comes aversion to the enjoyment of fruits (of one's actions) here and hereafter; (next is) the group of six attributes; and (last) is clearly the yearning for liberation.
- 20 A firm conviction of the mind to the effect that Brahman is real and the universe unreal, is designated as discrimination (*viveka*) between the Real and the unreal.

1. In this opening stanza salutation is made to God (Govinda), or to the Guru, in his absolute aspect. It may be interesting to note that the name of Shankara's Guru was Govindapada, and the *stoka* is ingeniously composed so as to admit of both interpretations.

Sadguru — lit. the highly qualified preceptor, and may refer either to Shankara's own Guru or to God himself, who is the Guru of Gurus.

2. Lifetime, etc. — That is, an indefinite length of time. One day of Brahma (the Creator) is equivalent to 432 million years of human computation, which is supposed to be the duration of the world.

3. *Duly* — That is, according to the prescribed mode (Vide *Mundaka*, I, ii, 12)

- 124 Now I am going to tell thee of the real nature of the Supreme Self, realising which man is freed from bondage and attains liberation.¹
- 125 There is some Absolute Entity, the eternal substratum of the consciousness of egoism, the witness of the three states and distinct from the five sheaths² or coverings.
- 126 Which knows everything that happens in the waking state, in dream, and in profound sleep; which is aware of the presence or absence of the mind and its functions; and which is the background of the notion of egoism. — This is that.
- 127 Which Itself sees all, but which no one beholds, which illumines the intellect etc., but which they cannot illumine. — This is that.
- 128 By which this universe is pervaded, but which nothing pervades, which shining, all this (universe) shines as Its reflection. — This is That.
- 129 By whose very presence the body, the organs, mind and intellect keep to their respective spheres of action, like servants!
- 130 By which everything from egoism down to the body, the sense-objects, and pleasure etc., is known as palpably as a jar — for It is the essence of Eternal Knowledge!
- 131 This is the innermost Self, the primeval Purusa (Being), whose essence is the constant realisation of infinite Bliss, which is ever the same, yet reflecting through the different mental modifications, and commanded by which the organs and *Pranas* perform their functions.
- 132 In this very body, in the mind full of *sattva*, in the secret chamber of the intellect, in the Akasa known as the Unmanifested, the Atman, of

1. *Liberation* — *Kaivalya* literally means extreme aloofness.

2. *Five sheaths etc.* — Consisting respectively of *Anna* (matter), *Prana* (force), *Manas* (mind), *Vijnana* (knowledge) and *Ananda* (bliss). The first comprises this body of ours, the next three make up the subtle body (*sukshma Sarira*), and the last the causal body (*Karana-Sarira*). The Atman referred to in this *sloka* is beyond them all.

charming splendour, shines like the sun aloft, manifesting this universe through Its own effulgence.¹

- 133 The Knower of the modifications of mind and egoism, and of the activities of the body, the organs and Pranas, apparently taking their forms, like the fire² in a ball of iron; It neither acts nor is subject to change in the least.
- 134 It is neither born nor dies, It neither grows nor decays, nor does It undergo any change, being eternal. It does not cease to exist even when this body is destroyed, like the sky in a jar (after it is broken), for It is independent.
- 135 The Supreme Self, different from the Prakrti³ and its modifications, of the essence of Pure Knowledge, and Absolute, directly manifests this entire gross and subtle universe,⁴ in the waking and other states, as the substratum of the persistent sense of egoism, and manifests Itself as the Witness of the buddhi,⁵ the determinative faculty.
- 136 By means of a regulated mind and the purified intellect (*buddhi*) realise directly thy own Self in the body so as to identify thyself with It,⁶ cross the boundless ocean of Samsara⁷ whose waves are birth and death, and firmly established⁸ in Brahman as thy own essence, be blessed.
- 137 Identifying the Self with this non-Self — this is the bondage of man, which is due to his ignorance, and brings in its train the miseries of birth and death. It is through this that one considers this evanescent body as

1. This *sloka* gives a hint as to where to look for the Atman. First of all there is the gross body; within this there is the mind or "inner organ", of which *buddhi* or intelligence, characterised by determination, is the most developed form; within *buddhi* again and pervading it, is the causal body known as the Unmanifested. We must seek the Atman within this. The idea is that the Atman transcends all the three bodies, in fact the whole sphere of duality and materiality. The word "Akasa" often occurs in the Sruti in the sense of the Atman or Brahman.

2. *like the fire, etc.* — Just as fire has no form of its own, but seems to take on the form of the iron ball which it turns red-hot, so the Atman though without form, seems to appear as *buddhi* and so forth.

3. *Prakrti* — The Mother of the entire manifested universe.

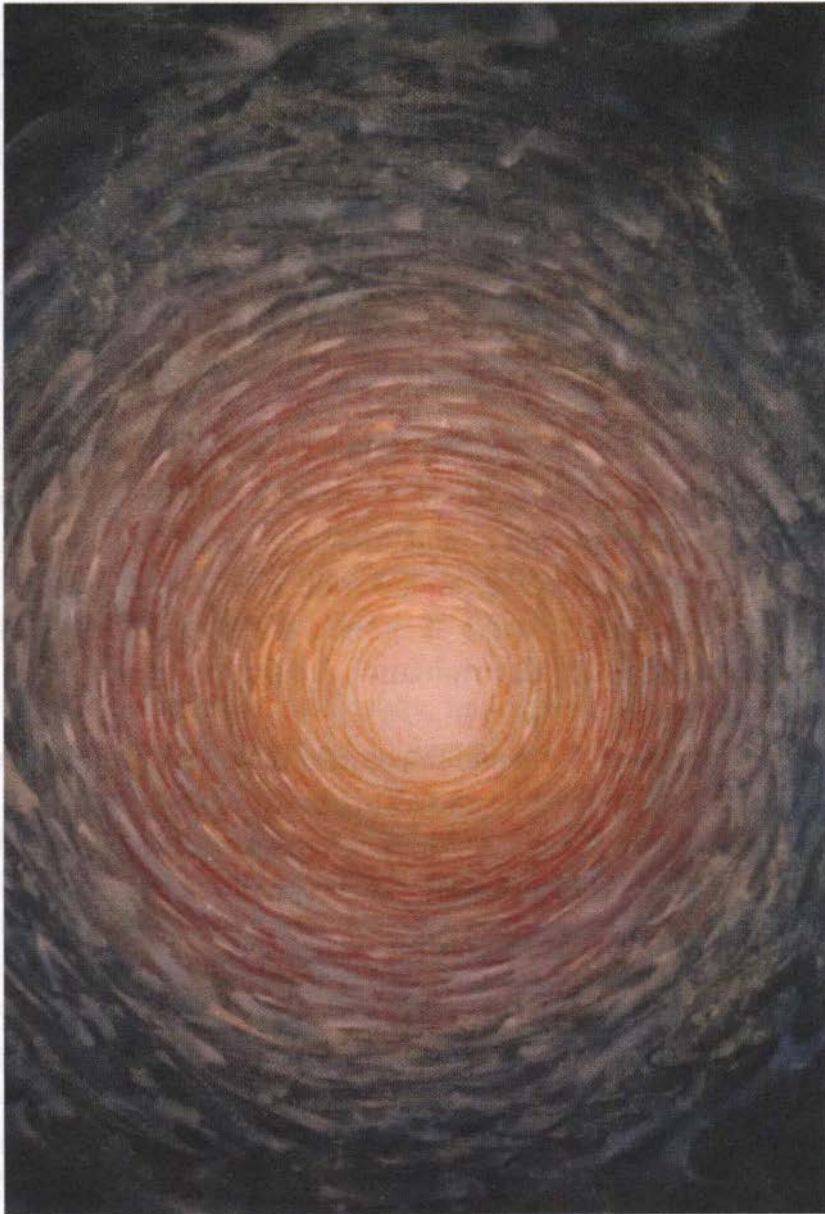
4. *gross and subtle universe* — The world of matter and thought.

5. *witness of the buddhi* — All actions that we seem to be doing are really done by the *Buddhi*, while the Self ever stands aloof, the only Absolute Entity.

6. *with it* — Instead of with the gross, subtle, and causal bodies.

7. *Samsara* — the entire relative existence.

8. *established etc.* — By our very nature we are ever identified with Brahman, but through ignorance we think we are limited and so forth.



Painting by Rolf, Auroville

real, and identifying oneself with it, nourishes, bathes,¹ and preserves it by means of (agreeable) sense-objects,² by which he becomes bound as the caterpillar by the threads of its cocoon.

- 138 One who is overpowered by ignorance mistakes a thing for what it is not: it is the absence of discrimination³ that causes one to mistake a snake for a rope, and great dangers overtake him when he seizes it through that wrong notion. Hence, listen, my friend, it is the mistaking of transitory things as real that constitutes bondage.
- 152 To remove his bondage the wise man should discriminate between the Self and the non-Self. By that alone he comes to know his own Self as Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, and becomes happy.
- 226 It is this Supreme Oneness which alone is real, since there is nothing⁴ else but the Self. Verily, there remains no other independent entity in the state of realisation of the highest Truth.
- 227 All this universe which through ignorance appears as of diverse forms, is nothing else but Brahman which is absolutely free⁵ from all the limitations of human thought.
- 228 A jar, though a modification of clay, is not different from it; everywhere the jar is essentially the same as the clay. Why then call it a jar? It is fictitious, a fancied name merely.
- 229 None can demonstrate that the essence of a jar is something other than the clay (of which it is made). Hence the jar is merely imagined (as separate) through delusion, and the component clay alone is the abiding reality in respect of it.

1. *bathes* — Keeps clean and tidy.

2. *sense-objects etc.* — He runs after sense-pleasures, thinking that will conduce to the well-being of the body, but these in turn throw him into a terrible bondage, and he has to abjure them wholly to attain his freedom, as the caterpillar has to cut through its cocoon.

3. *discrimination* — Between what is real (the Self) and what is not real (the phenomenal world).

4. *nothing else etc.* — Everything but the Self is an appearance merely.

5. *free etc.* — We imagine all sorts of things through ignorance, but Brahman is ever beyond them, and is the only Reality.

- 230 Similarly, the whole universe, being the effect of the real Brahman, is in reality nothing but Brahman. Its essence is That, and it does not exist apart from It. He who says it does is still under delusion — he babbles like¹ one asleep.
- 231 This universe is verily Brahman — such is the august pronouncement of the Atharva Veda. Therefore this universe is nothing but Brahman, for that which is superimposed (on something) has no separate existence from its substratum.
- 237 Hence whatever is manifested, viz. this universe, is the Supreme
- 238 Brahman Itself, the Real, the One without a second, pure, the Essence of Knowledge, taintless, serene, devoid of beginning and end, beyond activity, the Essence of Bliss Absolute — transcending all the diversities created by Maya or nescience, eternal, ever beyond the reach of pain, indivisible, immeasurable, formless, undifferentiated, nameless, immutable, self-luminous.
- 239 Sages realise the Supreme Truth, Brahman, in which there is no differentiation of knower, knowledge, and known, which is infinite, transcendent, and the Essence of Knowledge Absolute.
- 240 Which can be neither² thrown away nor taken up, which is beyond the reach of mind and speech, immeasurable, without beginning and end, the Whole, one's very Self, and of surpassing glory.
- 378 Fixing the mind firmly on the Ideal, Brahman, and restraining³ the external organs in their respective centres; with the body held steady and taking no thought for its maintenance; attaining identity with Brahman and being one with It — always drink joyfully of the Bliss of Brahman in thy own Self, without a break. What is the use of other things⁴ which are entirely hollow?

1. *like etc.* — That is, incoherently.

2. *neither etc.* — Because it is not a material thing, but one's very Self.

3. *restraining etc.* — That is, not allowing them to go outward.

4. *other things* — Pursued as means of happiness.

- 379 Giving up the thought of the non-Self which is evil and productive of misery, think of the Self, The Bliss Absolute, which conduces to liberation.
- 380 Here shines eternally the Atman, the Self-effulgent Witness of everything, which has the *buddhi* for Its seat. Making this Atman which is distinct from the unreal, the goal, meditate on It as thy own Self, excluding all other thought.
- 381 Reflecting on this Atman continuously and without any foreign thought intervening, one must distinctly realise It to be one's real Self.
- 382 Strengthening one's identification with This, and giving up that with egoism and the rest, one must live without any concern for them, as if they were trifling things, like a cracked jar or the like.
- 383 Fixing the purified mind in the Self, the Witness, the Knowledge Absolute, and slowly making it still, one must then realise one's own infinite Self.
- 464 There is only Brahman, the One without a second, infinite, without beginning or end, transcendent and changeless; there is not duality whatsoever in It.
- 465 There is only Brahman, the One without a second, the Essence of Existence, Knowledge, and Eternal Bliss, and devoid of activity; there is no duality whatsoever in It.
- 466 There is only Brahman, the One without a second, which is within all, homogeneous,¹ infinite, endless, and all-pervading; there is no duality whatsoever in It.
- 467 There is only Brahman, the One without a second; which is neither to be shunned² nor taken up nor accepted, and which is without³ any support; there is no duality whatsoever in It.

1. *homogeneous* — Admitting of no variation.

2. *shunned etc.* — Because it is the Self of all.

3. *without etc.* — Self-existent, being Itself the support of everything else.

- 471 High-souled Sannyasins¹ who have got rid of all attachment and discarded all sense-enjoyments, and who are serene² and perfectly restrained,³ realise this Supreme Truth and at the end⁴ attain the Supreme Bliss through their Self-realisation.
- 482 The majesty of the ocean of Supreme Brahman, replete with the swell of the nectar-like Bliss of the Self, is verily impossible to express in speech, nor can it be conceived by the mind — in an infinitesimal fraction of which my mind melted like a hailstone — getting merged in the ocean, and is now satisfied with that Essence of Bliss.
- 483 Where is the universe gone, by whom is it removed, and where is it merged? It was just now seen by me, and has it ceased to exist? It is passing strange!
- 484 In the ocean of Brahman filled with the nectar of Absolute Bliss, what is to be shunned⁵ and what accepted, what is other (than oneself) and what different?
- 485 I neither see⁶ nor hear nor know anything in This.⁷ I simply exist as the Self, the Eternal Bliss, distinct⁸ from everything else.
- 488 Blessed am I; I have attained the consummation of my life, and am free from the clutches of transmigration; I am the Essence of Eternal Bliss, I am Infinite — all through thy mercy!
- 489 I am unattached, I am disembodied,⁹ I am free from the subtle body, and undecaying. I am serene, I am infinite, I am taintless, and eternal.

1. *Sannyasins* — Lit. Those who struggle after realisation.

2. *serene* — Refers to the control of the mind.

3. *restrained*. — Refers to the control of the senses.

4. *end etc.* — They attain *videha mukti* or disembodied, absolute Freedom after the fall of their body.

5. *what... shunned etc.* — There is nothing besides the One Atman, and the aspirant is identified with That.

6. *see etc.* — All finite ideas have ceased.

7. *This* — State of Realisation.

8. *distinct etc.* — Being the eternal Subject, whereas all else are objects.

9. *disembodied etc.* — I have realised my identity with the Atman, and no longer consider myself as a body or mind.

- 490 I am not the doer, I am not the experiencer, I am changeless and beyond activity; I am the Essence of Pure Knowledge, I am Absolute and identified with Eternal Good.
- 491 I am indeed different from the seer, listener, speaker, doer, and experiencer; I am the Essence of Knowledge, eternal, without any break, beyond activity, limitless, unattached, and infinite.
- 492 I am neither this nor that, but the Supreme, the illuminer of both; I am indeed Brahman, the One without a second, pure, devoid of interior or exterior, and infinite.
- 493 I am indeed Brahman, the One without a second, matchless, the Reality that has no beginning, beyond such imagination as thou or I, or this or that, the Essence of Eternal Bliss, the Truth.
- 512 I am verily that Brahman, the One without a second, which is like the sky, subtle, without beginning or end, in which the whole universe from the Undifferentiated down to the gross body, appears merely as a shadow.
- 513 I am verily that Brahman, the One without a second, which is the support of all, which illumines all things, which has infinite forms, is omnipresent, devoid of multiplicity, eternal, pure, unmoved, and absolute.
- 514 I am verily that Brahman, the One without a second, which transcends the endless differentiations of Maya, which is the inmost essence of all, is beyond the range of consciousness, and which is Truth, Knowledge, Infinity, and Bliss Absolute.
- 515 I am without activity, changeless, without parts, formless, absolute, eternal, without any other support, the One without a second.
- 516 I am the Universal, I am the All, I am transcendent, the One without a second. I am Absolute and Infinite Knowledge, I am Bliss and indivisible.

- 564 As darkness, which is distinct (from sunshine), vanishes in the sun's radiance, so the whole objective universe dissolves in Brahman.
- 565 As, when a jar is broken, the space enclosed by it becomes palpably the limitless space, so when the apparent limitations are destroyed, the knower of Brahman verily becomes Brahman Itself.
- 566 As milk poured into milk, oil into oil, and water into water, becomes united and one with it, so the sage who has realised the Atman becomes one in the Atman.
- 569 Bondage and liberation, which are conjured up by Maya, do not really exist in the Atman, one's Reality, as the appearance and exit of the snake do not abide in the rope, which suffers no change.
- 573 Hence this bondage and liberation are created by Maya, and are not in the Atman. How can there be any idea of limitation with regard to the Supreme Truth, which is without parts, without activity, calm, unimpeachable, taintless, and One without a second, as there can be none with regard to the infinite sky?
- 574 There is neither death, nor birth, neither a bound nor a struggling soul, neither a seeker after liberation nor a liberated one — this is the ultimate truth.
- 575 I have today repeatedly revealed to thee, as to one's own son, this excellent and profound secret,¹ which is the inmost purport of all Vedanta, the crest of the Vedas — considering thee an aspirant after liberation, purged of the taints of this Dark Age, and of a mind free from desires.
- 576 Hearing these words of the Guru, the disciple out of reverence prostrated himself before him, and with his permission went his way, freed from bondage.

1. *secret* — The discrimination between the Real and the unreal which is hidden from the vulgar man.

- 577 And the Guru, with his mind steeped in the ocean of Existence and Bliss Absolute, roamed, verily purifying the whole world — all differentiating ideas banished from his mind.
- 578 Thus by way of a dialogue between the Teacher and the disciple, has the nature of the Atman been ascertained for the easy comprehension of seekers after liberation.

Extracts from *Vivekachudamani* of Sri Shankaracharya, text in Devanagari with English translation, notes and Index, by Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974).

Suggestions for further reading

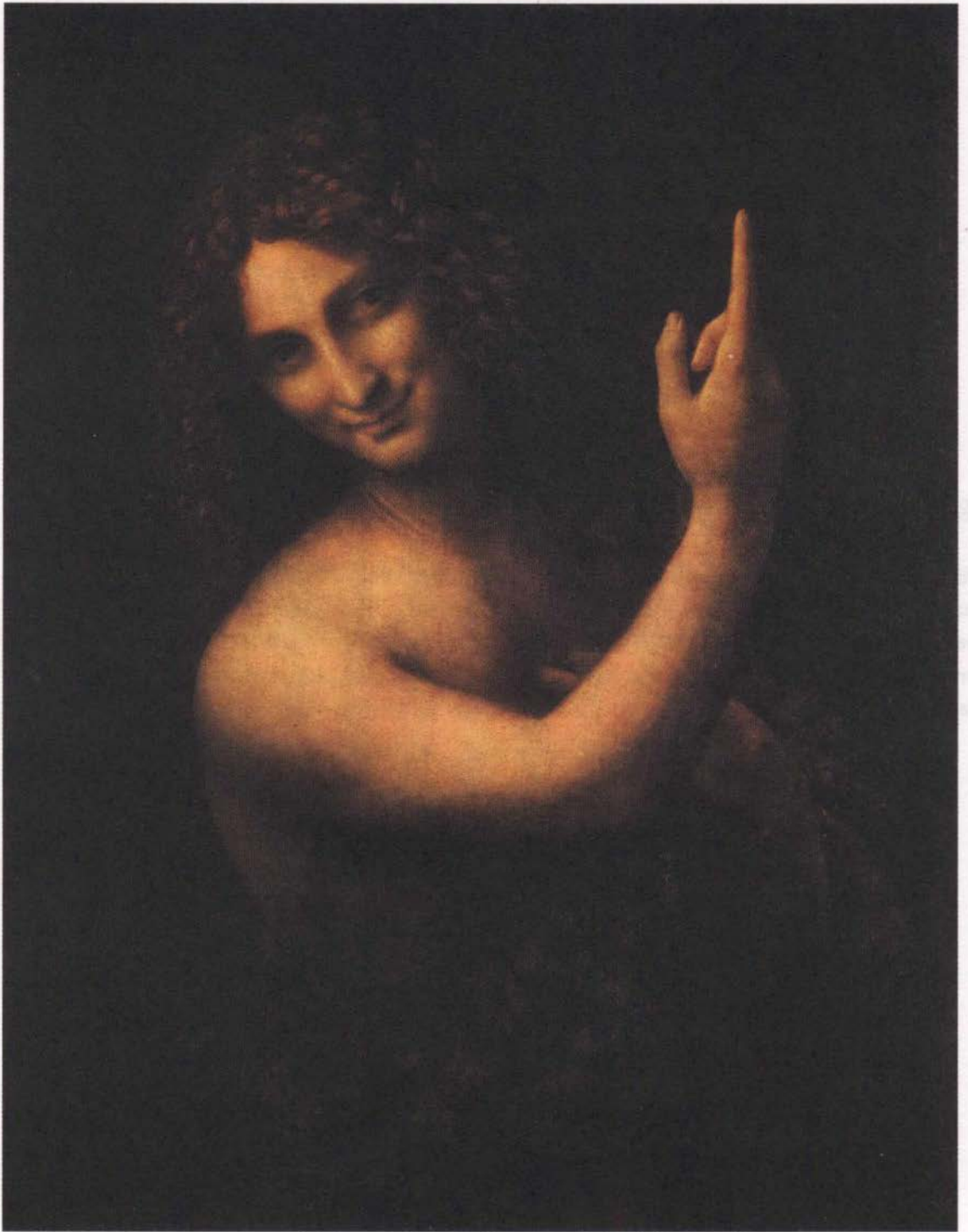
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John the Baptist, by Leonardo da Vinci

Search for Excellence and Perfection

Introduction

More than a century before Galileo, one man succeeded in overcoming the age-old distinction between the contemplative and active life, between science and craft, through a unique synthesis of scientific investigation and artistic expression. For his work in which he employed physical experimentation, mathematics and reason, he has been called the first modern engineer. He anticipated many inventions which would be realised only much later, such as the airplane, the submarine, the parachute, the armoured car. But the fact that he broke entirely with the medieval Aristotelian tradition and started a new quantitative and experimental approach to a new science of matter is what makes him the forerunner of early modern scientists like Galileo, Francis Bacon, William Harvey, Nicolaus Copernicus and Isaac Newton.¹ This man was Leonardo da Vinci.

Leonardo's lifetime was a period of great cultural turmoil, marked by such notable events as the introduction of the printing press (1455), the discovery of America (1492) and the beginning of the Protestant Reformation (1517). The Renaissance, which means a "rebirth" of ancient Greek and Roman culture, marked the decline of the Middle Ages and laid the foundations of modern times. This

1. Even though there is no direct connection between Leonardo and these early modern scientists, because none of his writings were published before 1651, there is nevertheless no doubt that Leonardo's widespread fame as an artist and engineer had a strong influence on many scientifically and philosophically oriented thinkers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) at least was raised in the same intellectual climate of central and northern Renaissance Italy.

complex process of cultural evolution started in the fourteenth century with a growing dissatisfaction with the medieval concepts of man and knowledge, and brought about radical changes before it ended in the seventeenth century. A firm foundation had been laid for a new science of nature, a new materialistic and utilitarian concept of man, and a new political order of independent, secular nation-states.¹ Three distinct intellectual movements contributed to that process: the humanists, the Aristotelian scholars, and the artists and craftsmen.

The humanists were originally university teachers of rhetoric, grammar, poetry and history, but came to include educated laymen, civil servants and merchants. To the humanists, the ideal individual was one equipped with intellectual and practical skills, and viewed as the conscious mover of his own fate. To them, the aim of life was success and fulfilment in the world, not beyond it. This new image of man as an active individual striving rationally towards worldly success began to replace the medieval world-view which was centered around religion and conceived of man's earthly existence as a mere preparation and test for the promised life after death.

Simultaneously, the Aristotelian scholars who constituted the scientific community during the Middle Ages began a critical reflection on their traditional approach to science. Aristotelian science was based on daily-life experience and common sense and operated in a closed world — the earth as its centre — about which everything to be known had already been expounded by the great philosopher himself. This approach was naturally inimical to discovery and innovation, for it could not provide a conceptual framework within which new knowledge could be generated. This was especially crucial in the natural sciences like biology and physics where newly gathered information only too often proved Aristotle wrong. At first this situation led to a sort of scientific pluralism in the explanation of nature, and magic, alchemy and astrology flourished; but in the end, the new sciences of biology and physics based on reason, experiment and mathematics replaced the old Aristotelian concept of human knowledge.

The third movement contributing to the cultural change from the Middle Ages to modern times involved the Renaissance artists and craftsmen who were originally

1. The first scientific academy, the *Accademia Secretorum Naturae*, was founded in Italy by the natural philosopher Giambattista della Porta in 1560. The final institutionalisation of modern science is generally attributed to the foundation of the Royal Society in England in 1662, and to the *Académie des Sciences* in France in 1669.

The modern image of man originated in Renaissance philosophy and particular influence can be found in the works of humanists like Petrarch (*De Remedius Utriusque Fortunae*, 1366), Leon Battista Alberti (*Della Famiglia*, — On the Family — 1444), and Pico della Mirandola (*De Dignitate Hominis*, — On the Dignity of Man — 1486). The final dominance of this utilitarian image of man oriented around worldly success can be found in Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 1776.

The secular nation-states of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in France, England and Spain replaced Papal and feudal power.

manual workers like painters (white-washers), masons and blacksmiths. Usually they lacked any formal education and had to rely exclusively on the knowledge transmitted orally through their guilds, and on their own experience and skill. Engaged in solving practical problems of construction and decor, they began to apply mathematics and experimentation as indispensable tools for their work. They found that the artist's freedom to create was limited by nature's own rules, and hence saw that a thorough knowledge of the hidden structure of reality was a necessary condition for any artificial recreation by the artist.

Leonardo da Vinci belonged to this third group. He received only a very basic formal education and was thirty years old when he finally learned Latin, a necessary tool since most books of these days were written in Latin. Yet his broad interest in scientific matters makes him an outstanding exception among the craftsmen and painters of his time. Leonardo transcended all traditional boundaries between science and art, and in the process raised both fields to new heights.





Virgin of the Rocks, by Leonardo da Vinci

The man who painted the world-famous *Mona Lisa* was born near the village of Vinci, in the countryside of Florence, on April 15, 1452. He was baptized Leonardo and was to become one of the most brilliant figures in a fascinating period of European history, the Italian Renaissance. He is mostly known as an artist, but he was much more, and his impact on the course of Western history has been immeasurable. Leonardo's unparalleled diversity of talents justifies calling him a "genius", a true embodiment of the Renaissance ideal of a universal man. Not only did he excel as a painter and sculptor, but he displayed a whole range of artistic and scientific capacities in such diverse fields as mathematics, mechanics, aeronautics, anatomy, geography, botany, astronomy, military engineering and even town planning and architecture.

Leonardo began his career as a painter in his hometown, Florence, which was one of the two cultural centres of Renaissance Italy, the other being Venice. He became an apprentice to the painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio, who is reported to have stopped painting when he saw that his young student Leonardo had surpassed him.¹ Leonardo enjoyed inspiring companionship: among his fellow-students were Ghirlandaio and Perugino. And in the ruler of Florence, Lorenzo di Medici, "Il Magnifico", Leonardo found an art-loving patron who generously promoted all the arts, literature and philosophy.² But after executing a few major works — the large panel painting *The Adoration of the Magi*³ is a revealing example of his early mastery and remarkable talent — Leonardo left his hometown in 1482 to work for Ludovico Sforza, "Il Moro", duke of Milan.⁴ The motives for this decision are not completely clear, but it seems that the intellectual atmosphere of Florence, which at that time was strongly influenced by mystical Hermetism and esoteric Neoplatonism, did not appeal to the more rationally inclined Leonardo.⁵ He was an independent and critical investigator who despised dogma as well as magic as futile attempts to understand and influence reality. Alchemy to him was nothing more than "the most foolish opinions", and he even expressed his hope that the flourishing astrologers of his day would be castrated.⁶ He showed the same attitude towards Christian doctrine, if one can trust his sixteenth century biographer Vasari who related that "Leonardo was of so heretical a cast of mind that he conformed to no religion whatever, accounting it perchance much better to be a philosopher than a Christian."⁷

At any rate, when Leonardo heard that Ludovico wanted a military engineer, an architect, a sculptor, and a painter, he decided to offer himself as all these in one. And so he wrote his famous letter:

Most Illustrious Lord, having now sufficiently seen and considered the proofs of all these who count themselves masters and inventors of instruments of war, and finding that their invention and use of the said instruments does not differ in any respect from those in common practice, I am emboldened without prejudice to anyone else to put myself in communication with your Excellency, in order to acquaint you with my secrets, thereafter offering myself at your pleasure effectually to demonstrate at any convenient time all those matters which are in part briefly recorded below.

I have plans for bridges, very light and strong, suitable for carrying very easily...

When a place is besieged I know how to cut off water from the trenches, and how to construct an infinite number of... scaling ladders and other instruments ...

I have plans for making cannon, very convenient and easy of transport, with which to hurl small stones in the manner almost of hail ...

And if it should happen that the engagement is at sea, I have plans for constructing many engines most suitable for attack or defense, and ships which can resist the fire of all the heaviest cannon, and powder and smoke.

Also I have ways of arriving at a certain fixed spot by caverns and secret winding passages, made without any noise even though it may be necessary to pass underneath trenches or a river.

Also I can make covered cars, safe and unassailable, which will enter the serried ranks of the enemy with artillery, and there is no company of men at arms so great as not to be broken by it. And behind these the infantry will be able to follow quite unharmed and without any opposition.

Also, if need shall arise, I can make cannon, mortars, and light ordnance, of very beautiful useful shapes, quite different from those in common use.

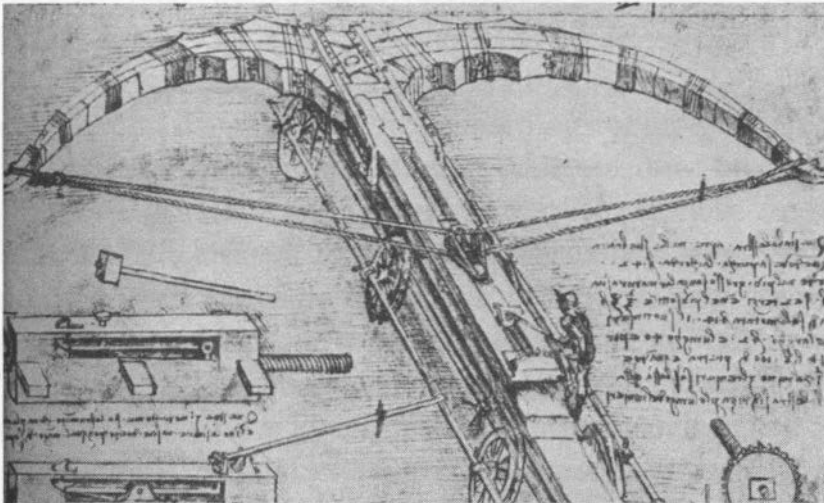
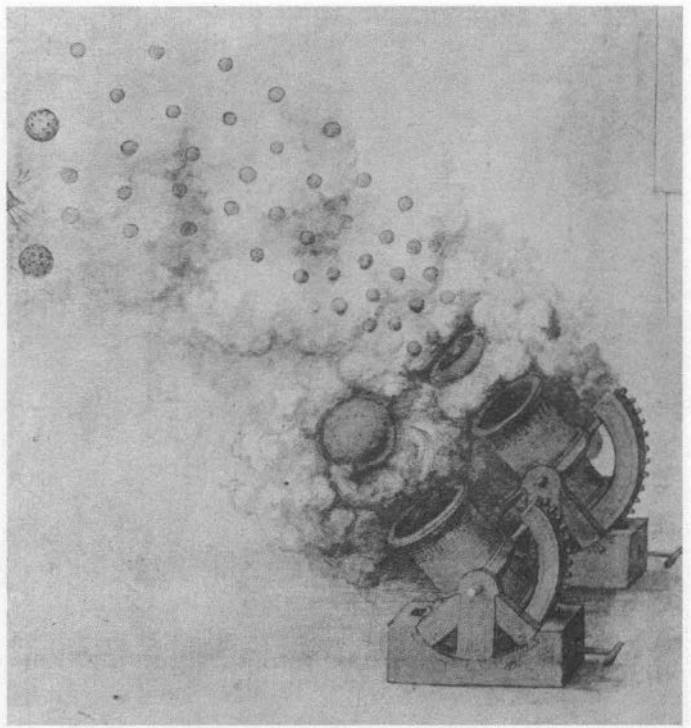
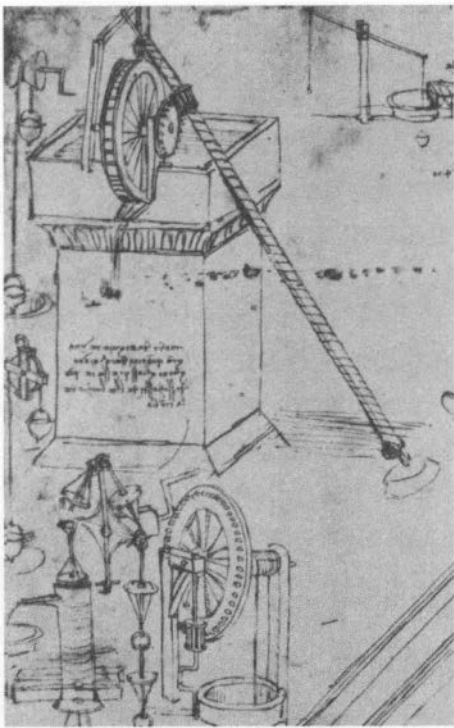
Where it is not possible to employ cannon, I can supply catapults, mangonels, traps, and other engines of wonderful efficacy not in general use. In short, as the variety of circumstances shall necessitate, I can supply an infinite number of different engines of attack and defense.

In time of peace I believe that I can give you as complete satisfaction as anyone else in architecture, in the construction of buildings both public and private, and in conducting water from one place to another.

Also I can execute sculpture in marble, bronze, or clay, and also painting, in which my work will stand comparison with that of anyone else whoever he may be.

Moreover, I would undertake the work of the bronze which shall endue with immortal glory and eternal honour the auspicious memory of the Prince your father and of the illustrious house of Sforza.

And if any of the aforesaid things should seem impossible or impracticable to anyone, I offer myself as ready to make trial of them in your park or in whatever place shall please your Excellency, to whom I commend myself with all possible humility.⁸



It is not known what Ludovico replied, but the thirty-year-old Leonardo entered the splendid court of Ludovico Sforza with great acclaim. He was described as “a beautiful person, well proportioned, with a fine beard well arranged in ringlets, reaching down to the middle of his chest”, and he fascinated his audience with his playing on a lyre his own hands had fashioned in the form of a horse’s head, with



**Study for the head of Judas
in view of the depiction of
the *Last Supper***

his gentle voice, and with his subtle arguments in conversation. “His powers of conversation were such as to draw to himself the souls of listeners”, remembers Vasari.¹⁰ Employed as a “painter and engineer of the Duke”, Leonardo directed an extensive workshop with several students, entertained the court with his decorations for the frequent festivities, and did some paintings, among them the beautiful *Virgin of the Rocks* and the monumental *Last Supper*.

The story of the execution of this last painting gives telling insights into the personality of the great painter. Shortly after he entered Ludovico’s service, the Duke asked him to depict the Last Supper on the far wall of the refectory where the Dominican friars took their meals, at the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. For three years (1495-98) Leonardo laboured but dallied at the task. The head of the monastery complained to Ludovico of Leonardo’s apparent sloth: the painter would sit before the wall for hours without painting a stroke. Leonardo explained to his patron that the artist’s most important work lies in conception rather than execution.

In this case he had two great difficulties, he said: to conceive features worthy of Jesus Christ, and to picture a man as heartless as Judas. Leonardo spent much of his time searching the streets of Milan for heads and faces that could serve him in representing the Apostles. One of the tragedies of Leonardo's life is that because of certain unconventional mural techniques the paint soon began to flake and fall. Leonardo shunned the traditional fresco method where the painter had to work fast on wet plaster, and tried a new mixture of colours intended to give the painter more time for contemplation. Today, although we can hardly study the shades of subtleties of the painting, the composition and general outlines alone make it evident that *The Last Supper* deserves to be called the greatest painting of the Renaissance.

Leonardo's most ambitious project for Ludovico, a sixteen-feet high equestrian statue in honour of Francesco Sforza, the Duke's father, was a failure, an exhausting and unnerving experience for Leonardo. The tons of bronze intended for the statue were instead used to make cannonballs to fight the French who were then menacing Milan. After four years of work, Leonardo had only finished the clay model of the horse, which the French soldiers used as a target when they captured the city. The many anatomical sketches Leonardo had made were of such excellent quality that they set a new standard for anatomical drawings.

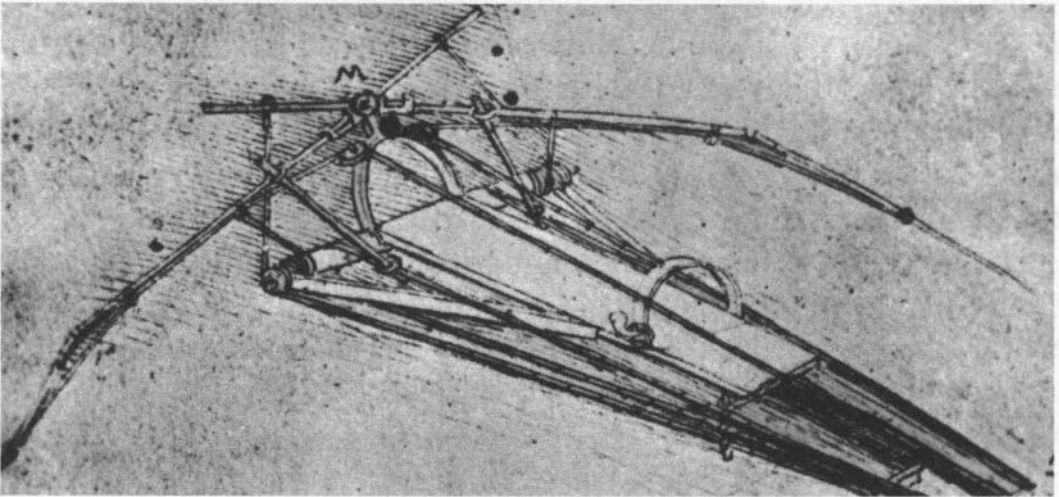
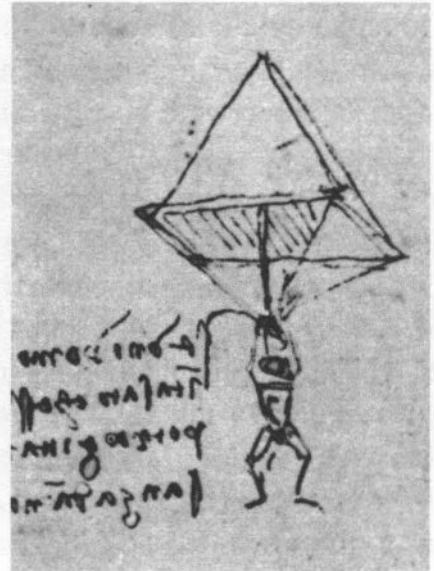
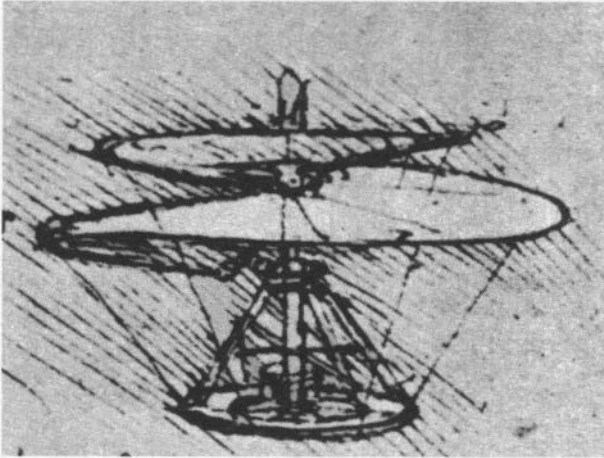
During the seventeen years Leonardo stayed in Milan he released the creative power of his investigative mind through the study of nature by all sorts of different means; ranging from geometry, architecture and painting to geology, biology and mechanical engineering. He recorded the proceedings of these studies in notebooks, writing the Italian vernacular in a strange mirror-script.¹¹ He is said to have composed about 120 manuscripts, and the fifty that remain are a treasure for historians of science and philosophy. He combined text and illustrations as a method — he called it *dimonstrazione* (demonstration) to present his discoveries and inventions; but the notebooks were never published.

One of the most striking themes in the notebooks, one which Leonardo spent half his life studying, is the problem of human flight. He envied the birds as a species in some ways superior to man. He studied every aspect of their wings and tails, and the mechanics of their soaring, gliding, turning and descending. And he planned the conquest of the air:

You will make an anatomy of the wings of a bird, together with the muscles of the breast, which move these wings. And you will do the same for a man, in order to show the possibility of a man sustaining himself in the air by the beating of wings.¹²

A bird is an instrument working according to mechanical law. This instrument it is within the power of man to reproduce with all its movements, but not with a corresponding degree of strength.¹³

In a brief essay, *Sul Volo* (On Flight), he described a flying machine made by him of strong cloth, leather and silk. He called this machine “the bird” and wrote instructions on how to fly it:



Studies for a flying screw or helicopter (top left), for a parachute (top right) and for a flying machine (bottom).

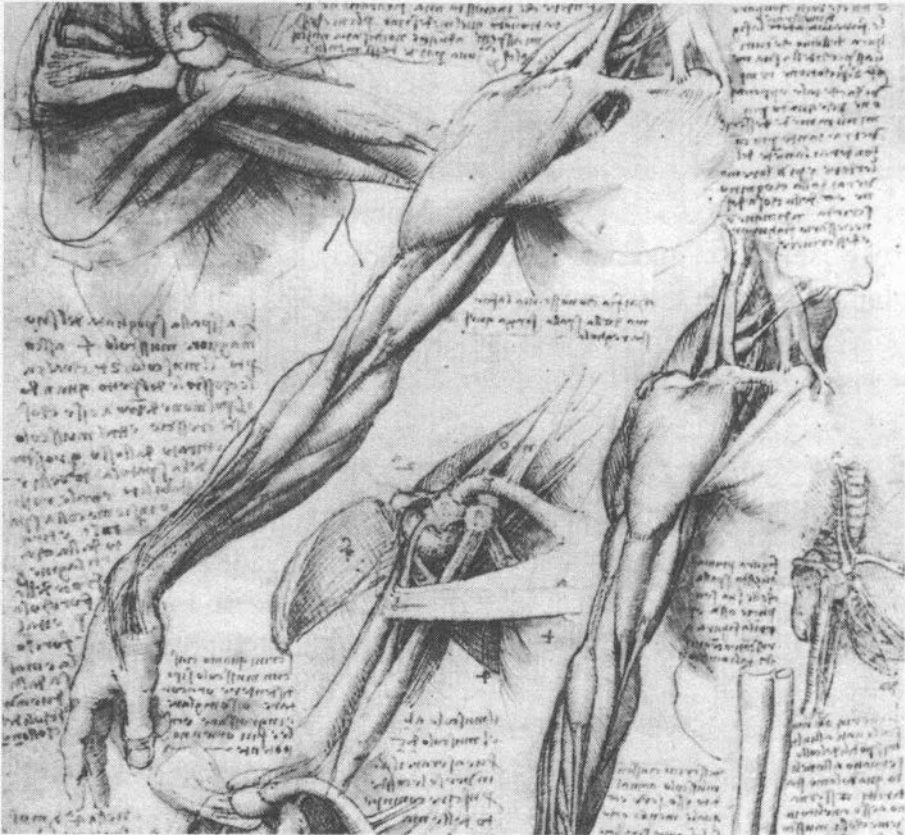
Make trial of the Machine over the water, so that if you fall you do not do yourself any harm ...¹⁴

The great bird will take its first flight... filling the whole world with amazement and all records with its fame; and it will bring eternal glory to the nest where it was born.¹⁵

During Leonardo's lifetime only one work of his was published, a collaboration with the mathematician Luca Pacioli, entitled *De Divina Proportione* (on Divine Proportion), published in Venice in 1509. His *Treatise on Painting* was edited after his death by his lifelong friend Francesco Melzi.¹⁶ This work must be seen in the context of the ongoing Renaissance discussion on the scientific foundation of art, as exemplified by the works of L.B. Alberti and Piero della Francesca.¹⁷ In the *Treatise*, Leonardo demonstrated the mathematical and biological basis of the art of painting, described the geometry of space and functioning of the eye, and expounded the concept of *saper vedere* (to know how to see), as the creative method not only for painting but for every conscious artistic expression. For Leonardo, "the eye is the window of the soul"¹⁸ and the most noble of the senses, constantly reflecting and determining what we call "reality". The painter once endowed with the powers of perception and the perfect ability to pictorialize what he perceives becomes thus a real scientist, achieving knowledge by observation and reproducing that knowledge authentically.

Unexplained gaps in the chronology of Leonardo's life between 1482 and 1487 have given rise to speculations about a journey to the Near East or even Asia, but apart from some passages in the *Codice Atlantico* notebook, there is no convincing evidence. In 1499 the French King Louis XII captured Milan and soon afterwards Leonardo and his friends returned to Florence where he was welcomed with honour and given ample opportunity to work. He made the cartoon for an altarpiece, *The Virgin, Child, and St. Anne*, and when it was publicly displayed it attracted large crowds of people who came as if attending a solemn festival. But his life was "so irregular and unsettled that he may be said to [have lived] from day to day."¹⁹ Only his constant search for new frontiers can explain his decision to enter the service of the ruthless commander-in-chief of the Papal Army, Cesare Borgia, son of the notorious Pope Alexander VI.²⁰ Borgia was entrusted with the mission of gaining control of central Italy, and Leonardo stayed with him as his "military engineer" for almost one year. Besides military advice, he supplied maps of cities and topographical sketches which laid the foundation of modern cartography.

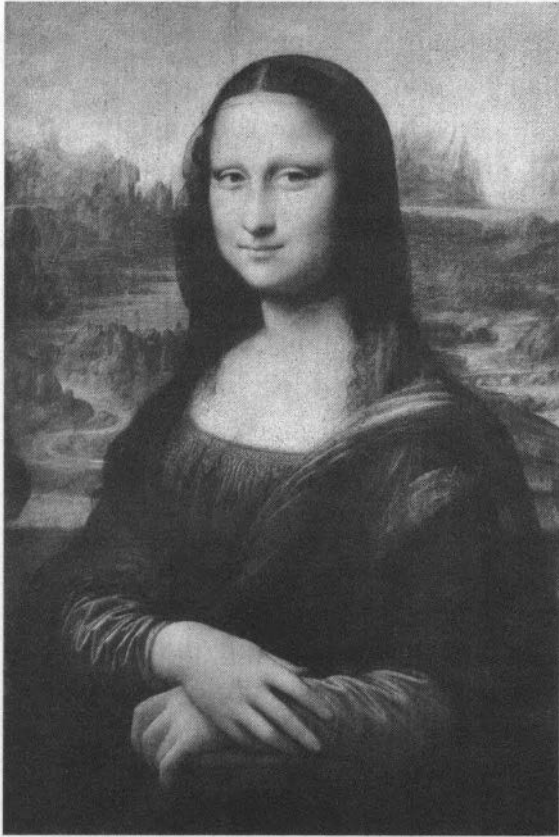
Upon his return to Florence the governing council of the city organised a competition in the Palazzo Vecchio for the best mural painting on an historical theme. The population of Florence watched in expectation as the two greatest artists of the day, Leonardo and Michaelangelo, became competitors. But neither Leonardo's *Battle of Anghieri* nor Michaelangelo's *Battle of Cesna* were completed. It is not clear whether Leonardo's return to Milan in 1506 was precipitated by personal quarrels with Michaelangelo or by disappointment with another failure to employ a new technique for the monumental (7 meters by 17 meters) mural (he seems not to have learned the lesson of *The Last Supper*). However he asked for and was granted permission to leave Florence and work in Milan for the French Chancellor, Charles d'Amboise. Here Leonardo stayed for six years, decorating palaces, preparing festivals, designing canals and sewage systems for Milan, studying anatomy, and doing some painting. But his success as an engineer and scientist was marred by



Anatomical studies

another disappointment in his work as a sculptor, when again an equestrian monument — this time for a victorious French Marshal — did not go beyond the stage of preliminary sketches. At any rate, it seems that Leonardo was more and more occupied with the scientific investigation of matter, and his notebooks of that time, including mechanical, optical, mathematical, biological and geological studies, reveal that he was increasingly convinced that nature worked on the basis of mathematically explicable rules. “Let no man who is not a mathematician read the elements of my work,”²¹ he insisted, recalling the ancient Greek mathematician Euclid and anticipating the quantification of natural philosophy by Galileo.

When the French lost Milan in 1513, Leonardo, now sixty, again had to move. He left for Rome where the art-loving Pope Leo X (formerly Giovanni di Medici) commissioned great works from Raphael, Michaelangelo, Bramante and Peruzzi.²² He was entertained at the Belvedere, a summer palace atop the Vatican Hill, but



Mona Lisa



Virgin, Child and St. Ann

could not find the place he deserved as a master artist and received no large commission from the Pope. In fact, Leo X complained about him: "This man will never get anything done, for he is thinking about the end before he begins."²³ Thus, after three years of disappointment and loneliness in Rome, Leonardo readily accepted an invitation from King Francis I to come to France. He spent the last three years of his life, accompanied by the faithful Francesco Melzi, in the castle of Cloux near the Loire river, greatly admired by the French King who later told Benevenuto Cellini that he "believed no other man had been born who knew as much about sculpture, painting and architecture, but still more... was a very great philosopher."²⁴ Francis I left Leonardo complete freedom to make finishing touches on some of his paintings and to rearrange and edit his notebooks. Leonardo died on May 2, 1519, and was buried in the palace Church of Saint Florine, which was destroyed during the French Revolution and completely torn down in the early nineteenth century. Except for his creations, no trace of Leonardo remains. But he once wrote: "A day well spent makes it sweet to sleep, so a life well used makes it sweet to die."²⁵

Four centuries later, we may be able to see Leonardo's impact and significance on the course of history much more clearly than his contemporaries, among whom only a handful realised his unique talent and his advanced state of consciousness. His synthesis of science and art, of investigation and expression, was a major breakthrough on the way towards modern empirical and rational science. His paintings, above all *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*, are such extraordinary renderings of physical and spiritual realities as to be considered immortal peaks of art. In sculpture he conceived the greatest projects of his age, and the anatomical sketches for the two equestrian monuments still rank among the best works ever done in anatomy. As a scientist, besides inventing many curious devices, he initiated a new way of exploring matter: his methods of experiment and quantification combined with visual demonstrations and textual explanations anticipate the modern scientific methods, and his concept of "force" as the prime agent in organic and inorganic matter has become a fundamental notion of modern physics. His science of seeing, *saper vedere*, as a precise method of revealing and understanding the secrets of reality ranks beside Socrates' *Know that you do not know* as a philosophical and practical guideline for a conscious life.

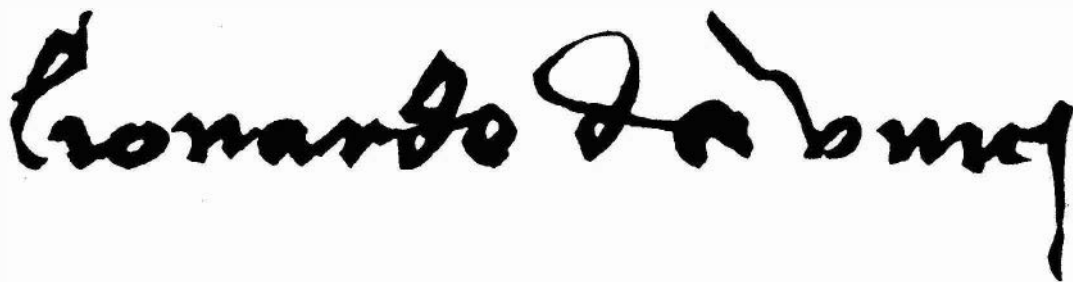
The philosopher and historian Will Durant has this to say about Leonardo:

How shall we rank him? — though which of us commands the variety of knowledge and skills required to judge so multiple a Man? The fascination of his polymorphous

mind lures us into exaggerating his actual achievement; for he was more fertile in conception than in execution ... And yet Leonardo's studies of the horse were probably the best work done in anatomy of that age; Ludovico and Cesare Borgia chose him, from all Italy, as their engineer; nothing in the paintings of Raphael or Titian or Michaelangelo equals *The Last Supper*; no painter has matched Leonardo in subtlety of nuance, or in the delicate portrayal of feeling and thought and pensive tenderness; no statue of the time was so highly rated as Leonardo's plaster *Sforza*; no drawing has ever surpassed *The Virgin, Child and Ste Anne*; and nothing in Renaissance philosophy soared above Leonardo's conception of natural law.

He was not "the man of the Renaissance", for he was too gentle, introverted, and refined to typify an age so violent and powerful in action and speech. He was not quite "the universal man", since the qualities of statesman or administrator found no place in his variety. But, with all his limitations and incompleteness, he was the fullest man of the Renaissance, perhaps of all time. Contemplating his achievement we marvel at the distance that man has come from his origins, and renew our faith in the possibilities of mankind.²⁶

Leonardo's constant search for precision in cognition and for perfection in expression often brought him beyond the scope of the original task at hand, and he sometimes got lost in experimenting with details and distracted by exploring new possibilities. Sometimes when his thirst for knowledge was satisfied he lost interest in his subject and would drop it in favour of new frontiers. And only too often the ignorance and arrogance of his patrons frustrated him. His spiritual aspirations to see and to express clashed with the imperfections of the physical world. There was in him some conflict between the spiritual and the material. But in the instances that Leonardo was able to overcome this seeming contradiction and synthesize his vast talents, the results were so stupendous that they remain timeless inspirations in the search for an integral aim of life.

A stylized, handwritten signature of Leonardo da Vinci in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing script that is characteristic of his personal handwriting. The letters are interconnected, with long, sweeping strokes that give it a sense of movement and fluidity. The signature is positioned at the bottom of the page, below the main body of text.



Auto-portrait of Leonardo in old age

Platonic Academy of Florence became the leading centre for the study and translation of Platonic texts. Masilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) were its major philosophical exponents, while Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) visualised the Platonic world-view in his painting *Primavera* (Spring) in 1475. See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).

Hermetic literature dates from the first to the last parts of the third century AD, and was rediscovered during the Renaissance. Hermetism is an effort to bridge the gap between religion and science and to deify man through knowledge of the world and experience of the transcendent divinity.

6. Cf. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization Part V: The Renaissance*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), p. 222.

7. Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) was an artist and, more importantly, an art historian whose book *Le Vite dei più eccellenti Architetti, Pittori, e Scultori Italiani*, published in 1550, gives a detailed account of the life of Leonardo. Vasari is quoted from Irma A. Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo*

Notes

1. Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-1488) was an outstanding and widely talented artist. He directed the most important workshop in Florence during Leonardo's youth. His most famous work is the bronze statue *David*, in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence.

2. The Medici were a family of bankers and traders who ruled Florence and later Tuscany from 1434 to 1737. They provided three Popes, married into the royal families of Europe and were exceptional patrons of art. Lorenzo (1449-1492) continued the tradition of his father Cosimo and surrounded himself with philosophers, poets and artists.

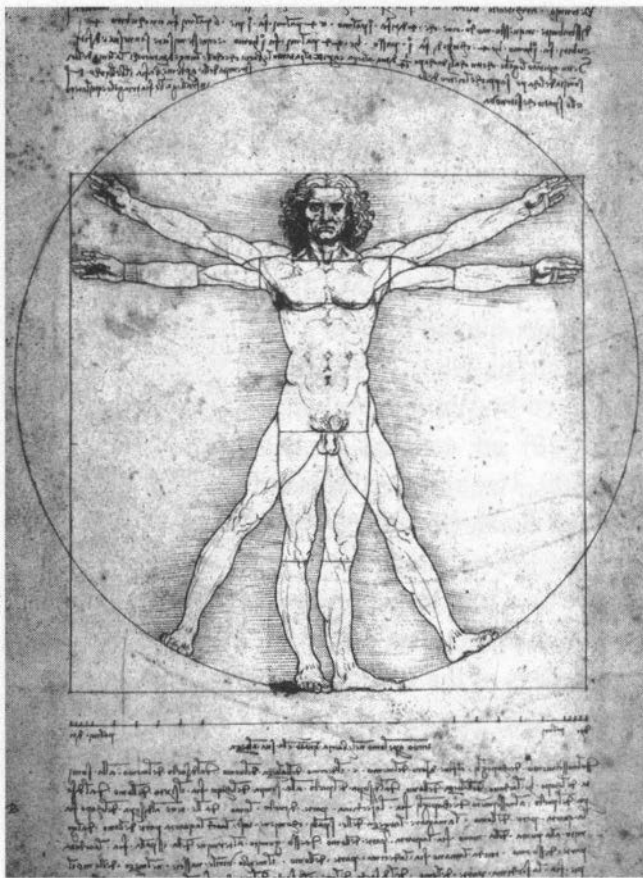
3. The Adoration of the Magi is a popular theme of Christian mythology. Leonardo's painting should be seen in contrast with those of Sandro Botticelli (1475) and of Albrecht Durer (1483).

4. Ludovico Sforza (1452-1505), an offspring of the Milanese Sforza dynasty, made Milan the most splendid court in Europe during his reign.

5. Renaissance Neoplatonism was a philosophical movement that returned to the ancient sources of Platonic philosophy. Sponsored by the Medici, the

- da Vinci*, (Oxford University Press, reprint 1980), p. 288.
8. Reproduced by Will Durant, op. cit., pp. 202-203.
9. Richter, op. cit., p. 293.
10. Vasari, quoted in Richter, op. cit., p. 330.
11. For recent editions of Leonardo's notebooks, see Jean P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 3rd ed., 2 vols. 1970; or Edward McCurdy, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2 vols., 1955.
12. Leonardo, *Codice Atlantico*; quoted by Will Durant, op. cit., p. 220.
13. Leonardo, *Codice Atlantico*; quoted by Will Durant, op. cit., p. 220.
14. Cf. Irma A. Richter, op. cit. p. 298.
15. Leonardo, *Sul Volo*, quoted by Will Durant, op. cit., p. 220.
16. Luca Pacioli (1450-1520) an eminent Renaissance mathematician, published *De Divina Proportione* in Venice in 1509. Two recent editions of the *Treatise on Painting* by Leonardo are: C. Pedretti, *On Painting: A Lost Book*, (Berkeley, 1964); and A. O. MacMahon, *Treatise on Painting*, (Princeton, 1956).
17. Geometrical perspective as a tool to pictorialise space was discovered during the Renaissance by several artists. The first publications on that theme are from Piero della Francesca (1420-1492), one of the most important artists of the Renaissance, in *De Prospettiva Pingendi*, 1482; and *Della Pittura* by Leon Battista Alberti.
18. Leonardo, *Trattato della Pittura*; cf. Irma A. Richter, op. cit., p. 4.
19. Vasari as quoted by Irma A. Richter, op. cit., p. 341f.
20. The Spanish Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia (1431-1503) became Pope Alexander VI in 1492. Indulging in orgies and crime he is often regarded as the personification of the declining moral standards of the Vatican during the Renaissance. His son Cesare (1475-1507) and his daughter Lucrezia (1480-1519) were of the same mould, unscrupulously pursuing power and wealth. For Niccolo Macchiavelli, Cesare Borgia was a model of the successful secular ruler. See Niccolo Macchiavelli, *Il Principe*, (The Prince).
21. Cf. Will Durant, op. cit., p. 222.
22. Giovanni di Medici acquired Papal authority in 1503 and tried to consolidate the Vatican after the devastating rulership of Pope Alexander VI. Bramante (1444-1514), the architect of St. Peter's Basilica, Michaelangelo (1475-1564) the sculptor, and Raphael (1483-1520) the painter were among the artists who found generous employment in Rome during his reign.
23. Vasari, as quoted by Richter, op. cit., p. 377.
24. Benevenuto Cellini, quoted by Richter, op. cit., p. 383.
25. Will Durant, op. cit., p. 227.
26. *ibid*, pp. 227-28.

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Extracts from Leonardo's Notebooks: Reflections on Life

We are deceived by promises and deluded by time, and death derides our cares; life's anxieties are nought.

That man is extremely foolish who always is in want for fear of wanting; and his life flies away while he is still hoping to enjoy the good things which he has acquired with great labour.

He who possesses most is most afraid to lose.

O time, consumer of all things! O envious age, thou destroyest all things and devourest all things with the hard teeth of the years little by little, in slow death. Helen, when she looked in her mirror and saw the withered wrinkles which old age had made in her face

wept and wondered why she had twice been carried away. O Time, consumer of all things! O envious age, whereby all things are consumed!

...The miserable life should not pass without leaving some memory of ourselves in the minds of mortals.

... Lead: Leather — a weight of lead pressing forwards and backwards a little bag of leather filled with air, the descent will show you the hour. We do not lack ways and means to divide and measure these miserable days of ours which it should be our pleasure not to spend and pass away in vain and without praise, and without leaving record of themselves in the minds of men; so that this our miserable course should not be sped in vain.

O thou that sleepest, what is sleep? Sleep resembles death. Oh, why not let thy work be such that after death thou mayst retain a resemblance to perfect life, rather than during life make thyself resemble the hapless dead by sleeping.

Shun those studies in which the work that results dies with the worker.

I obey thee, Lord, first for the love which I ought reasonably to bear thee; secondly, because thou canst shorten or prolong the lives of men.

In rivers, the water that you touch is the last of what has passed and the first of that which comes: so with time present. Life if well spent is long.

The age as it flies glides secretly and deceives one and another; nothing is more fleeting than the years, but he who sows virtue reaps honour.

In youth acquire that which may restore the damage of old age; and if you are mindful that old age had wisdom for its food, you will so exert yourself in youth, that your old age will not lack sustenance.

While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die.

To the ambitious, whom neither the boon of life, nor the beauty of the world suffice to content, it comes as penance that life with them is squandered, and that they possess neither the benefits nor the beauty of the world.

As a day well spent brings happy sleep, so a life well used brings happy death.

Every evil leaves a sorrow in the memory, except the supreme evil, death, which

destroys this memory together with life.

Wrongfully do men lament the flight of time, accusing it of being too swift, and not perceiving that its period is sufficient. But good memory wherewith nature has endowed us causes everything long past to seem present.

Our judgement does not reckon in their exact and proper order things which have come to pass at different periods of time; for many things which happened many years ago will seem nearly related to the present, and many things that are recent will seem ancient, extending back to the far-off period of our youth. And so it is with the eye, with regard to distant things, which when illumined by the sun seem near to the eye, while many things which are near seem far off.

[With a drawing of two figures, one pursuing the other with bow and arrow]

A body may sooner be without its shadow than virtue without envy.

When Fortune comes, seize her in front with a sure hand, because behind she is bald.

Just as iron rusts from disuse, and stagnant water putrefies, or when cold turns to ice, so our intellect wastes unless it is kept in use.

[With a drawing of butterflies fluttering round a flame]

Blind ignorance misleads us thus and delights with the results of lascivious joys.

Because it does not know the true light.

Because it does not know what the true light is.

Vain splendour takes from us the power of being ...

Behold how owing to the glare of the fire we walk where blind ignorance leads us.

O wretched mortal, open your eyes!

[With drawings of compass and plough]

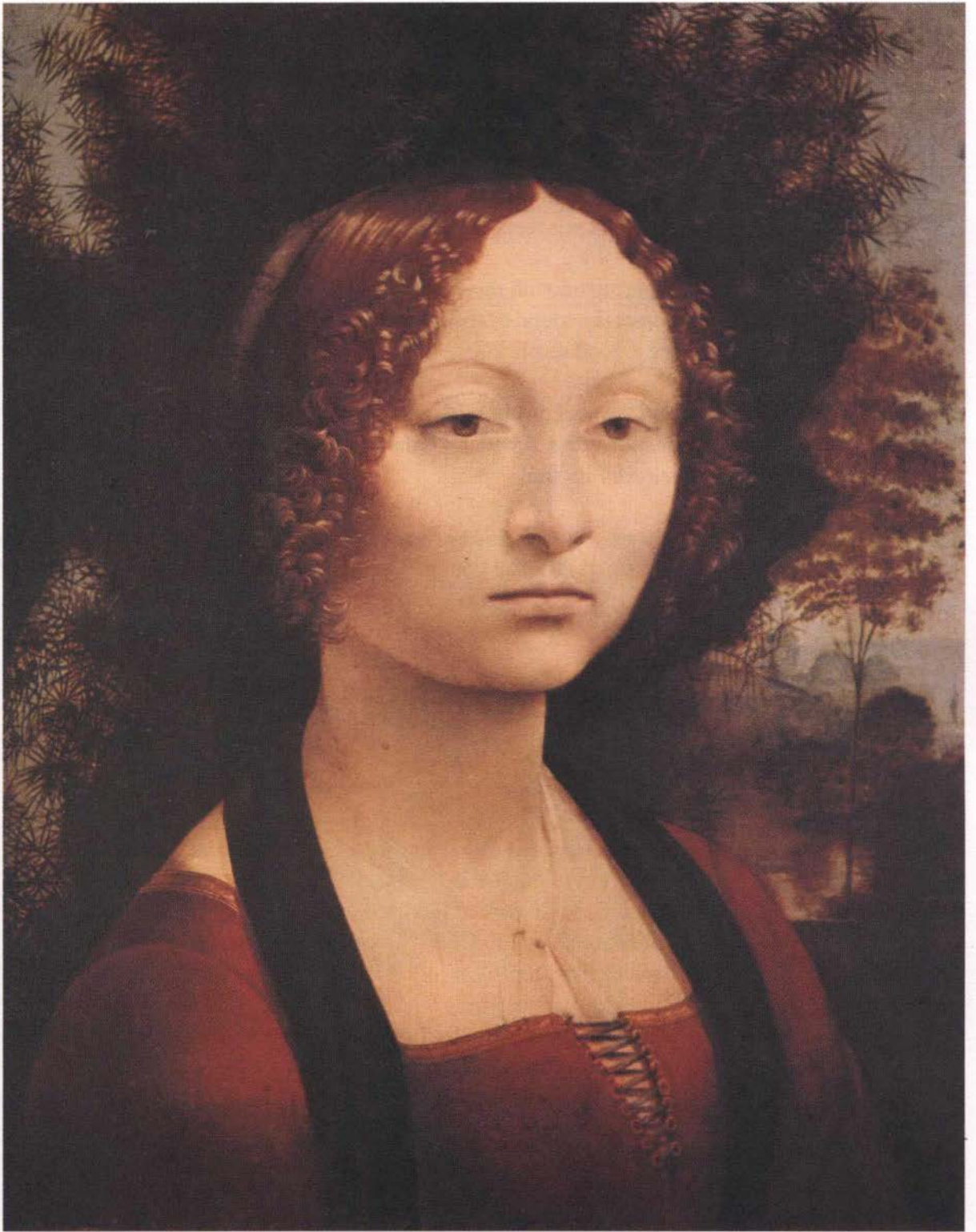
He turns not back who is bound to a star.

Obstacles do not bend me.

Every obstacle yields to stern resolve.

Good culture is born of a good disposition; and since the cause is more to be praised than the effect, you will rather praise a good disposition without culture, than good culture without the disposition.

Where there is most feeling there is the greatest martyrdom.



The highest happiness becomes the cause of unhappiness, and the fullness of wisdom the cause of folly.

The part always has a tendency to unite with its whole in order to escape from its imperfection.

The soul's desire is to remain with its body, because without the organic instruments of that body it can neither act nor feel.

The soul can never be corrupted with the corruption of the body, but acts in the body like the wind which causes the sound of the organ, where if a pipe is spoiled, the wind would cease to produce a good result.

Whoever would see how the soul dwells within its body let him observe how this body uses its daily habitation, for if this is without order and confused the body will be kept in disorder and confusion by its soul.

Extracts selected and edited by Irma A. Richter, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, Oxford University Press, reprint 1980, pp. 260-61 and pp. 273-275.

A few dates

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| 1452 (April 15) | — Birth of Leonardo. |
| 1469 | — Leonardo's family moves to Florence. |
| 1481 | — <i>Adoration of the Magi</i> . |
| 1482 | — Leonardo goes to Milan and works for Ludovico, Regent of Milan. |
| 1483 | — <i>The Virgin of the Rocks</i> . |
| 1500-1 | — Leonardo goes back to Florence. |
| 1502 (June) | — Military engineer to Caesar Borgia in Romagna. |
| 1503 (April) | — Back to Florence. |
| 1503-06 | — Painting of <i>Mona Lisa</i> . |
| 1507 | — Leonardo is appointed as "painter and engineer in ordinary" to the King of France in Milan. |
| 1513 | — Rome: Leonardo works for the Pope Leo X. He is more and more attracted by Science. |
| 1516 | — Leonardo goes to France, invited by the King Francis Ist and settles in Cloux, near Amboise. |
| 1519 (May 2) | — Death of Leonardo. |

Suggestions for further reading

Burckhardt, Jacob. *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. London: 1914.

Clark, Kenneth. *Leonardo da Vinci*. Penguin Books.

Durant, Will. *The Story of Civilization: Part V. The Renaissance*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1953.

The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. Selected and edited by Irma A. Richter, Oxford University Press, World's Classics Edn., 1980.

Richter, Jean Paul. *Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*. Oxford University Press, 2nd edn., 1939.





Radha and Krishna, by M.A.R. Chughtai, courtesy N.G.M.A, New Delhi

Ecstasy of Divine Love

Introduction

If we study the lives of God-lovers, we find that love for God comes to them in many ways. It may come as an awakening to the beauty of the Lover, by the sight of an ideal face and image of Him, by his mysterious hints of Himself behind the thousand faces of things in the world, by a slow or sudden need of the heart, by a vague thirst in the soul, by the sense of someone near drawing them or pursuing them with love, or someone blissful and beautiful whom they must discover. There are also instances where one seeks after Him passionately and pursues the unseen Beloved. But also the Lover whom one thinks not of, may pursue us, may come upon us in the midst of the world and seize us for His own, whether at first we will or not. There is a striking instance of that latter case in the life of a most remarkable figure in medieval India: Sri Chaitanya.

As the reader will see in the story of his life which follows, Sri Chaitanya for the first part of his existence was simply Nimai Pandit, a man of knowledge and intellectual pursuit, a teacher of grammar and syllogisms. Not only was he not in the slightest way devoted or attracted to Krishna, but in addition he mocked and ridiculed the bhaktas in his hometown. Then he experienced a sudden conversion and became Chaitanya the bhakta of Krishna. This bhakta at times seemed to be possessed by the presence of Krishna, to know himself to be Krishna, to speak, move and appear with the light of the Godhead — none around him could think of or see him as anything else when he was in this glorified and transfigured condition. At other times he fell

back to the consciousness of the bhakta, and refused to consider himself as anything more.

According to the Indian theory of Avatarhood, in the process of evolution — the progressive manifestation of the Divine, or Spirit, in its innumerable material forms — an incarnation of the Divine consciousness in a physical body becomes necessary at times of the evolutionary process when a certain grade of consciousness must be surpassed. In the case of Sri Chaitanya, it may be considered that the secret Divine Consciousness had been waiting to manifest until after the conversion; and even then it manifested intermittently, because the main work of Chaitanya was to establish the type of a spiritual and psychic bhakti in the emotional-vital part of man, thus preparing that part in us to turn towards the Divine, at any rate, to fix the possibility of such a turn in man's nature. It was not that there had not been the emotional type of bhakti before; but the completeness of it, the elan, the vital's rapture in it had never manifested as it manifested in Sri Chaitanya. If he had always remained in the Krishna-consciousness his work would never have been done; he would have been the Lord to whom all give bhakti, but not the supreme example of the divine ecstatic bhakta. Still, the occasional manifestation showed who he was, and this is why his contemporaries saw in him Krishna, an Avatar of Divine Love, and revered him as God incarnate even during his life-time.

Love is a passion and it seeks for two things, eternity and intensity, and, as revealed in the experience of the mystics in the relation of the Lover and Beloved, the seeking for eternity and for intensity is instinctive and self-born. Love is a seeking for mutual possession, and it is in Divine Love that the demand for mutual possession becomes absolute. Desire of possession, which means a difference, is surpassed by a seeking for oneness, and it is here that the idea of oneness, of two souls merging into each other and becoming one, finds the acme of its longing and the completeness of its satisfaction. Love, too, is a yearning for beauty, and it is in Divine Love that the yearning is eternally satisfied in the vision and the touch and the joy of the All-beautiful. Love is a child and a seeker of Delight, and it is here that it finds the highest possible ecstasy both of the heart-consciousness and of every fibre of the being.

The relation of Love is that which, as between human being and human being, demands the most and, even while reaching the greatest intensities, is still the least satisfied, because, the God-lovers tell us, only in the Divine can it find its real and its utter satisfaction. Therefore it is here most that the turning of human emotion Godwards finds its full meaning and discovers all the truth of which love is the human symbol.



It is said that there are intensities of love where all its essential instincts are divinised, raised, satisfied in the bliss from which our life was born and towards which by oneness it returns, in the Ananda of the Divine existence where Love is absolute, eternal and unalloyed. Such is the possibility which is awaiting us if we choose to make of it the aim of our life; in fact, even if we don't, it may still happen to us, as to Sri Chaitanya, whose life we are going to read now.

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India, February 27, 1486. It was the night of the lunar eclipse, and most of the people of Navadip, Bengal, were out on the bank of the holy Ganges, observing and celebrating the event. As the chants of “Hari” filled the air, a son was born to Jagannath Mishra and his wife Shashi. Of their eight other children, only Visvarup, their first son, had survived. The happy parents did not know that their new-born child was to become a famous Sannyasin, revered throughout India as Sri Krishna Chaitanya, an incarnation of Sri Krishna himself. Named Vishwamber, the little boy was soon called Gaura or Gauranga — “the golden one” — because of his exceptional physical beauty, and nicknamed Nimai — “of bitter taste” — to ward off the evil eye.

Throughout his childhood, Nimai kept an extraordinary fondness for the name of the Lord. When he was crying, nothing would console him but to hear people around him chant the Name; whenever the word “Hari” was uttered, he would leave whatever he was doing and dance for joy, his hands uplifted, his eyes upturned, his face and his whole little body a radiant expression of his spontaneous inner bliss. The boyish frolics of Nimai were in many ways similar to those of Gopala himself: milk, curd, butter, ghee, sweets were not safe from him in any neighbouring house. When he was on the banks of the Ganges, playing his tricks, those who were there to bathe had better be careful: he would run away with the articles they had brought for worship. He would interrupt someone in meditation and say, “Worship me, for I am the God you are meditating upon.” He would climb upon the shoulders of

another, proclaiming, “I am Lord Shiva”, and jump into the Ganges, using the shoulders as a diving board. He would swim under water, as if he were a crocodile, and pull the legs of the people bathing. On the bank, he would discreetly interchange the clothes of men and women ... The list of his pranks was endless, and so was the line of people coming to complain about him to his mother, Shashi. Yet, he was so utterly sweet and lovable and charming, and everyone was so fond of him, that whenever Jagannath went looking for his naughty son, determined to chastise him properly, his very victims would intercede for him, and help him hide away until his father’s anger had cooled.

One day, this happy childhood took a different turn: Nimai’s elder brother, Vishvarup, went away from home to become a Sannyasin. Jagannath and Shashi were overcome with grief, and grew anxious that their only remaining child, their beloved Nimai, would also abandon them if he were allowed to study, as Vishvarup had been. Nimai was then about eight years old. Although Jagannath himself was a scholar, he had kept his last son away from school for several years. But the young boy grew only more wild and desperate, and his father finally had to relent and let him go to school. Nimai’s intellectual genius then started to unfold. Navadvip was at that time a renowned university-town where good teachers and brilliant students were common. Nimai was sent to the best school in town. There were about a thousand other students with him in that school, but this lad of fourteen eclipsed them all by his extraordinary intelligence. It was his favourite pass-time to challenge the pupils of other schools to intellectual debates with him on the bank of the Ganges. He would offer his own explanation of a Sutra, and ask others to criticise it; on their failing to find any flaw in it, he would himself then point out a number of flaws, and offer another explanation, which he would again criticise to finally... re-establish his original explanation with extraordinary skill and ease. Nimai’s only passion now was study, to which he applied himself with single-minded devotion. Intellectual giant that he was, he acquired mastery over the different branches of Sanskrit learning at a very early age. Even certain well-known scholars who had challenged him to a rhetorical debate were properly defeated and compelled to recognise him as a prodigy.

Nimai was still a student when his father suddenly died. The responsibility for the household now fell on him. He set up his own school, where he taught grammar. More than ever imbued with the scholastic spirit, he indulged in dialectical bouts with any scholar imprudent enough to challenge him. The number of his students was growing every day. But, along with his fame, his arrogance grew to such an

extent that other scholars began to avoid coming near him. His irony and his sarcasm were particularly aimed at the Vaishnavaites of his hometown. How far was Nimai, now twenty-two years old, from the spontaneous adoration for Krishna which had been so alive in him in his early childhood!

In 1508, Nimai went on a pilgrimage to Gaya, to perform the Shraddha Ceremony¹ of his father. He was accompanied, as always, by a large number of his pupils. After the ceremony, he went to a nearby temple to see the sacred footprint of Lord Vishnu. As his gaze was fixed on the footprint and the priests around were singing the Name of the Lord, Nimai was overcome with emotion; tears flowed down his face in a continuous stream, his whole body trembled; an intense and blissful devotion made him fall on his knees in adoration. Among the many other pilgrims was Ishwara Puri, a renowned devotee of Krishna who had visited Navadvip some years before and had met the young pundit Nimai, but had no apparent influence on Nimai at that time. When he saw Ishwara Puri at Gaya, Nimai asked him to be his Guru and to initiate him. Puri accepted and, in a secluded spot, whispered the sacred Krishna Mantra in his ear.

On his way back to Navadip, Nimai was blessed with a vision of Krishna. When he arrived in his hometown, people could not believe their eyes: Nimai was a completely changed man. His pride of learning and his aggressive spirit were gone. His fondness for dress and care for personal appearance had disappeared. He was the meekest and simplest of men. He hardly paid attention to anything of this world, and was always lost in the thought of Krishna. Tears flowed from his eyes at the very name of Krishna, and anything associated with the Lord sent him into trance. It was impossible for him to teach his pupils. The only meaning he found in the Sutras of grammar he was accustomed to teach, or in any word or letter, was Krishna.

So he always discoursed on Krishna, and in the midst of the discourses laughed and wept and raved and lost himself in trance. Niamai, who had so far been given only to scholastic pursuits, was now completely mad with love for Krishna. His pupils did not know what to do. They felt it was impossible for them to leave their teacher and take their lessons from someone else. They went and reported everything to the head of the school, who gave some good counsel to Nimai. Nimai promised earnestly to follow the advice, but he could not. In utter helplessness he had to tell his pupils one day: "I always see a dark-complexioned boy of exquisite beauty standing before me and playing on his flute. I cannot but speak of him and him alone. I must therefore stop teaching from today onwards. You are free to go and take your lessons anywhere you like." And so saying, he closed the book and burst



Radha and Krishna, by Chughtai, N.G.M.A, New Delhi

into tears. The pupils also closed their books, saying, “No more education for us, Master. Only bless us that we may remember life after life what we have learnt at thy feet.” The Master was visibly moved. He took them one by one upon his lap and kissed them and wept. Then he performed Samkirtana² with them. He stood in the middle singing and keeping time with his hands, while the pupils went round and round repeating the song. As the song and the dance went on, their hearts were filled with the presence of the Divine and tears of joy flowed from their eyes. Many people from the neighbourhood were attracted to the scene. But everyone who came as a spectator was caught into the current of devotion and began to sing and dance. This marked the end of the academic career of Nimai and the beginning of Samkirtana which was now the professed mission of his life.

The news of this change in Nimai spread all over Navadvip. People thought it was a fit of lunacy. But the Vaishnavas of the town knew that Nimai had become a Vaishnava — a change, though seemingly impossible, which they had long wished and prayed for and there was no end to their rejoicing. Nimai was soon acknowledged as the leader of the Vaishnavas of the town and became the centre of their devotional activities, which now started to grow in intensity with great rapidity. People in large numbers began to be drawn to him. His influence was so contagious that his very touch or presence converted sinners into saints. He was like a live-wire charged with the current of divine love, and anyone who came into contact with him was similarly charged.

The courtyard of a disciple’s house became a regular meeting-place for the Vaishnavas. Here Nimai had his nightly Samkirtanas in which only his close associates were allowed to participate. The doors of the house were closed when the Samkirtanas started and no outsider was allowed to enter. It was at these meetings that Nimai is said to have revealed his divine form to his followers. These nocturnal and private gatherings continued for some time. But as already indicated, the professed mission of Nimai’s life was to preach Samkirtana as the only means of deliverance in the age of Kali.³ He could not, therefore, confine his devotional activities to the limited circle of his friends, and it did not take him long to organize Samkirtanan parties and processions in which thousands and thousands of people participated, parading the streets of Navadvip, singing and dancing and surcharging the whole atmosphere of the city with unique devotional fervour.

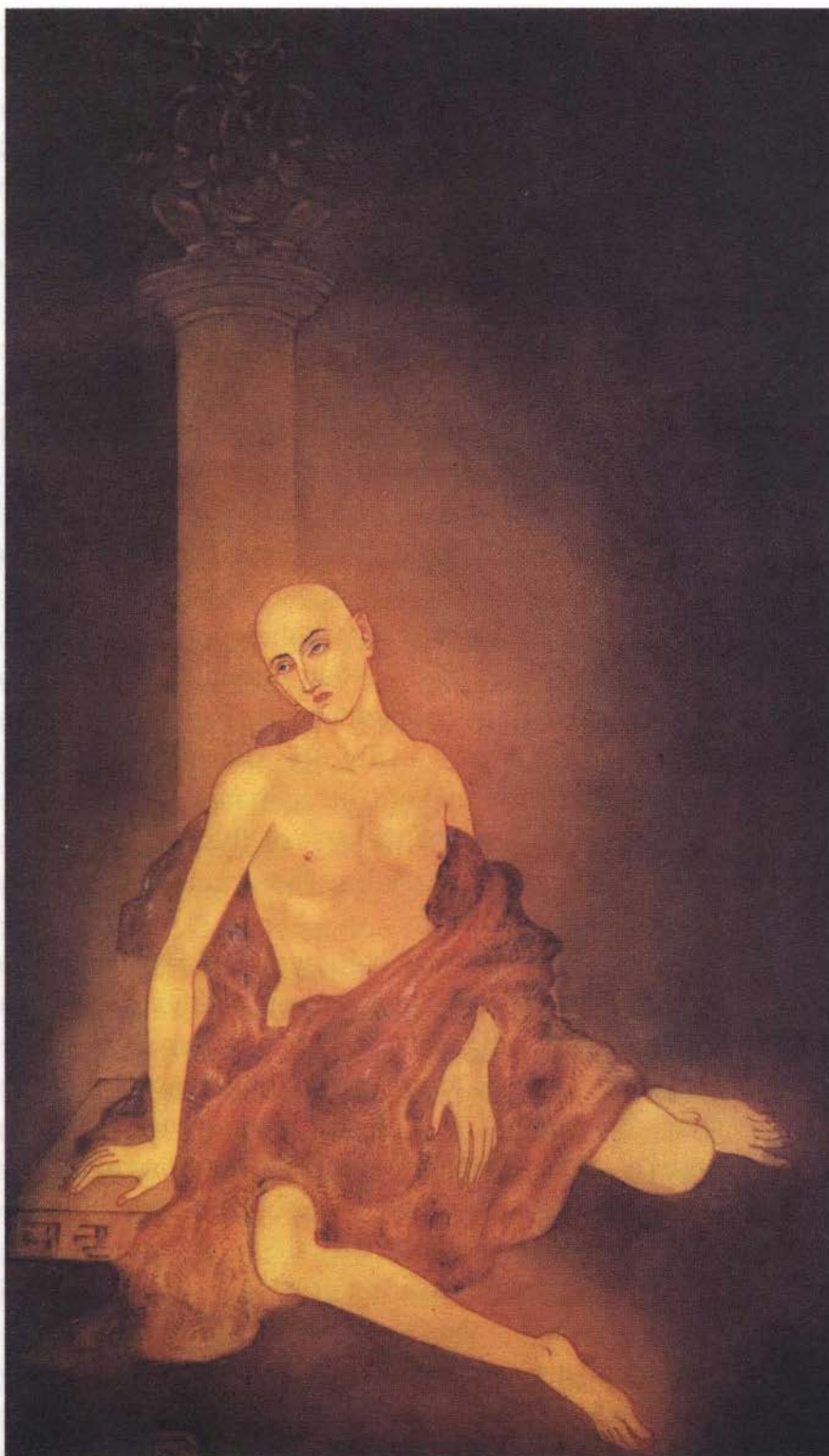
The movement had a universal appeal, but a small and influential section of people, proud of their learning and social status, did not like the tumultuous scenes it released which threatened to wipe away the age-old distinctions of caste and creed

and high and low in society. They complained to the Kazi, the Mohammadan governor of the town. The Kazi tried to crush the movement, but Nimai counterattacked immediately by organising a huge Samkirtana in all the streets of Navadvip, and aimed... at the Kazi's residence. At the sight of the crowd, the Kazi accepted to meet its leader. He fell a helpless prey to the tremendous spiritual influence of Nimai, and not only allowed Samkirtan thereafter, but even, according to some sources, became a Vaishnava himself.

The conversion of the Kazi broke the bone of the opposition Nimai had to encounter, but the pedantic scholars and godless persons persisted in their attitude of scornful indifference. Nimai realised that this type of people would not respect him unless he became a monk. "They themselves", he said to a disciple, "will fall at my feet; thus only can I redeem them and fulfil the mission of my life." He therefore resolved to renounce the world. Nimai was only twenty-four years old. His young wife, Vishnupriya, had accepted that her husband was a special human being, and had started worshipping him as God incarnate — but what about his mother, Shashi? When Nimai informed his mother of his drastic decision, and asked for her blessings, her grief was so overwhelming that his own voice got choked with emotion. Finally he said: "You were my mother in all my previous incarnations. I promise you I shall be born again as your son in two more births. So please do not grieve for me ..."

A few days later, Shashi stood in front of their home and gazed at the receding figure of her only child: Nimai was setting out for Katwa, a village twenty-four miles away from Navadvip, on the other side of the Ganges, where a monk, Keshav Bharati, had agreed to initiate him into monastic life. Many people gathered there, looking wonderingly at the handsome young man who was about to forsake all worldly pleasures. Once tonsured, Nimai sat near Keshav Bharati and whispered into his ear a mantra which he had heard in a dream. Keshav Bharati gladly initiated him with that mantra, then gave Nimai the name of Sri Krishna-Chaitanya: "He who awakens Sri Krishna in the Hearts of All."

The ceremony over, the new Sannyasin left intending to go to Brindavan: but he was in such ecstasy that for three days and nights, without food or rest, he roamed the countryside in search of his beloved Krishna. Finally, the few disciples who were with him convinced him to go and rest at the house of one of them in a nearby town. Shashi, who had been informed, came the next morning and with her a vast crowd of followers from Navadvip. Since Nimai had left, the city had been enveloped in lamentations. Now the days passed in rejoicing at the reunion. But it is improper for a monk to live with his kindred in his birth-place, so a residence elsewhere had to be



*Shri Chaitanya under
Garuda Stambh, by
Nandalal Bose,
N.G.M.A., New Delhi*

chosen for the new Sannyasin. When consulted, Shashi replied: "Let him live at Nilachala [today's Puri], which is, as it were, next door to Navadvip. People are continuously passing between the two places, and I shall always get his news."

So a month after his initiation, Sri Chaitanya took leave of his broken-hearted mother and the Vaishnavas of Navadvip, to go and live at Puri (in Orissa) with a few of his disciples. As soon as he arrived in Puri, his extraordinary Bhakti, combined with his capacity for brilliant argument and simple and direct explanations, started to win over to him and to the path of devotion many new disciples. The first was a famous veteran scholar of Vedanta, living at Puri under the patronage of Prataparudra, the king of Orissa. The old scholar, after a long discussion with Sri Chaitanya, not only accepted him as his saviour, but became so passionately attached to him that he could bear anything in the world but separation from him.

A short while later, Sri Chaitanya started on a pilgrimage to South India, which lasted more than two years. His visit to the South created a deep and lasting impression on the minds of the people. The devotion which had flowed freely in that part of the country in the days of the Tamil Alvars,⁴ but which had dried up as time had passed, was now revived, taking the form of a sudden outburst of devotional songs in Kanarese and Marathi. Vaishnavism as propounded by Sri Chaitanya was even proclaimed as the state religion of Karnataka. Shortly after Sri Chaitanya's return to Puri, several influential personalities whom he had met and converted during his journey came to stay there with him for the rest of their lives. Most of them were officials working under the King, Prataparudra. Then came an even more important event: the conversion of the king himself.

Repeatedly, through several companions of Sri Chaitanya, the king had begged for an interview with him; repeatedly Sri Chaitanya had refused, on the grounds that it was not proper for a Sannyasin to have familiarity with a king. After all his efforts had failed, one day Prataparudra stole into the courtyard of the house where the Master was living. Sri Chaitanya was lying unconscious in trance, in the lap of one of his disciples, while the others were performing Samkirtana around him. Prataparudra fell at his feet. On regaining consciousness, Sri Chaitanya expressed deep regret for having even unwillingly come into contact with one who was devoted to power and self. When the king heard this, his grief knew no bounds. He offered to surrender all his wealth and power at the feet of Sri Chaitanya, and prayed to him to be accepted as the lowest of his servants. Sri Chaitanya was moved by these words, and clasped the king in a loving embrace, which brought tears of joy to Prataparudra's eyes. The Raja, who was a terror to the Pathans and whose physical

strength and iron contact was dreaded even by wrestlers, melted at his touch.

For the Chariot Festival of Jagannath, about two hundred Bengali disciples of Sri Chaitanya arrived at Puri, led by the close companions whom he had sent to Bengal to revive there the devotion for the Lord. A huge Kirtan procession, the first of its kind in Puri, was organised, in which Sri Chaitanya and his followers sang and danced in front of the chariot carrying the image of Lord Jagannath.

In 1514, Sri Chaitanya tried again to go to Brindavan. About five years earlier, at the time of his Sannyasa, he had sent there one of his main disciples, with the mission of reclaiming the holy city, long neglected and lost. The mission had resulted in a newly restored Brindavan. To reach there, he had to cross the territory of a ferocious Muhammadan chief, whose curiosity was so greatly aroused on hearing about Sri Chaitanya that he came out to meet him. Conquered at once, the Muhammadan fell at his feet and made all necessary arrangements for his new Master to journey safely through his territory. A large number of people, including even those who five years earlier had been hostile to Sri Chaitanya, came from distant places to pay homage to him. The rush was so great and the crowd so numerous that, on the advice of two Brahmana brothers — ministers in the court of the Muhammadan King of Bengal and whom he had just won over to Bhakti — Sri Chaitanya decided not to go on towards Brindavan, but to return to Puri.

He started for Brindavan again in the autumn of 1515. This time he took with him only two attendants (he could not travel alone, as he was constantly going into trance) and followed a route through the forests to avoid being noticed. When he finally reached Brindavan, the intensity of his bhakti was such that in every creeper and blade of grass he saw his beloved Krishna. Chanting and dancing through the holy forests, he wept and often fell senseless on the ground, lost in the bliss of Divine Love. On his way back, he was so charged and radiant that a muslim prince, meeting him on the road, felt the name of Krishna come spontaneously to his lips when he saw Sri Chaitanya. The Prince and his attendants were at once converted to Vaishnavism.

Back in Puri around April, 1516, Sri Chaitanya passed the remaining eighteen years of his life in monastic seclusion in the garden-house which had been put at his disposal. After his Sannyasa, he had spent six years travelling all over the country, and spreading everywhere the seeds of Bhakti. The seeds having sprouted and taken root in the soil, he could now leave the plants to the care of his able lieutenants. During these last years, all his days were spent in deep communion with the Lord, interrupted only by occasional conversations with a few of his closest disciples, who lived near him or came from distant places to receive instructions from him.

The biographers of Sri Chaitanya are agreed that he passed away in 1534. The manner in which he passed away is veiled with mystery. The general belief is that he disappeared physically and merged with the deity of the temple of Jagannath, for no trace of his body was ever found.

Based on *Chaitanya, His Life and Doctrine*, by A.K. Majumdar (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan), and on *The Philosophy and Religion of Sri Chaitanya*, by O.B.L. Kapoor (Munshiram Manoharlal).



Chaitanya with his disciples, by Abanindranath Tagore

Notes

- 1 *Shraddha Ceremony*: Traditional ceremony in commemoration of a deceased parent.
- 2 *Samkirtana*: Group dancing and chanting in the name of Krishna. A distinctly informal, unritualistic emotional mode of worship.
- 3 *The age of Kali* (or Kali Yuga): According to the Indian tradition, this is the era we live in now. It is the last of the four Yugas, or Ages, which form a cosmic cycle. This fourth Age is a Dark Age, after which a new cycle will start again, with a Golden Age or Satya Yuga.
- 4 *Alwars*: Twelve poet Bhaktas of Tamil Nadu, who lived in the second half of the first millenium AD, and composed beautiful devotional hymns.

A few dates

1486 (February)	— Birth in Navadvip.
1507	— Tour of Bengal.
1508	— Pilgrimage to Gaya and conversion.
1510 (January)	— Sannyasa at Katwa.
1510 (March)	— Arrival at Puri.
1510 (April)-1511	— Tour of South India.
1514	— First pilgrimage to Brindavan and Mathura.
1515	— Second pilgrimage to Brindavan and Mathura.
1516 (April)	— Return to Puri.
1534	— Passing away in Puri.

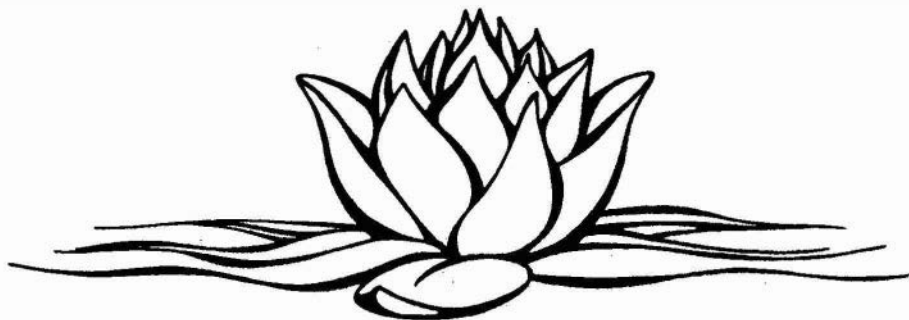
Suggestions for further reading

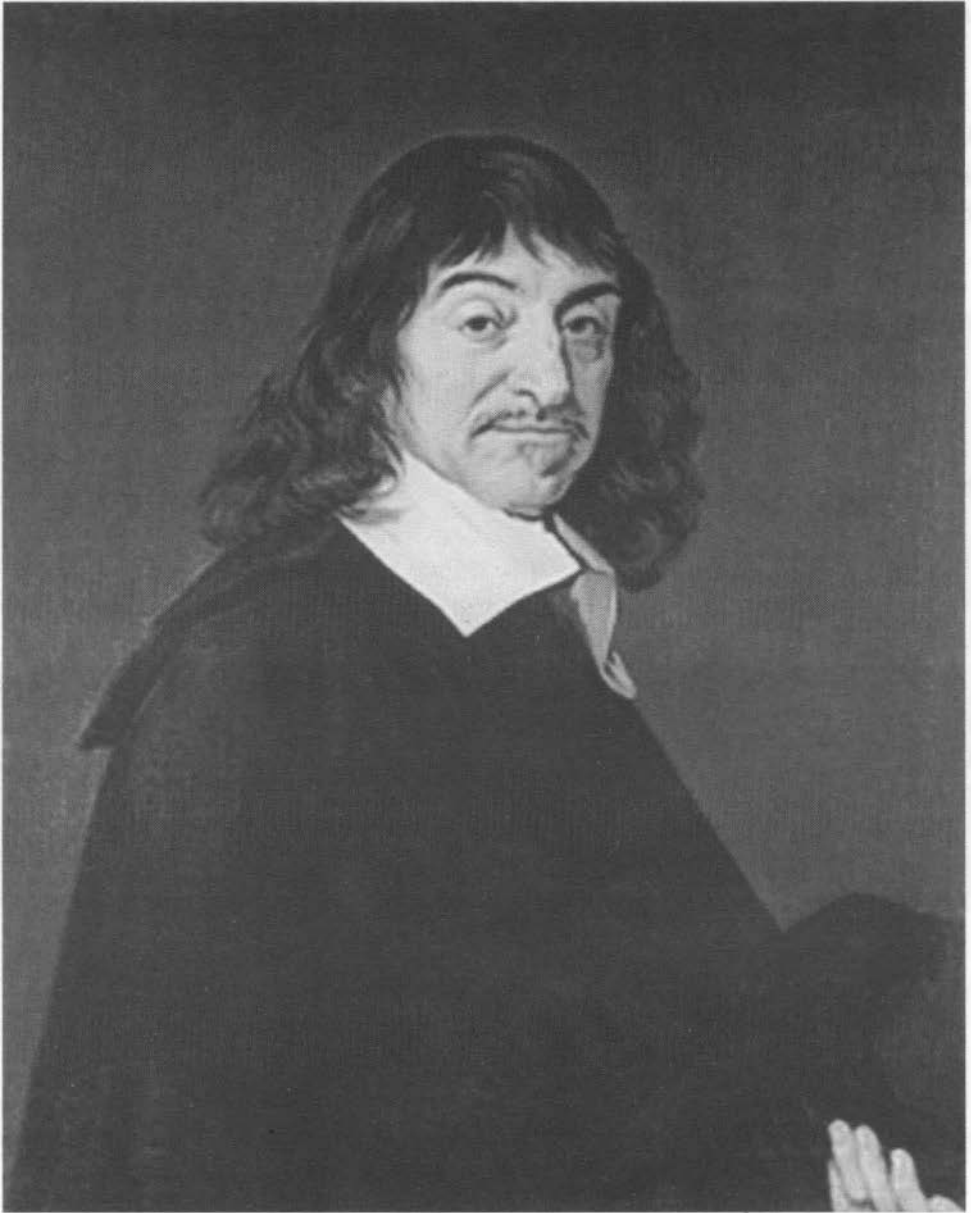
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René Descartes

Proofs of the Existence of God and of the Human Soul

Introduction

Pursuit of truth is easily acknowledged to be an ideal for every thinking and living being. But what is truth and how can it be pursued? This has been debated through the centuries. What is claimed to be true by some is opposed by others. Some believe that truth is what our physical senses perceive; some others believe that truth is what our reasoning mind comes to conceive as real; some others believe that truth can be known neither by the senses nor by the reasoning intellect; according to them, truth is given to us through God's revelation.

Truth by revelation became a preponderant concept in the West during the Middle Ages. The great theologians of the Christian religion propounded the theory of revelation and pointed out that there was a clear distinction between reason and revelation. However, with the advent of the Renaissance, when the ancient Greek knowledge began to spread once again throughout Europe, a new age of reason began to dawn. Now, by means of physical verification certain facts were established which turned out to be in direct opposition to what was thought to be the revealed truth. The great scientists of this time revolutionised the concept of the universe and the place of earth and man within it. Mathematics, which had already reached great heights in ancient Greek civilisation, was now developed as a perfect model of science. That a proposition must be proved to be true before it can be accepted as true became widely acknowledged. Along with this came a serious questioning as to whether something should be accepted as true simply on the basis of faith, because

it was a revelation or an unquestioned dogma. It is in this psychological climate that there arose a brilliant star in the firmament of thought who crystallised the tendency of discovering the truth by means of pure reason. This was René Descartes.

René Descartes was born in 1596 in La Haye, a small town in the region of Touraine in France. His father was a councillor of the Parliament of Brittany and belonged to the gentry. He left his son enough means to live as a gentleman of leisure — a way of life which Descartes cherished. His mother died of ill-health a year after his birth. Her delicate disposition was inherited by him and he had to be carefully brought up by a nurse during his childhood.

At the age of ten, he entered the Jesuit College of La Flèche, where he received a better grounding in Mathematics than he could have got at other universities of the time: "The subject being specially dear to me for it alone could lead to certain knowledge." He was a brilliant student and he received special attention from his teachers. He completed his education at the University of Poitiers, with some study of law and probably of medicine. He then went to Paris, where he found social life not quite to his taste and he began to seek quiet and leisure to carry on his work.

The decisive event of his life came about on November 10, 1619, during a night of great inspiration and "élan". He had successive visions or dreams in which he saw flashes of light and heard thunder. It seemed to him that some divine spirit was revealing to him a new philosophy. At the core of this revelation was the intuition that there was a fundamental accord between the laws of nature and those of the science of mathematics.

To carry on this work he wished to be left undisturbed. He did not think it would be possible to be so in France for several reasons. He thus enlisted, as a voluntary gentleman, in the Dutch army and moved to Holland, where he lived for twenty years. Holland in the seventeenth century was a very free and hospitable place for those spirits of Europe who were breaking fresh ground and did not want any constraints of tradition imposed upon them. Later, Descartes also spent some time in the Bavarian army. These occupations gave him leisure, and also the seclusion from social life.

He carried on, however, an enlightened intellectual correspondence with Queen Christina of Sweden, a lady of great intelligence, who persuaded him to take up residence at her court so that she could take lessons from him. He then moved to Sweden, and that is where he died in 1650. Descartes' writings seem to have been done during short periods of great concentration. His most important works are Discourse on Method and Meditations.

That truth must be pursued as the very aim of intellectual life is the dominant message of Descartes. And what is particularly significant in Descartes is the method of doubt which he came to perfect. Indeed, Descartes did not preach the method of doubting in a spirit of making the act of doubting fashionable. This is important to underline because among many pseudo-intellectuals there is a fashion to pronounce every proposition made to them to be doubtful and then to remain quiescent, throwing the entire burden of the pursuit of truth on the propounder. What Descartes pointed out was that doubt itself should be based upon convincing grounds, and he was ready to doubt even those convincing grounds on the basis of some other convincing grounds which he was ready to doubt on other convincing grounds, and so on. His method of doubt was a responsible method, deeply conceived, and it was committed to the pursuit of truth right up to its possible end; at the same time, he did not assume that this process of doubting would ever end at all. It was only in respect of the statement "I am thinking" that he saw clearly that it was impossible to doubt it. In that case, the act of doubting revealed its own presupposition, namely the process of thinking. Thus this presupposition affirmed itself through the very act of doubting. Therefore he found that it was impossible to doubt the proposition "I am thinking" (cogito). And from the proposition "I am thinking" he saw that an inevitable proposition followed, namely, "I am" (sum). This is the famous Cartesian proposition "Cogito ergo sum". Indeed, in the later history of philosophy this argument, "I think therefore I am" has come to be questioned, and in the Cartesian spirit we may welcome this further questioning, for it opens up a new chapter in the pursuit of truth. But what is most valuable in Descartes is his incisive spirit of enquiry and his boldness to pursue the truth even at the risk of never reaching it. He insisted that reason is an inborn light within us, and it is with this light that we must pursue the path to the discovery of truth.

What was Descartes' standard or criterion by which to judge whether an idea was true or false? His answer, which does not seem especially convincing at first sight, is found to be quite profound as one thinks of it more and more deeply. According to him, an idea which is clear and precise is true. Negatively speaking, an idea which is unclear and imprecise is untrue. We shall leave it to the reader to doubt if this Cartesian definition is valid or not, on the condition that he finds valid grounds to doubt it.

Descartes is not only famous for his doubting, but also for his argument to prove the existence of God. Descartes came to accept the existence of God because he found that his argument established the existence of God beyond any possibility

of doubt. This argument can be stated in difficult, even quite sophisticated ways, but it can also be stated very simply, although some staunch spirits may not pardon this kind of formulation. But if we are permitted, we may formulate Descartes' argument as follows: "I cannot doubt that I am thinking because to doubt that I am thinking, I must think. Among numerous thoughts, there is the thought of perfection. Perfection means that which lacks nothing. Existence is something, therefore perfection cannot lack existence. By perfection is meant God. That means that God cannot lack existence. Therefore God exists."

According to Descartes' argument, the "idea" of God implies the actual existence of God. What it affirms is that the idea of God is so special that to think of God and not to think of him as existing is impossible. Following Descartes, one can go further and say that, truly speaking, to think is to think of God. There is only one thing that can be thought of, and that is God. God as absolute and perfect being is not only conceivable but it is the only thing that can be conceived of.

Whether this argument seems convincing or not is to be judged by the reader, and we shall not burden him with further reflections. In the meantime, let us study in the following text the interesting meditations of Descartes, which will show us some of the contours of the adventure of his thought.



Philosopher in Meditation, by Rembrandt

I do not know whether I ought to touch upon my first meditations here, for they are so metaphysical and out of the ordinary that they might not be interesting to most people. Nevertheless, in order to show whether my fundamental notions are sufficiently sound, I find myself more or less constrained to speak of them. I had noticed for a long time that in practice it is sometimes necessary to follow opinions which we know to be very uncertain, just as though they were indubitable, as I stated before; but inasmuch as I desired to devote myself wholly to the search for truth, I thought that I should take a course precisely contrary, and reject as absolutely false anything of which I could have the least doubt, in order to see whether anything would be left after this procedure which could be called wholly certain. Thus, as our senses deceive us at times, I was ready to suppose that nothing was at all the way our senses represented them to be. As there are men who make mistakes in reasoning even on the simplest topics in geometry, I judged that I was as liable to error as any other, and rejected as false all the reasoning which I had previously accepted as valid demonstration. Finally, as the same precepts which we have when awake may come to us when asleep without their being true, I decided to suppose that nothing that had ever entered my mind was more real than the illusions of my dreams. But I soon noticed that while I thus wished to think everything false, it was necessarily true that I who thought so was something. Since this truth, *I think, therefore I am*, was so firm and assured that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were unable to shake it, I judged that I could safely accept it as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.

I then examined closely what I was, and saw that I could imagine that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place that I occupied, but that I could not imagine for a moment that I did not exist. On the contrary, from the very fact that I doubted the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed. On the other hand, if I had ceased to think while all the rest of what I had ever imagined remained true, I would have had no reason to believe that I existed; therefore I concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature was only to think, and which, to exist, has no need of space nor of any material thing. Thus it follows that this ego, this soul, by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body and is easier to know than the latter, and that even if the body were not, the soul would not cease to be all that it now is.

Next I considered in general what is required of a proposition for it to be true and certain, for since I had just discovered one to be such, I thought I ought also to

know of what that certitude consisted. I saw that there was nothing at all in this statement, "I think, therefore I am", to assure me that I was saying the truth, unless it was that I saw very clearly that to think one must exist. So I judged that I could accept as a general rule that the things which we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are always true, but that there may well be some difficulty in deciding which are those which we conceive distinctly.

After that I reflected upon the fact that I doubted, and that, in consequence, my spirit was not wholly perfect, for I saw clearly that it was a greater perfection to know than to doubt. I decided to ascertain from what source I have learned to think of something more perfect than myself, and it appeared evident that it must have been from some nature which was in fact more perfect. As for my ideas about many other things outside of me, as the sky, earth, light, heat, and thousands of other things, I was not so much troubled to discover where they came from, because I found nothing in them superior to my own nature. If they really existed, I could believe that whatever perfection they possessed might be derived from my own nature; if they did not exist, I could believe that they were derived from nothingness, that is, that they were derived from my own defects. But this could not be the explanation of my idea of a being more perfect than my own. To derive it from nothingness was manifestly impossible, and it is no less repugnant to good sense to assume that what is more perfect comes from and depends on the less perfect than it is to assume that something comes from nothing, so that I could not assume that it came from myself. Thus the only hypothesis left was that this idea was put in my mind by a nature that was really more perfect than I was, which had all the perfections that I could imagine, and which was, in a word, God. To this I added that since I knew some perfections which I did not possess, I was not the only being in existence (I will here use freely, if you will pardon me, the terms of the schools), and that it followed of necessity that there was someone else more perfect upon whom I depended and from whom I had acquired all that I possessed. For if I had been alone and independent of anything else, so that I had bestowed upon myself all that limited quantity of value which I shared with the perfect Being, I would have been able to get from myself, in the same way, all the surplus which I recognise as lacking in me, and so would have been myself infinite, eternal, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, and, in sum, I would possess all the perfections that I could discover in God.

For, following the reasoning which I have just explained, to know the nature of God as far as I was capable of such knowledge, I had only to consider each quality of which I had an idea, and decide whether it was or was not a perfection to possess

**Descartes with Queen
Christina of Sweden**



it. I would then be certain that none of those which had some imperfection was in him, but that all the others were. I saw that doubt, inconstancy, sorrow and similar things could not be part of God's nature, since I would be happy to be without them myself. In addition, I had ideas of many sensible and corporeal entities, for although I might suppose that I was dreaming and that all that I saw or imagined was false, I could not at any rate deny that the ideas were truly in my consciousness. Since I had already recognised very clearly that intelligent nature is distinct from corporeal nature, I considered that composition is an evidence of dependency and that dependency is manifestly a defect. From this I judged that it could not be a perfection in God to be composed of these two natures, and that consequently he was not so composed. But if there were in the world bodies, or even intelligences or other natures that were not wholly perfect, their being must depend on God's power in such a way that they could not subsist without him for a single moment.

At this point I wished to seek for other truths, and proposed for consideration the object of the geometricians. This I conceived as a continuous body, or a space infinitely extended in length, breadth, and height or depth; divisible into various parts which can have different shapes and sizes and can be moved or transposed in

any way: all of which is presumed by geometricians to be true of their object. I went through some of their simplest demonstrations and noticed that the great certainty which everyone attributes to them is only based on the fact that they are evidently conceived, following the rule previously established. I noticed also that there was nothing at all in them to assure me of the existence of their object; it was clear, for example, that if we posit a triangle, its three angles must be equal to two right angles, but there was nothing in that to assure me that there was a single triangle in the world. When I turned back to my idea of a perfect Being, on the other hand, I discovered that existence was included in that idea in the same way that the idea of a triangle contains the equality of its angles to two right angles, or that the idea of a sphere includes the equidistance of all its parts from its centre. Perhaps, in fact, the existence of the perfect Being is even more evident. Consequently, it is at least as certain that God, who is this perfect Being, exists, as any theorem of geometry could possibly be.

What makes many people feel that it is difficult to know of the existence of God, or even of the nature of their own souls, is that they never consider things higher than corporeal objects. They are so accustomed never to think of anything without picturing it — a method of thinking suitable only for material objects — that everything which is not picturable seems to them unintelligible. This is also manifest in the fact that even philosophers hold it as a maxim in the schools that there is nothing in the understanding which was not first in the senses, a location where it is clearly evident that the ideas of God and of the soul have never been. It seems to me that those who wish to use imagery to understand these matters are doing precisely the same thing that they would be doing if they tried to use their eyes to hear sounds or smell odours. There is even this difference: that the sense of sight gives us no less certainty of the truth of objects than do those of smell and hearing, while neither our imagery nor our senses could assure us of anything without the co-operation of our understanding.

Finally, if there are still some men who are not sufficiently persuaded of the existence of God and of their souls by the reasons which I have given, I want them to understand that all the other things of which they might think themselves more certain, such as their having a body, or the existence of stars and of an earth, and other such things, are less certain. For even though we have a moral assurance of these things, such that it seems we cannot doubt them without extravagance, yet without being unreasonable we cannot deny that, as far as metaphysical certainty goes, there is sufficient room for doubt. For we can imagine, when asleep, that we

have another body and see other stars and another earth without there being any such. How could one know that the thoughts which come to us in dreams are false rather than the others, since they are often no less vivid and detailed? Let the best minds study this question as long as they wish, I do not believe they can find any reason good enough to remove this doubt unless they presuppose the existence of God. The very principle which I took as a rule to start with, namely, that all those things which we conceived very clearly and very distinctly are true, is known to be true only because God exists, and because he is a perfect Being, and because everything in us comes from him. From this it follows that our ideas or notions, being real things which come from God insofar as they are clear and distinct, cannot to that extent fail to be true. Consequently, though we often have ideas which contain falsity, they can only be those ideas which contain some confusion and obscurity, in which respect they participate in nothingness. That is to say, they are confused in us only because we are not wholly perfect. It is evident that it is not less repugnant to good sense to assume that falsity or imperfection as such is derived from God, as that truth or perfection is derived from nothingness. But if we did not know that all reality and truth within us came from a perfect and infinite Being, however clear and distinct our ideas might be, we would have no reason to be certain that they were endowed with the perfection of being true.

After the knowledge of God and the soul has thus made us certain of our rule, it is easy to see that the dreams which we have when asleep do not in any way cast doubt upon the truth of our waking thoughts. For if it happened that we had some very distinct idea, even while sleeping, as for example when a geometrician dreams of some new proof, his sleep does not keep the proof from being good. As for the most common error of dreams, which is to picture various objects in the same way as our external senses represent them to us, it does not matter if this gives us a reason to distrust the truth of the impressions we receive from the senses, because we can also be mistaken in them frequently without being asleep, as when jaundiced persons see everything yellow, or as the stars and other distant objects appear much smaller than they really are. For in truth, whether we are asleep or awake, we should never allow ourselves to be convinced except on the evidence of our reason. Note that I say of our reason, and not of our imagination or of our senses; for even though we see the sun very clearly, we must not judge thereby that its size is such as we see it, and we can well imagine distinctly the head of a lion mounted on the body of a goat, without concluding that a chimera exists in this world. For reason does not insist that all we see or visualise in this way is true, but it does insist that all our ideas or

notions must have some foundation in truth, for it would not be possible that God, who is all-perfect and wholly truthful, would otherwise have given them to us. Since our reasonings are never as evident or as complete in sleep as in waking life, although sometimes our imaginations are then as lively and detailed as when awake, or even more so, and since reason tells us also that all our thoughts cannot be true, as we are not wholly perfect; whatever of truth is to be found in our ideas will inevitably occur in those which we have when awake rather than in our dreams.

Text from *Discourse on Method*, by Descartes, translated by J. Lafleur (New York: The Library of Liberal Arts, second edition, 1956), pp. 20-26.

The Philosophical Climate of Europe at the Time of Descartes

The times were beginning to find fault with the old traditions, the old language and literature, the old art, the old theological systems, the old political relations of Church and State, the old authoritative religion. The spirit of reflection and criticism, which had been silently quickening, broke out in open revolt against authority and tradition: in the revolt of nation against Church, of reason against prescribed truth, of the individual against the compulsion of ecclesiastical organisation. The conflict between Church and state had been settled in favour of the State, but within both Church and State themselves the desire for political, economic, religious and intellectual liberty was forming. It found partial realisation in the Renaissance and Reformation; later on it expressed itself in modern philosophy.

The history of this new era, the modern, is marked by a further awakening of the reflective spirit, a more insistent criticism and protest against absolutism and collectivism as represented by tradition. The need grew strong for freedom in thought, in feeling and in action. Reason became sovereign in science and philosophy. It was being increasingly accepted that truth is not something to be handed down by authority or decreed by papal bulls, but something to be acquired; something to be achieved by free and impartial inquiry. And the gaze was turned from the contemplation of supernatural things to the examination of natural things, from heaven to earth — theology finally accepted to yield her crown to science and philosophy. The physical and the mental world, society, human institutions, and religion itself were explained by natural causes.

What characterised the higher intellectual life of the period following the Middle Ages was an abiding faith in the power of human reason, an intense interest in natural things, a lively yearning for civilisation and progress. Knowledge, however, was esteemed and desired not only for its sake but also for its utility, for its practical value: for knowledge was power. Nearly all great leaders of modern thought, from Francis Bacon onward, were interested in the practical applications of the results of scientific investigation and looked forward with an enthusiastic optimism to a coming era of wonderful achievement in the mechanic art, technology, medicine, as well as in the field of political and social reform.

Modern philosophy, in its beginnings, breathed the spirit of the modern times, the characteristic of which we have endeavoured to describe. It was independent in its search for truth, resembling ancient Greek thought in this respect. It was rationalistic in the sense that it made human reason the highest authority in the pursuit of knowledge. It was naturalistic in that it sought to explain inner and outer nature without supernatural presuppositions. It was, therefore, scientific, keeping in touch with the new sciences, particularly with the sciences of external nature.

The new movement found in the work of Descartes its most significant formulation. He elaborated, for the future centuries, a method on which science and philosophy could found themselves confidently.

In looking back at the past, it is interesting for us to observe that we take our stand today on yet another frontier, perhaps as significant for the future as the preceding era was in its own time. Fresh discoveries of science are pointing the way to the elaboration of new methods. These have not yet been worked out but we seem to be outgrowing the past ones. Maybe, we shall be the innovators of those to come.

A few dates

1596	— Birth of Descartes.
1604-1614	— Studies in the Jesuit College of La Flèche.
1619 (November 10)	— Night of great inspiration.
1618-1628	— Various travels through Europe.
1628	— Descartes settles in Holland.
1637	— <i>Discourse on Method</i> .
1641	— <i>Meditations</i> .
1644	— <i>The Principles of Philosophy</i> .
1649	— <i>Treatise on Passions</i> .
	— Descartes goes to Sweden, invited by Queen Christina.
1651	— Death of Descartes in Sweden.

Suggestions for further reading

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Swami Vivekananda

Have You seen God ?

Introduction

Described as “the soul of puissance if ever there was one, a very lion among men” he who came to be known the world over as Swami Vivekananda lived for only 39 years. He was born on January 12, 1863, and named Narendra Nath. His father Vishwanath Datta, was a well-known Calcutta attorney, and his mother, Bhuvaneshwari, was known as a highly intelligent woman. Narendra Nath’s early years were spent in a home characterised by purity and truthfulness. In his boyhood Narendra showed remarkable capacities of intellect, powers of concentration and qualities of courage, self-confidence and resourcefulness. While still in his teens and studying in college, he was greatly influenced by science and logic. He was at that time sceptical, and yet he had a great yearning in his heart to touch something absolutely perfect.

This burning quest in the spirited and fearless young man drove Narendra to seek from those who claimed to be God-knowers and God-lovers the answer to one question: Have you seen God? No one gave him a satisfactory answer. Then one day some friends took the sceptical Narendra to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar, some miles from Calcutta, to see someone who was known to be a “Godman”. The first meeting between Narendra Nath and Sri Ramakrishna was momentous. First, Narendra sang a few devotional songs and, as usual, poured his soul into them. Suddenly, Sri Ramakrishna took his hand and drew him into the adjacent room. When they were alone, the Master began to shed tears of joy and said, “Ah, you have come

so late! How unkind of you to keep me waiting so long! My ears are almost seared listening to the cheap talk of worldly people. Oh how I have been yearning to unburden my mind to one who will understand my thought!" Then with folded hands he went on: "Lord! I know you are the ancient sage Nara — the incarnation of Narayana — born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind." Recalling this moment, Swami Vivekananda described his own reaction: "I was altogether taken aback by his conduct; 'Who is this man whom I have come to see?' I thought, 'he must be stark mad!'" "

Nevertheless, Sri Ramakrishna extracted from Narendra a promise to return to Dakshineswar. Then they went back into the other room. It was at this point that Narendra Nath asked his question to the Master: "Sir, have you seen God?" The reply was immediate: "Yes, I have seen God. I see Him as I see you here, only much more clearly. God can be seen. One can talk to him. But who cares for God? People shed torrents of tears for their wives, children, wealth, and property, but who weeps for the vision of God? If one cries sincerely for God, one can surely see Him." That answer impressed Narendra at once:

For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world. As I heard these things from his lips, I could not but believe that he was saying them not like an ordinary preacher, but from the depths of his own realization... "He may be a madman," I thought, "but only the fortunate few can have such renunciation. Even if insane, this man is the holiest of the holy, a true saint, and for that alone he deserves the reverent homage of mankind!"

During his second visit, Narendra had an even stranger experience. Sri Ramakrishna called him to sit by his side and in an ecstatic mood muttered some words and placed his right foot on Narendra's body. "With my eyes open," Swami Vivekananda recalled, "I saw that the wall, and everything in the room, whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality was about to merge in an all encompassing mysterious void!" Narendra was terrified and cried out, "What are you doing to me? I have my parents, brothers, and sisters at home." Then Sri Ramakrishna laughed and stroked the young man's chest, and the experience vanished as quickly as it had come.

Narendra was tremendously puzzled by these experiences and was angry with himself for having succumbed to the influence of a "madman". But what the sceptic in him refused proved irresistibly fascinating to another part of his character, and

Narendra returned again and again to Dakshineswar. On his part, Sri Ramakrishna described these early days of their relationship as being particularly painful to him: "I felt such a constant agonizing desire to see him! At times the pain would be so excruciating that I felt as if my head were being squeezed like a wet towel. I cried, O my darling, come to me! I cannot live without seeing you." If Narendra failed to come to him for some days, he would become disconsolate. He would weep and pray to the Divine Mother, begging Her to make him come.

Their relationship continued in this way for some time. Narendra was a born idealist and seeker of truth, but his mind was intensely analytical and he subordinated his imagination to the demands of reason. Although his visits to Sri Ramakrishna were marked by overwhelming inner experiences, his great respect for Western material science and its processes made him want to test each of these experiences, and he would accept only those that he felt stood the test. He yearned for Truth, but would not believe anything merely through blind devotion. He needed direct vision to allay his doubts.

Later Sri Ramakrishna admitted that he was glad at heart that Narendra was a rebel; "without intellectual questioning and struggle," he said, "no one can arrive at full illumination." It was only after a series of powerful, undeniable experiences that Narendra accepted Sri Ramakrishna as, his Master. But before his final surrender Narendra Nath was to pass through a long period of suffering in his personal life. He had grown up in relative luxury, with few material worries. Then his father suddenly died. When the estate was settled the family found itself poor. Narendra, being the eldest son, was faced with the responsibility of supporting his mother, brothers and sisters. The hardship of these days drove Narendra almost to despair. He even expressed bitter doubts as to the existence of a God who could be author of such pain and evil. But these dark days also triggered an experience that would mark a decisive turning point in his life. This is how he described it:

One day the idea struck me that God listened to Sri Ramakrishna's prayers; so why should I not ask him to pray for me for the removal of my pecuniary needs?... I hurried to Dakshineswar... He said, "My boy, I can't make such demands. But why don't you go and ask the Mother yourself? All your sufferings are due to your disregard of Her." I said, "I do not know the Mother; you please speak to Her on my behalf. You must." He replied tenderly, "My dear boy, I have done so again and again. But you do not accept Her, so She does not grant my prayer. All right... go to the Kali temple tonight, prostrate yourself before the Mother, and ask Her any boon you like. It shall be granted. She is Knowledge Absolute, the Inscrutable Power of Brahman. By Her mere

will She has given birth to this world. Everything is in Her power to give. "I believed every word and eagerly waited for the night... As I went I was filled with a divine intoxication... Reaching the temple as I cast my eyes on the image I actually found that the Divine Mother was living and conscious... I was caught in a surging wave of devotion and love. In the ecstasy of joy I prostrated myself and prayed, "Mother, give me discrimination! Give me renunciation. Give me knowledge and devotion! Grant that I may have the uninterrupted vision of Thee!" As soon as I returned, the Master asked me if I had prayed to the Mother for the removal of my worldly needs. I was startled at this question and said, "No, Sir, I forgot all about it..." "Go again," he said, "and tell Her about your needs."

Narendra goes a second time, and the same thing occurs. Again Sri Ramakrishna sends him back. He goes a third time:

... but on entering the temple a terrible shame overpowered me. I thought, "What a trifle I have come to pray to the Mother about!" In shame and remorse I bowed to Her respectfully and said, "Mother, I want nothing but knowledge and devotion."

And so Narendra Nath came to know the Divine Mother, and the power of his Master. Later Sri Ramakrishna promised Narendra that his family would never be without plain food and clothing. The promise proved true, and now Narendra had more and more time to spend with him. These were the final years of the Master's and disciple's relationship, which was to reach an intensity described by those who observed it as "divine". Sri Ramakrishna left his body when Narendra was only 23 years old.

Shortly before his passing, Sri Ramakrishna had called Narendra to his bedside, and then entered into deep meditation. Narendra felt that a subtle force, resembling an electric current, was entering his body. When the Master regained knowledge of the outer world, he said to him, "O Naren, today I have given you everything I possess — now I am no more than a fakir, a penniless beggar. By the powers I have transmitted to you, you will accomplish great things in the world, and not until then will you return to the source whence you have come."

After the passing of the Master on August 16, 1886, Narendra and the band of young disciples found themselves with no means of support if they wished to continue their life together as seekers. Their one asset was their burning aspiration to realise God and to spread the Master's words.

The young men took the vows of sannyasa and started a Math¹ under extremely

1. Math: An institution of a spiritual order.

difficult conditions, bravely undergoing many privations. Narendra was their inspiration and their guide.

But Narendra longed for the peace of solitude. He also wanted to teach his brother monks not to depend upon him. One day he slipped away from the Math, alone and on foot, and became a wandering sannyasin. He travelled extensively in India from the Himalayan glaciers to the lands' end at Cape Comorin in the South. In central India he lived with a family of outcast sweepers and amidst them he found spiritual treasures, while their misery choked him. Absorbed within himself, he was a seething cauldron with "a soul on fire". "I feel a mighty power!" he wrote during this time. "It is as if I were to blaze forth. There are so many powers in me! It seems to me as if I could revolutionize the world..."

After a fierce inner struggle to integrate his intellect, his fiery spirit and his inherent spirituality, the two-fold mission of this man of destiny — namely, the quest for God and service to mankind — was to crystalize into a progressive action. On May 31, 1893, with the new name of Swami Vivekananda, he sailed from Bombay for the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago, USA. He was 30 years old and an unaccredited delegate among the many religious leaders from numerous faiths and sects from all parts of the world. Nevertheless, Swami Vivekananda captured the

centre of the stage of the Parliament. His magnetic presence brought people cheering to their feet as he began his first address: "Brothers and sisters of America..." The New York Herald had this to say: "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions."

After the Parliament he toured the United States and later visited England, Europe, China and Japan. He won many followers, a good number of whom came to be with him in India. He made a second trip abroad in 1899. But his strenuous schedules ever since his days as a wandering sannyasin had affected his health adversely. He began to feel that his mission on earth was drawing to a close, and his last year was spent in the Math at Belur. On July 4, 1902, Swami Vivekananda went to his room, lay down, and quietly left his body. He was 39 years old.



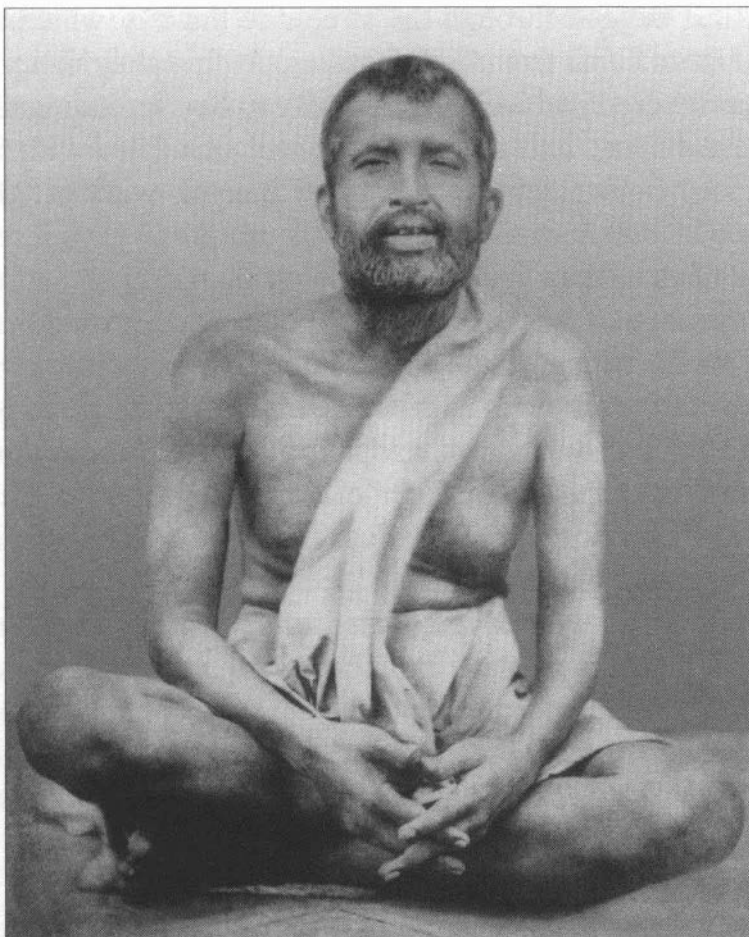
In California, 1900

Four years earlier, on another fourth of July, Swami Vivekananda had written a poem dedicated to that date which for him represented liberty; liberty of life and of spirit. Reading it now, one cannot but feel that Swami Vivekananda in some way embodied Liberty in its highest sense:

*To the fourth of July
Behold the dark clouds melt away
That gathered thick at night and hung
Like a gloomy pall above the earth!
Before thy magic touch the world
Awakes...
All hail to thee, thou lord of light!
A welcome new to thee today
O sun! Today thou sheddest liberty!
Bethink thee how the world did wait
And search for thee, through time and clime!
Move on, O lord, in thy resistless path,
Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world,
Till every land reflects thy light,
Till men and women, with uplifted head,
Behold their shackles broken and know
In springing joy their life renewed!*

Swami Vivekananda's life corresponded to a time in the earth's history when men and women throughout the world began to ask for a wider vision of life, a more comprehensive vision that would harmonise the diverse claims of science and spirituality. His burning quest to join together knowledge, devotion and action was indeed unique, and his numerous speeches and letters bear witness to this. Let us now turn to some of them in an attempt to understand more deeply this "very lion among men", one of the greatest Vibhutis in the history of the world.

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Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

(In one of his lectures abroad, Swami Vivekananda spoke thus about his Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa:)

I am what I am, and what I am is always due to him, whatever in me and in my words is good and true and eternal came to me through his mouth, his heart, his soul. Sri Ramakrishna is the spring of this phase of the earth's religious life, of its impulses and its activities. If I can show the world one glimpse of my Master, I shall not live in vain... His thoughts and his message were known to very few capable of giving them out. Among others, he left a few young boys who had renounced the world and were ready to carry on his work. Attempts were made to crush them. But they stood firm, having the inspiration of that great life before them. These young men,

living as sannyasins, begged through the streets of the city where they were born, although some of them came from high families. At first they met with great antagonism, but they persevered and went on from day to day spreading all over India the message of that great man, until the whole country was filled with the ideas he had preached. This man, from a remote village of Bengal, without education, by the sheer force of his own determination, realised the truth and gave it to others, leaving only a few young boys to keep it alive.

This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world:

Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality; and the more this is developed in man, the more powerful he is for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticize no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words, or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.¹

(At the World's Parliament of Religions, in Chicago, at the end of the first meeting on 11th September 1893, Swami Vivekananda spoke briefly:)

Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions; and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honour of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was

shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

The present convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: "Whosoever comes for Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me." Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

(Swami Vivekananda received wide acclaim during his years abroad. The success of his mission was extensively covered in the Indian Press, and when the news of Swami Vivekananda's departure from Europe reached India, the hearts of the people were stirred. City after city planned regal welcomes for him. His progress from Colombo, where he landed in January 1897 to Madras, demonstrates how deeply he had endeared himself to the men and women of India. Here are some excerpts from one of the many talks he delivered along the way:)

My India, arise! Where is your vital force? In your Immortal Soul. Each nation, like each individual, has one theme in this life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. If any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries, that nation dies... In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England. Artistic life in another, and so on. In India religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of the national life. And, therefore, if you suc-

ceed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics or society, the result will be that you will become extinct. Social reform and politics have to be preached through the vitality of your religion... Every man has to make his own choice; so has every nation. We made our choice ages ago. And it is the faith in an Immortal Soul. I challenge anyone to give it up. How can you change your nature? ... Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? If so, that is the first step to becoming a patriot

It is a man-making education all around that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. And here is the test of truth: anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all knowledge. Truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating. Give up these weakening mysticisms and be strong. The greatest truths are the simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence.²

(In the Math, things came to a climax one day when a brother disciple said that Sri Ramakrishna had emphasized bhakti alone for spiritual seekers and that philanthropic activities, organisations, and patriotic work were the Swami's own peculiar ideas, the result of his Western education and travel in Europe and America. The Swami retorted with a sort of rough humour and said:)

What do you know? You are an ignorant man... What do you understand of religion? You are only good at praying with folded hands: "O Lord! How beautiful is your nose! How sweet are your eyes!" and all such nonsense... And you think your salvation is secured and Sri Ramakrishna will come at the final hour and take you by the hand to the highest heaven! Study, public preaching, and doing humanitarian works are, according to you, maya, because he said to someone, "Seek and find God first; doing good to the world is a presumption!" As if God is such an easy thing to be achieved! As if He is such a fool as to make Himself a plaything in the

[illegible]

GOES

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

The Hindoo Monk of India.

hands of an imbecile!

You think you have understood Sri Ramakrishna better than myself! You think jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenderest faculties of the heart! Your bhakti is sentimental nonsense which makes one impotent. You want to preach Sri Ramakrishna as you have understood him, which is mighty little! Hands off! Who cares for your Ramakrishna! Who cares for your bhakti and mukti? Who cares what your scriptures say? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in tamas, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of karma-yoga. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or anyone, but of him only who serves and helps others without caring for his own bhakti and mukti!

(The Swami's voice was choked with emotion, his body shook, and his eyes flashed fire. Quickly he went to the next room. A few moments later some of his brother disciples entered the room and found him absorbed in meditation, tears flowing from his half-closed eyes. After nearly an hour the Swami got up, washed his face, and joined his spiritual brothers in the drawing-room. He said to them softly:)

When a man attains bhakti, his heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that he cannot bear even the touch of a flower! ... I cannot think or talk of Sri Ramakrishna long without being overwhelmed. So I am always trying to bind myself with the iron chains of jnana, for still my work for my motherland is unfinished and my message to the world not fully delivered. So as soon as I find that those feelings of bhakti are trying to come up and sweep me off my feet, I give a hard knock to them and make myself firm and adamant by bringing up austere jnana. Oh, I have work to do! I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me and will not give me rest till I have finished it. And oh, how shall I speak of him? Oh, his love for me!³

(Swami Vivekananda poured tremendous energy into the training of his fellow monks and disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. These excerpts are from the conversations he had with them:)

You will go to hell if you seek your own salvation! Seek the salvation of others if you want to reach the Highest. Kill out the desire for personal mukti. This is the greatest spiritual discipline. Work, my children, work with your whole heart and

soul! That is the thing. Mind not the fruit of work. What if you go to hell working for others? That is worth more than to gain heaven by seeking your own salvation ...Sri Ramakrishna came and gave his life for the world. I will also sacrifice my life. You also, every one of you, should do the same. All these works and so forth are only a beginning. Believe me, from the shedding of our life-blood will arise gigantic, heroic workers and warriors of God who will revolutionize the world.

You must try to combine in your life immense idealism with immense practicality. You must be prepared to go into deep meditation now, and the next moment you must be ready to go and cultivate fields. You must be prepared to explain the intricacies of the scriptures now, and the next moment to go and sell the produce of the fields... The true man is he who is strong as strength itself and yet possesses a woman's heart. The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the inner divinity. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man loses faith in himself, death comes. Believe first in yourself and then in God. A handful of strong men will move the world. We need a heart to feel, a brain to conceive, and a strong arm to do the work... One man contains within him the whole universe. One particle of matter has all the energy of the universe at its back. In a conflict between the heart and the brain, follow your heart.⁴

(In 1899 Swami Vivekananda again sailed to the West. But he seemed to be more and more detached from the world. This extract is from a letter he wrote during this period to Miss Josephine Mac-Leod, one of his closest western disciples:)

Work is always difficult. Pray for me, Joe, that my work may stop for ever and my whole being would be absorbed in Mother. Her work She knows...

I am well, very well mentally. I feel the rest of the soul more than that of the body. The battles are lost and won. I have bundled my things and am waiting for the Great Deliverer.

Siva, O Siva, carry my boat to the other shore!

After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature — works and activities, doing good and so forth, are all superimpositions.

Now I again hear his voice thrilling my soul. Bonds are breaking — love dying, work becoming tasteless, the glamour is off life. Now only the voice of the Master calling. “I come, Lord, I come.” “Let the dead bury the dead. Follow thou me.” “I come, my beloved Lord, I come.”

Yes, I come, Nirvana is before me. I feel it at times, the same infinite ocean of peace, without a ripple, a breath.

I am glad I was born, glad I suffered so, glad I did make big blunders, glad to enter peace. I leave none bound, I take no bonds. Whether this body will fail and release me or I enter into freedom in the body, the old man is gone, gone for ever, never to come back again!

The guide, the guru, the leader, the teacher, has passed away; the body, the student, the servant, is left behind...

The sweetest moments of my life have been when I was drifting. I am drifting again — with the bright warm sun ahead and masses of vegetation around — and in the heat everything is so still, so calm — and I am drifting, languidly — in the warm heart of the river. I dare not make a splash with my hands or feet — for fear of breaking the wonderful stillness, stillness that makes you feel sure it is an illusion!

Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance the thirst for power. Now they are vanishing and I drift. I come Mother, I come, in Thy warm bosom, floating wheresoever Thou takest me, in the voiceless, in the strange, in the wonderland, I come — a spectator, no more an actor.

Oh, it is so calm! My thoughts seem to come from a great, great distance in the interior of my own heart. They seem like faint, distant whispers, and peace is upon everything, sweet, sweet peace — like that one feels for a few moments just before falling into sleep, when things are seen and felt like shadows — without fear, without love, without emotion — peace that one feels alone, surrounded with statues and pictures. I come, Lord, I come.

The world *is*, but not beautiful nor ugly, but as sensations without exciting any emotion. Oh, Joe, the blessedness of it! Everything is good and beautiful; for things are all losing their relative proportions to me — my body among the first. OM That Existence!⁵

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* *

Notes

1. "My Master", *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), p. 359 ff.
2. "My Plan of Campaign", *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III, p. 207 ff.
3. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda : a Biography* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975), pp. 246-247.
4. *Ibid*, p. 286.
5. Selections from Swami Vivekananda, op. cit., p. 547.

A few dates

1863 (January, 12)	— Birth of Vivekananda in Calcutta.
1881	— Encounter with Ramakrishna.
1886 (August, 16)	— Passing of Ramakrishna.
1888	— Vivekananda starts to spread his message in India.
1893 (September, 11)	— World's Parliament of Religions in USA.
1897	— Return to India. — Foundation of Ramakrishna mission.
1899	— Second trip abroad.
1902 (July, 4)	— Vivekananda leaves his body.

Suggestions for further reading

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Dhar, Sailendra Nath. *A comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, (2 Volumes). Madras: Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, 1st edn, 1975.

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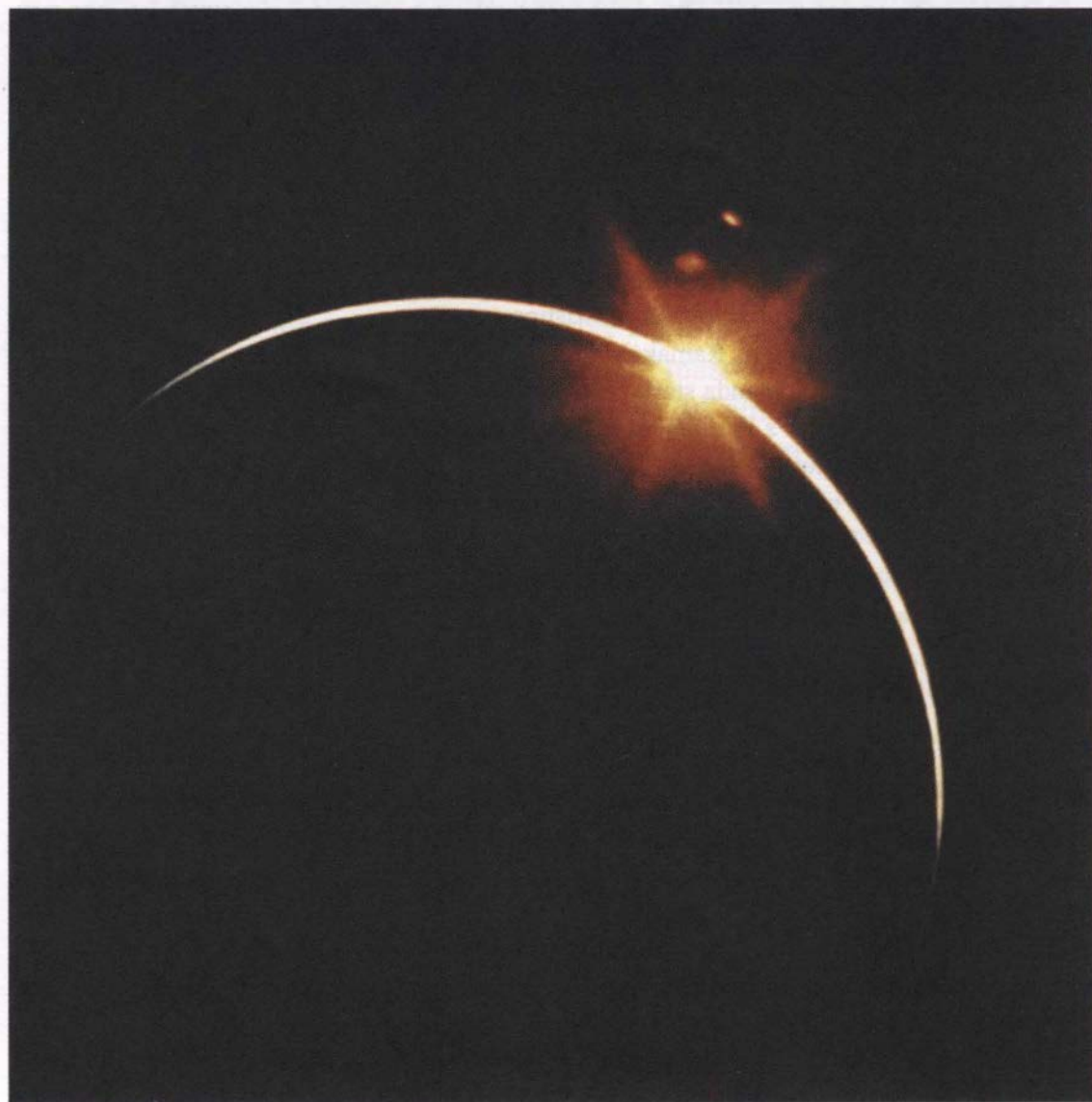
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The World as I see It

Introduction

The man who became a world-famous scientist during his own lifetime did not do well at school. Albert Einstein's teacher wrote that he "could not be expected to make a success of anything." In fact, he was late in learning to walk and did not speak fluently until he was nine. He later wrote that at the age of five he had been stirred by the mystery of a compass and he said:

At the age of twelve I experienced a second wonder of a totally different nature in a little book dealing with Euclidean plane geometry... Here were assertions, as for example, the intersection of the three altitudes of a triangle in one point, which though by no means evident — could nevertheless be proved with such certainty that any doubt appeared out of the question. This lucidity and certainty made an indescribable impression on me.²

Scientific books, especially books on mathematics, interested the young Einstein much more than school. By fifteen he gave up school altogether and went with his parents from Germany to Italy. Eventually, he applied for The Polytechnic in Zurich, only to fail the entrance examination. He studied for another year to make up for his deficiencies and passed the examination the following year. Still a

1. D. J. Raine, *Albert Einstein and Relativity* (Pitman Press, England, 1984), p. 17.

2. Carl Sagan, *Broca's Brain* (New York, Ballantine, 1980), p. 23.

mediocre student by academic standards, he relied on a friend's notes to get through. He greatly resented the examination system, the rigidity of the lecture system and the lack of freedom to study what interested him. This made him discontent, and he was unpopular with his teachers. Yet he managed to graduate with the help of his friend.

At the turn of the century, this friend's father got him a job as a Swiss civil servant (third class) at the Swiss Patent Office, when the more desirable research and university positions failed to materialise. He served there for seven years. During this period he married a fellow-student who had been the only one to fail the final examination in physics. They had two children and life appeared very ordinary in an undistinguished career. The Patent Office must not have been a very busy place, for Einstein recalled those years with nostalgia as a cloister where he could hatch "my most beautiful ideas".

The "beautiful ideas" were contained in four papers that he published in 1905. Any of them would have been an impressive output of a life-time's work; so one can imagine the astonishment they created in the scientific world. The first demonstrated that light has particle as well as wave properties and explained the previously baffling photo-electric effect in which electrons are emitted by solids when irradiated by light. The second explored the nature of molecules by explaining the statistical "Brownian motion" of suspended small particles, and the third and fourth introduced the special theory of relativity and for the first time expressed the famous equation, $E=mc^2$, which is so widely quoted. His theories were by no means readily accepted, and remained highly controversial if not rejected as incomprehensible or erroneous.

Nevertheless, these papers made him a name in the scientific community. He lectured at Bonn University and soon became a professor at Zurich University, and then in Prague, before receiving a professorship in Berlin which was then the centre of European science. Here Einstein remained for several years, devoting most of his time to scientific research. When the first world war broke out in 1914, he quietly continued his work, but eventually suffered a breakdown from the tension of the war, lack of attention to his health and the breakup of his marriage. He was nursed back to health by his cousin, whom he later married. At the end of the war, British expeditions to Brazil and Africa established this German scientist as a world figure. The purpose of these expeditions was to photograph the eclipse of the sun from two distant points on the earth in order to test Einstein's theory that light is subject to gravitational forces. Sir Arthur Eddington took the measurements of the photographs and later said that this experience stayed in his memory as the greatest moment in his life. Fellows of the Royal Society rushed the news to one another:

Eddington by telegram to the mathematician Littlewood, and Littlewood in a hasty note to Bertrand Russell: "Einstein's theory is completely confirmed."¹

Einstein became a pacifist during the first world war and only his Swiss citizenship saved him from prison in Germany, while his friend Bertrand Russell was sent to jail in England for similar political ideals. During the period between the two world wars, Einstein's reputation grew as he travelled, lectured, and got extensive press coverage. He felt it was his responsibility to speak out his convictions and to lend his name to causes he found to be true. When the madness of Nazism overwhelmed Germany with the rise of Hitler in 1933, he had to flee Germany. When the Nazi terror spread across Europe, Einstein changed his pacifist views and told the conscientious objectors to fight in the war. The Nazis reacted by placing a price on his head and by denouncing his works, publicly burning his books and forcing scientists to speak against him. The great upsurge of anti-Semitism² that came with Nazism caused Einstein to openly admit his Jewish origins. He even became interested in helping to form the state of Israel, while at the same time calling for an understanding of the Arab situation. In 1948 he was offered the Presidency of Israel, which he politely declined.

After leaving Germany, Einstein made his permanent home at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University in the United States. It was there, during World War II, that his fellow scientists persuaded him to write to the President of the United States urging the development of the atomic bomb. There was a fear that Germany was already developing it. Einstein did not himself participate in the development of the bomb. It was later discovered that Germany would not succeed in making the bomb. Had he known this, Einstein said, he would never have supported its development by the United States. He felt a great remorse for the advice he had given to the President. He attempted to unite scientists to stop all nuclear weapons development, but without success. Einstein continued in America to fight for the civil rights of all people and got his share of criticism during the era of McCarthyism,³ when people with Communist sympathies or leftist views lost their jobs or were brought to court for "un-American activities".

His years at Princeton University saw no decrease in his intense research activities. Bronowski has fond memories of the great man lecturing in an old sweater

1. J. Bronowski, *The Ascent of Man*, London, Futura, 1984.

2. *anti-Semitism*: Sentiment against the Jews expressed in persecutions and restrictions which can be both racial and religious.

3. *McCarthyism*: McCarthy, Joseph R. 1908-1957. US Senator and Republican known for his vigorous attacks mainly on Communists and subversives.

and carpet slippers with no socks, completely unconcerned with worldly success, respectability or conformity.¹ But years of labour in pursuit of a unified field theory which would combine gravitation, electricity, and magnetism on a common basis seemed to have been unsuccessful.

Einstein's greatness allowed him to acknowledge his mistakes. In his model of the universe he did not follow his original calculations; had he done so, he might have made the same discovery that the American scientist Edwin Hubble made, namely, that the universe is expanding. Einstein referred to this as "the biggest blunder of my life". He did live to see his general theory of relativity incorporated as the principal tool for understanding the large scale structure and evolution of the universe, and he would have been delighted to see its vigorous application in current astrophysics.

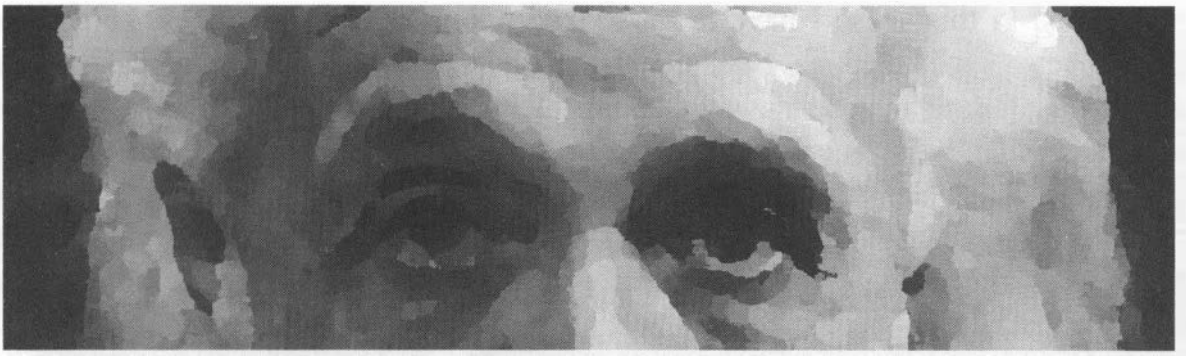
Einstein himself had advanced the idea of probability as a way to avoid the need for two theories of light. The idea was taken up by others and was found to work. A whole new physics called "quantum physics" was developed to calculate the probabilities of events in the sub-atomic world. At this stage, however, Einstein disagreed with his colleagues. He could not reconcile himself with the idea of probability as an over-arching frame for science. As he put it: "God doesn't play dice with the cosmos."² His arguments against the new physics, however, did not stand. The last thirty years of his life were spent looking for an alternative to quantum physics, a work he felt had to be done even though there was small chance of success.

Einstein's death in 1955 concluded a lifetime of work in which he joined light to time and time to space, energy to matter, matter to space, and space to gravitation. These theories must be brought together, and after fifty years of work scientists still do not know how. Einstein opened new doors on the frontiers of knowledge that only a handful of people have walked through, but the effects of his discoveries are part of the world we all live in. He is a man who changed the world.

Einstein's life was filled with the tragedies of war and oppression, and he fought against them with all the power of his brilliant spirit; he never accepted the brutalities of his age but sought to overcome them through his life and work. In the selection from his writings that follows, he has told us of those principles which he believed in and which formed the basis of his pursuit of truth, whatever the cost or consequences.

1. J. Bronowski, *Op. cit.*, p. 161.

2. Sagan, *Op. cit.*, p. 35.



What an extraordinary situation is that of us mortals! Each of us is here for a brief sojourn; for what purpose he knows not though he sometimes thinks he feels it. But from the point of view of daily life, without going deeper, we exist for our fellowmen — in the first place for those on whose smiles and welfare our happiness depends, and next for all those unknown to us personally with whose destinies we are bound up by the tie of sympathy. A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depend on the labours of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving. I am strongly drawn to the simple life and am often oppressed by the feeling that I am engrossing an unnecessary amount of the labour of my fellow-men. I regard class differences as contrary to justice and, in the last resort, based on force. I also consider that plain living is good for everybody, physically and mentally.

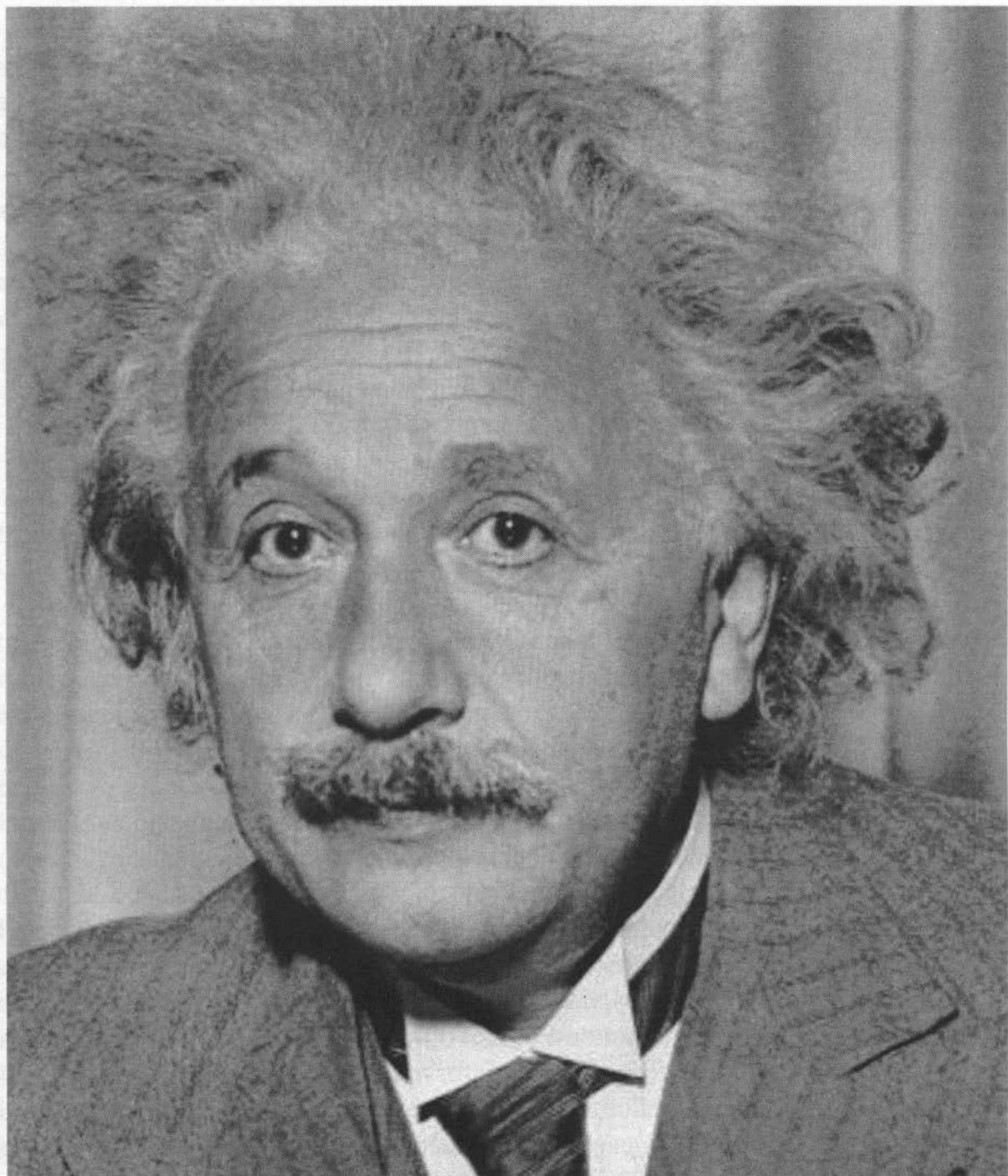
In human freedom in the philosophical sense I am definitely a disbeliever. Everybody acts not only under external compulsion but also in accordance with inner necessity. Schopenhauer's saying, that "a man can do as he will, but not will as he will", has been an inspiration to me since my youth up, and a continual consolation and unfailing wellspring of patience in the face of the hardships of life, my own and others. This feeling mercifully mitigates the sense of responsibility which so easily becomes paralysing, and it prevents us from taking ourselves and other people too seriously; it conduces to a view of life in which humour, above all, has its due place.

To inquire after the meaning or object of one's own existence or of creation generally has always seemed to me absurd from an objective point of view. And yet everybody has certain ideals which determine the direction of his endeavours and his

judgments. In this sense I have never looked upon ease and happiness as ends in themselves... such an ethical basis I call more proper for a herd of swine. The ideals which have lighted me on my way and time after time given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Without the sense of fellowship with men of like mind, of preoccupation with the objective, the eternally unattainable in the field of art and scientific research, life would have seemed to me empty. The ordinary objects of human endeavour — property, outward success, luxury — have always seemed to me contemptible.

My passionate sense of social justice and social responsibility has always contrasted oddly with my pronounced freedom from the need for direct contact with other human beings and human communities. I set my own pace and have never belonged to my country, my home, my friends, or even my immediate family, with my whole heart; in the face of all these ties I have never lost an obstinate sense of detachment, of the need for solitude — a feeling which increases with the years. One is sharply conscious, yet without regret, of the limits to the possibility of mutual understanding and sympathy with one's fellow-creatures. Such a person no doubt loses something in the way of geniality and light-heartedness; on the other hand, he is largely independent of the opinions, habits, and judgments of his fellows and avoids the temptation to take his stand on such insecure foundations.

My political ideal is that of democracy. Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolized. It is an irony of fate that I myself have been the recipient of excessive admiration and respect from my fellows through no fault, and no merit, of my own. The cause of this may well be the desire, unattainable for many, to understand the one or two ideas to which I have with my feeble powers attained through ceaseless struggle. I am quite aware that it is necessary for the success of any complex undertaking that one man should do the thinking and directing and in general bear the responsibility. But the led must not be compelled, they must be able to choose their leader. An autocratic system of coercion, in my opinion, soon degenerates. For force always attracts men of low morality, and I believe it to be an invariable rule that tyrants of genius are succeeded by scoundrels. For this reason I have always been passionately opposed to systems such as we see in Italy and Russia today. The thing that has brought discredit upon the prevailing form of democracy in Europe today is not to be laid to the door of the democratic idea as such, but to lack of stability on the part of the heads of governments and to the impersonal character of the electoral system. I believe that in this respect the United States of America have found the right way. They have a responsible President who is elected



Albert Einstein

for a sufficiently long period and has sufficient powers to be really responsible. On the other hand, what I value in our political system is the more extensive provision that it makes for the individual in case of illness or need. The really valuable thing in the pageant of human life seems to me not the State but the creative, sentient individual, the personality; it alone creates the noble and the sublime, while the herd as such remains dull in thought and dull in feeling.

This topic brings me to that worst outcrop of the herd nature, the military system, which I abhor. That a man can take pleasure in marching in formation to the strains of a band is enough to make me despise him. He has only been given his big brain by mistake; a backbone was all he needed. This plague-spot of civilisation ought to be abolished with all possible speed. Heroism by order, senseless violence, and all the pestilent non-sense that goes by the name of patriotism — how I hate them! War seems to me a mean, contemptible thing: I would rather be hacked in pieces than take part in such an abominable business. And yet so high, in spite of everything, is my opinion of the human race that I believe this bogey would have disappeared long ago, had the sound sense of the nations not been systematically corrupted by commercial and political interests acting through the schools and the Press.

The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. It was the experience of mystery — even if mixed with fear — that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which are only accessible to our reason in their most elementary forms — it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude; in this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man. I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension, nor do I wish it otherwise; such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls. Enough for me the mystery of the eternity of life, and the inkling of the marvellous structure of reality, together with the single-hearted endeavour to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the reason that manifests itself in nature.

Good and Evil

It is right in principle that those should be the best loved who have contributed most to the elevation of the human race and human life. But, if one goes on to ask who they are, one finds oneself in no inconsiderable difficulties. In the case of political, and even of religious leaders, it is often very doubtful whether they have done more good or harm. Hence I most seriously believe that one does people the best service by giving them some elevating work to do and thus indirectly elevating them. This applies most of all to the great artist, but also in a lesser degree to the scientist. To be sure, it is not the fruits of scientific research that elevate a man and enrich his nature, but the urge to understand, the intellectual work, creative or receptive. It would surely be absurd to judge the value of the Talmud, for instance, by its intellectual fruits.

The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and the sense in which he has attained to liberation from the self.

Society and Personality

When we survey our lives and endeavours we soon observe that almost the whole of our actions and desires are bound up with the existence of other human beings. We see that our whole nature resembles that of the social animals. We eat food that others have grown, wear clothes that others have made, live in houses that others have built. The greater part of our knowledge and beliefs has been communicated to us by other people through the medium of language which others have created. Without language our mental capacities would be poor indeed, comparable to those of the higher animals; we have, therefore, to admit that we owe our principal advantage over the beasts to the fact of living in human society. The individual, if left alone from birth, would remain primitive and beastlike in his thoughts and feelings to a degree that we can hardly conceive. The individual is what he is and has the significance that he has not so much in virtue of his individuality, but rather as a member of a great human society, which directs his material and spiritual existence from the cradle to the grave.

A man's value to the community depends primarily on how far his feelings, thoughts, and actions are directed towards promoting the good of his fellows. We

call him good or bad according to how he stands in this matter. It looks at first sight as if our estimate of a man depended entirely on his social qualities.

And yet such an attitude would be wrong. It is clear that all the valuable things, material, spiritual, and moral, which we receive from society can be traced back through countless generations to certain creative individuals. The use of fire, the cultivation of edible plants, the steam engine — each was discovered by one man.

Only the individual can think, and thereby create new values for society — nay, even set up new moral standards to which the life of the community conforms. Without creative, independently thinking and judging personalities the upward development of society is as unthinkable as the development of the individual personality without the nourishing soil of the community. The health of society thus depends quite as much on the independence of the individuals composing it as on their close political cohesion. It has been said very justly that Graeco-Europeo-American culture as a whole, and in particular its brilliant flowering in the Italian Renaissance, which put an end to the stagnation of medieval Europe, is based on the liberation and comparative isolation of the individual.

Let us now consider the times in which we live. How does society fare, how the individual? The population of the civilised countries is extremely dense as compared with former times; Europe today contains about three times as many people as it did a hundred years ago. But the number of great men has decreased out of all proportion. Only a few individuals are known to the masses as personalities, through their creative achievements. Organisation has to some extent taken the place of the great man, particularly in the technical sphere, but also to a very perceptible extent in the scientific.

The lack of outstanding figures is particularly striking in the domain of art. Painting and music have definitely degenerated and largely lost their popular appeal. In politics not only are leaders lacking, but the independence of spirit and the sense of justice of the citizen have to a great extent declined. The democratic, parliamentary regime, which is based on such independence, has in many places been shaken, dictatorships have sprung up and are tolerated, because men's sense of the dignity and the rights of the individual is no longer strong enough. In two weeks the sheep-like masses can be worked up by the newspapers into such a state of excited fury that the men are prepared to put on uniform and kill and be killed, for the sake of the worthless aims of a few interested parties. Compulsory military service seems to me the most disgraceful symptom of that deficiency in personal dignity from which civilized mankind is suffering today. No wonder there is no lack

of prophets who prophesy the early eclipse of our civilization. I am not one of these pessimists; I believe that better times are coming...

This text was written by Einstein in German and first published in 1934. The selections presented above are taken from pages 7 to 10 of the English translation by Alan Harris, published by The Philosophical Library, NewYork, in 1949, under the title *The World as I see It*.

A few dates

1879	— Birth of Albert Einstein in Ulm, Germany.
1900	— Einstein becomes Swiss citizen.
1905	— Special Relativity.
1914	— Appointed in Prussian Academy of Sciences, Berlin.
1915	— General Theory of Relativity.
1919	— Confirmation of Einstein's theory by astronomers.
1921	— Nobel Prize of Physics.
1933	— Einstein leaves Germany and settles in America (Princeton).
1955	— Death of Einstein.

The New Physics

In two articles published in 1905, Einstein initiated two revolutionary trends in scientific thought. One was his special theory of relativity; the other was a new way of looking at electromagnetic radiation which was to become characteristic of quantum theory, the theory of atomic phenomena.

Einstein strongly believed in nature's inherent harmony, and throughout his scientific life his deepest concern was to find a unified foundation of physics. He began to move toward this goal by constructing a common framework for electrodynamics and mechanics, the two separate theories of classical physics. This framework is known as the special theory of classical physics. It unified and completed the structure of classical physics, but at the same time it involved radical changes in the traditional concepts of space and time. Ten years later Einstein proposed his general theory of relativity, in which the framework of the special theory is extended to include gravity. This is achieved by further drastic modifications of the concepts of space and time.

The other major development in twentieth-century physics was a consequence of the experimental investigation of atoms. At the turn of the century physicists discovered several phenomena connected with the structure of atoms, such as X-rays and radioactivity, which were inexplicable in terms of classical physics. Besides being objects of intense study, these phenomena were used, in most

ingenious ways, as new tools to probe deeper into matter than had ever been possible before.

This exploration of the atomic and subatomic world brought scientists in contact with a strange and unexpected reality that shattered the foundations of their world view and forced them to think in entirely new ways. Nothing like that had ever happened before in science. Revolutions like those of Copernicus and Darwin had introduced profound changes in the general conception of the universe, changes that were shocking to many people, but the new concepts themselves were not difficult to grasp. In the twentieth century, however, physicists faced, for the first time, a serious challenge to their ability to understand the universe. Every time they asked nature a question in an atomic experiment, nature answered with a paradox, and the more they tried to clarify the situation, the sharper the paradoxes became. In their struggle to grasp this new reality, scientists became painfully aware that their basic concepts, their language, and their whole way of thinking were inadequate to describe atomic phenomena.

It took these physicists a long time to accept the fact that the paradoxes they encountered are an essential aspect of atomic physics, and to realise that they arise whenever one tries to describe atomic phenomena in terms of classical concepts. Once this was perceived, the physicists began to learn to ask the right questions and to avoid contradictions, and finally they found the precise and consistent mathematical formulation of that theory. Quantum theory, or quantum mechanics as it is also called, was formulated during the first three decades of the century by an international group of physicists including Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, Louis De Broglie, Erwin Schrodinger, Wolfgang Pauli, Werner Heisenberg, and Paul Dirac.

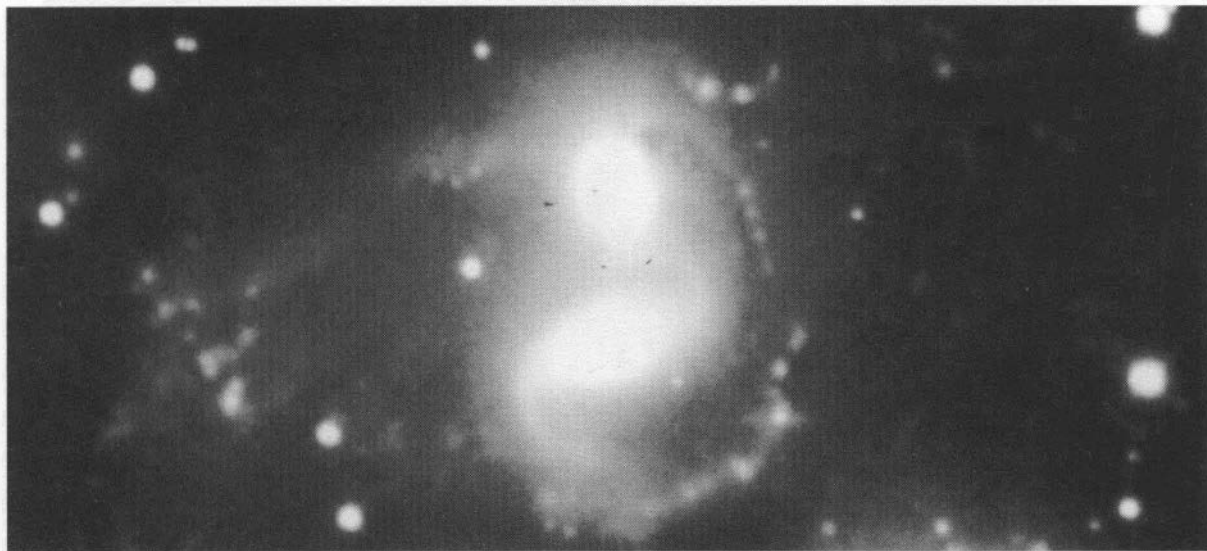
Even after the mathematical formulation of quantum theory was completed, its conceptual framework was by no means easy to accept. Its effect on the physicists' view of reality was truly shattering. The new physics necessitated profound changes in concept of space, time, matter, object, and cause and effect; and because these concepts are so fundamental to our way of experiencing the world, their transformation came as a great shock. To quote Heisenberg, "The violent reaction to the recent development of modern physics can only be understood when one realises that here the foundations of physics have started moving; and that this motion has caused the feeling that the ground will be cut from science."

Einstein experienced the same shock when he was confronted with the new concepts of physics, and he described his feelings in terms very similar to Heisenberg's: "All my attempts to adapt the theoretical foundations of physics to this [new type of] knowledge failed completely. It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere, upon which one could have built." To the end of his life Einstein could not reconcile himself to accept the consequences of the theory that his earlier work had helped to establish.

Out of the revolutionary changes in our concepts of reality that were brought about by modern physics, a consistent world view is now emerging. This view is not shared by the entire physics community, but is being discussed and elaborated by many leading physicists whose interest in their science goes beyond the technical aspect of their research. The scientists are deeply interested in the philosophical implications of modern physics and are trying in an open-minded way to improve their understanding of the nature of reality.

In contrast to the mechanistic Cartesian view of the world, the world view emerging from modern physics can be characterised by words like organic, holistic, and ecological. The universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process. An increasing number of scientists are aware that mystical thought provides a consistent and relevant philosophical background to the theories of contemporary science, a conception of the world in which the scientific discoveries of men and women can be in perfect harmony with their spiritual aims.

Extract from: Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point* (London, Flamingo edition, 1983), pp.63 ff.



Suggestions for further reading

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Life's Philosophy

Introduction

Among the great leaders of India's renaissance, Jawaharlal Nehru stands out prominently. He was born at Allahabad on November 14, 1889. He was educated at home until the age of sixteen by English governesses and tutors. In 1905, he went to Harrow, one of England's leading schools, where he studied for two years. His housemaster described him as "a very nice boy, quiet and very refined. He was not demonstrative but one felt there was great strength of character." From Harrow, Nehru went to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took an honours degree in natural science. His letters to his father from England reflect his deep interest in the fate of his country. He followed the progress of events at home and his sympathies lay with the extremist faction of the Indian National Congress, led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo.

After graduating from Cambridge, Jawaharlal joined the Inner Temple in London, qualified as a barrister and returned to India in 1912 to practise at the Allahabad High Court as his father's junior. The seven years Nehru spent in England had left him, as he wrote some years later, "a queer mixture of the East and West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere." Nehru tried to settle down at Allahabad as a lawyer, but his heart was not in the legal profession. Deep within him there was a yearning which did not find fulfilment in the practice of law. Nehru's true vocation lay in politics. Slowly, he was pulled into the centre of the struggle against British imperialism. He had attended the session of the Indian National Congress held at

Bankipore in December 1912, but found the proceedings rather tame. The arrest of Mrs. Annie Besant in 1917 and the Punjab massacre in 1919 were events that created a storm in the country and drew Nehru into the vortex of political agitation.

In 1919 and 1920, Nehru followed Gandhi's call to non-violent agitations against the British Raj. He turned his back on the legal profession, simplified his life-style and gave himself wholly to the movement for independence. "I gave up", he wrote in his autobiography, "all other associations and contacts, old friends, books, even newspapers except in so far as they dealt with the work in hand... I almost forgot my family, my wife, my daughter." Nehru was in many ways the antithesis of Gandhi. His outlook was more modern and forward looking than Gandhi's. He did not share Gandhi's aversion to industrialisation. He accepted Gandhi's nonviolence not as a religious principle but because he regarded nonviolence as a useful political weapon and the right policy for India under the prevailing conditions. He deprecated the inordinate value the Mahatma attached to austerity and asceticism and questioned his idealisation of poverty.

The non-cooperation movement launched by the Indian National Congress was a threat to the British government. A large number of "non-cooperators" were jailed. Nehru was arrested for the first time in 1921 with his father and sentenced to six months imprisonment. Over the next 24 years he served another eight periods of detention, the last and longest ending in June 1945, after an imprisonment of almost three years. In all Nehru spent over nine years in jail.

In 1923 Nehru became general secretary of the Congress Party for two years and again in 1927 for another two years. In 1929 he was elected president of the Party at the historic Lahore Session that declared officially for the first time complete independence as India's political goal.

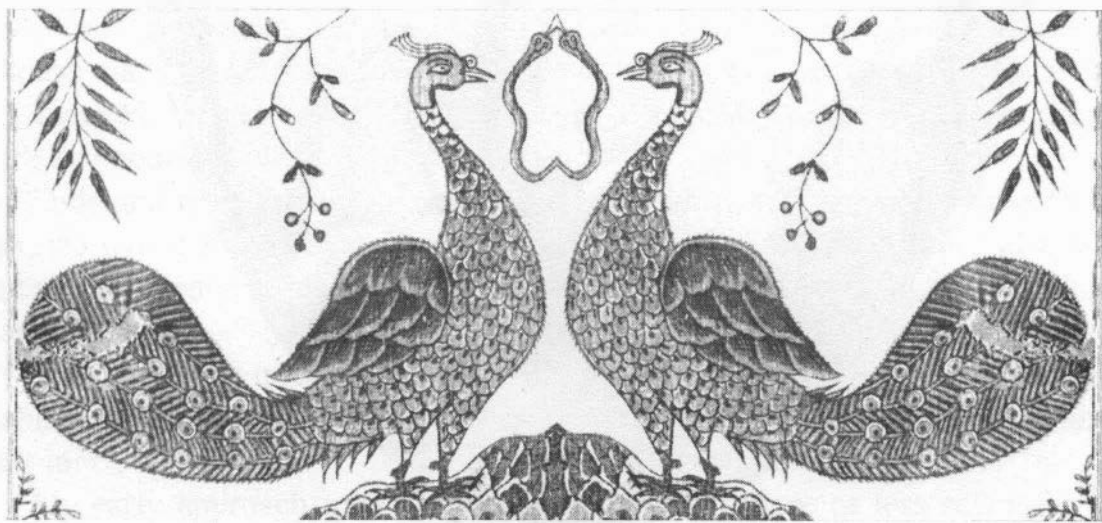
Nehru travelled to all parts of the country in connection with his work in the Indian National Congress which took him deep into the countryside. He mingled with the peasant masses of India and came to know them. Thus began the process that gave birth to his momentous work, aptly called *The Discovery of India*. He involved himself deeply in the agrarian movement and in the needs of the nascent industrial proletariat. He came to grips with the rising tension between Hindus and Muslims.

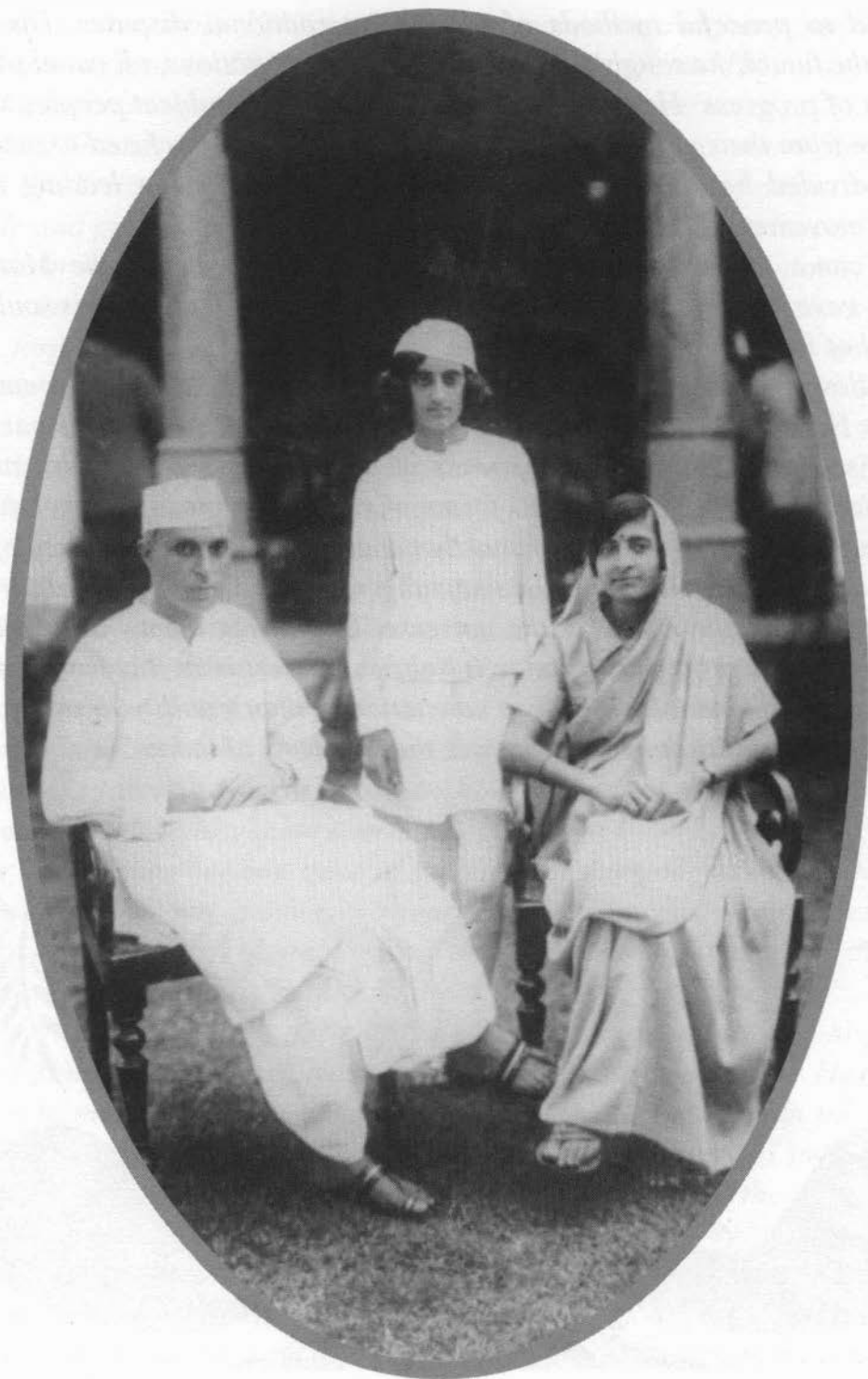
After Independence, Nehru led the country as its first Prime Minister and held that position until his death on May 27, 1964. He took upon himself the stupendous task of awakening in his country the spirit of progress which had been stultified by a long and oppressive colonial rule. Nehru also held the portfolio for foreign affairs. He became a leading statesman and made a mark on the world with his commitment

to peace and to peaceful methods of solving international disputes. His vision focussed on the future; he sought to create a world of free nations, all equal partners in the march of progress. He made common cause with all subject peoples seeking independence from their colonial rulers. True to his vision, he refused to take sides in a world divided between two opposing camps and played a leading role in building the movement for nonalignment.

Nehru came to symbolise India. On the day of his death the Mother in Pondicherry gave the following message: "Nehru leaves his body but his soul is one with the soul of India that lives for Eternity."

The following essay was written by Nehru during his imprisonment in Ahmadnagar Fort prison camp during the years 1942 to 1945, and forms part of his book The Discovery of India. As he speaks of his own life's philosophy, one can sense that Nehru is impatient with all forms of religion, philosophy, metaphysics, mysticism and spirituality that are primarily concerned with the existence of other worlds beyond this one. He has little sympathy with people who are absorbed in finding an answer to the riddle of the universe, as it leads them "away from the individual and social problems of today". Nehru's interest is in this world, and the cornerstone of his philosophy is a deep conviction in man's ability to progress. He declares: "A living philosophy must answer the problems of today."





Jawaharlal Nehru with daughter and wife, 1931

Six or seven years ago an American publisher asked me to write an essay on my philosophy of life for a symposium he was preparing. I was attracted to the idea but I hesitated, and the more I thought over it, the more reluctant I grew. Ultimately, I did not write that essay.

What was my philosophy of life? I did not know. Some years earlier I would not have been so hesitant. There was a definiteness about my thinking and objectives then which has faded away since. The events of the past few years in India, China, Europe, and all over the world have been confusing, upsetting and distressing, and the future has become vague and shadowy and has lost that clearness of outline which it once possessed in my mind.

This doubt and difficulty about fundamental matters did not come in my way in regard to immediate action, except that it blunted somewhat the sharp edge of that activity. No longer could I function, as I did in my younger days, as an arrow flying automatically to the target of my choice ignoring all else but that target. Yet I functioned, for the urge to action was there and a real or imagined coordination of that action with the ideals I held. But a growing distaste for politics as I saw them seized me and gradually my whole attitude to life seemed to undergo a transformation.

The ideals and objectives of yesterday were still the ideals of today, but they had lost some of their lustre and, even as one seemed to go towards them, they lost the shining beauty which had warmed the heart and vitalised the body. Evil triumphed often enough, but what was far worse was the coarsening and distortion of what had seemed so right. Was human nature so essentially bad that it would take ages of training, through suffering and misfortune, before it could behave reasonably and raise man above that creature of lust and violence and deceit that he now was? And, meanwhile, was every effort to change it radically in the present or the near future doomed to failure?

Ends and means: were they tied up inseparably, acting and reacting on each other, the wrong means distorting and sometimes even destroying the end in view? But the right means might well be beyond the capacity of infirm and selfish human nature.

What then was one to do? Not to act was a complete confession of failure and a submission to evil, with all the untoward consequences that such compromises result in.

My early approach to life's problems had been more or less scientific, with something of the easy optimism of the science of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. A secure and comfortable existence and the energy and self-confidence I

possessed increased that feeling of optimism. A kind of vague humanism appealed to me.

Religion, as I saw it practised, and accepted even by thinking minds, whether it was Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism or Christianity, did not attract me. It seemed to be closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs, and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was certainly not that of science. There was an element of magic about it, an uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural.

Yet it was obvious that religion had supplied some deeply felt inner need of human nature, and that the vast majority of people all over the world could not do without some form of religious belief. It had produced many fine types of men and women, as well as bigoted, narrow-minded, cruel tyrants. It had given a set of values to human life, and though some of these values had no application today, or were even harmful, others were still the foundation of morality and ethics.

In the wider sense of the word, religion dealt with the uncharted regions of human experience, uncharted, that is, by the scientific positive knowledge of the day. In a sense it might be considered an extension of the known and charted region, though the methods of science and religion were utterly unlike each other, and to a large extent they had to deal with different kinds of media. It was obvious that there was a vast unknown region all around us, and science, with its magnificent achievements, knew little enough about it, though it was making tentative approaches in that direction. Probably also, the normal methods of science, its dealings with the visible world and the processes of life, were not wholly adapted to the physical, the artistic, the spiritual, and other elements of the invisible world. Life does not consist entirely of what we see and hear and feel, the visible world which is undergoing change in time and space; it is continually touching an invisible world of other, and possibly more stable or equally changeable elements, and no thinking person can ignore this invisible world.

Science does not tell us much, or for the matter of that anything about the purpose of life. It is now widening its boundaries and it may invade the so-called invisible world before long and help us to understand this purpose of life in its widest sense, or at least give us some glimpses which illumine the problem of human existence. The old controversy between science and religion takes a new form — the application of the scientific method to emotional and religious experiences.

Religion merges into mysticism and metaphysics and philosophy. There have been great mystics, attractive figures, who cannot easily be disposed of as self-

deluded fools. Yet mysticism (in the narrow sense of the word) irritates me; it appears to be vague and soft and flabby, not a rigorous discipline of the mind but a surrender of mental faculties and a living in a sea of emotional experience. The experience may lead occasionally to some insight into inner and less obvious processes, but it is also likely to lead to self-delusion.

Metaphysics and philosophy, or a metaphysical philosophy, have a greater appeal to the mind. They require hard thinking and the application of logic and reasoning, though all this is necessarily based on some premises, which are presumed to be self-evident, and yet which may or may not be true. All thinking persons, to a greater or less degree, dabble in metaphysics and philosophy, for not to do so is to ignore many of the aspects of this universe of ours. Some may feel more attracted to them than others, and the emphasis on them may vary in different ages. In the ancient world, both in Asia and Europe, all the emphasis was laid on the supremacy of the inward life over things external, and this inevitably led to metaphysics and philosophy. The modern man is wrapped up much more in these things external, and yet even he, in moments of crisis and mental trouble often turns to philosophy and metaphysical speculations.

Some vague or more precise philosophy of life we all have, though most of us accept unthinkingly the general attitude which is characteristic of our generation and environment. Most of us accept also certain metaphysical conceptions as part of the faith in which we have grown up. I have not been attracted towards metaphysics; in fact, I have had a certain distaste for vague speculation. And yet I have sometimes found a certain intellectual fascination in trying to follow the rigid lines of metaphysical and philosophic thought of the ancients or the moderns. But I have never felt at ease there and have escaped from their spell with a feeling of relief.

Essentially, I am interested in this world, in this life, not in some other world or a future life. Whether there is such a thing as a soul, or whether there is a survival after death or not, I do not know; and, important as these questions are, they do not trouble me in the least. The environment in which I have grown up takes the soul (or rather the *atma*) and a future life, the *Karma* theory of cause and effect, and reincarnation for granted. I have been affected by this and so, in a sense, I am favourably disposed towards these assumptions. There might be a soul which survives the physical death of the body, and a theory of cause and effect governing life's actions seems reasonable, though it leads to obvious difficulties when one thinks of the ultimate cause. Presuming a soul, there appears to be some logic also in the theory of reincarnation.

But I do not believe in any of these or other theories and assumptions as a matter of religious faith. They are just intellectual speculations in an unknown region about which we know next to nothing. They do not affect my life, and whether they were proved right or wrong subsequently, they would make little difference to me.

Spiritualism with its seances and its so-called manifestations of spirits and the like has always seemed to me a rather absurd and impertinent way of investigating psychic phenomena and the mysteries of the after-life. Usually it is something worse, and is an exploitation of the emotions of some over-credulous people who seek relief or escape from mental trouble. I do not deny the possibility of some of these psychic phenomena having a basis of truth, but the approach appears to me to be all wrong and the conclusions drawn from scraps and odd bits of evidence to be unjustified.

Often, as I look at this world, I have a sense of mysteries, of unknown depths. The urge to understand it, in so far as I can, comes to me: to be in tune with it and to experience it in its fullness. But the way to that understanding seems to me essentially the way of science, the way of objective approach, though I realise that there can be no such thing as true objectiveness. If the subjective element is unavoidable and inevitable, it should be conditioned as far as possible by the scientific method.

What the mysterious is I do not know. I do not call it God because God has come to mean much that I do not believe in. I find myself incapable of thinking of a deity or of any unknown supreme power in anthropomorphic terms, and the fact that many people think so is continually a source of surprise to me. Any idea of a personal God seems very odd to me. Intellectually, I can appreciate to some extent the conception of monism, and I have been attracted towards the *Advaita* (non-dualist) philosophy of the Vedanta, though I do not presume to understand it in all its depth and intricacy, and I realise that merely an intellectual appreciation of such matters does not carry one far. At the same time the Vedanta, as well as other similar approaches, rather frighten me with their vague, formless incursions into infinity. The diversity and fullness of nature stir me and produce a harmony of the spirit, and I can imagine myself feeling at home in the old Indian or Greek pagan and pantheistic atmosphere, but minus the conception of God or Gods that was attached to it.

Some kind of ethical approach to life has a strong appeal for me, though it would be difficult for me to justify it logically. I have been attracted by Gandhiji's stress on right means and I think one of his greatest contributions to our public life

has been this emphasis. The idea is by no means new, but this application of an ethical doctrine to large-scale public activity was certainly novel. It is full of difficulty, and perhaps ends and means are not really separable but form together one organic whole. In a world which thinks almost exclusively of ends and ignores means, this emphasis on means seems odd and remarkable. How far it has succeeded in India I cannot say. But there is no doubt that it has created a deep and abiding impression on the minds of large numbers of people.

A study of Marx and Lenin produced a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some sequence, and the future lost some of its obscurity. The practical achievements of the Soviet Union were also tremendously impressive. Often I disliked or did not understand some development there and it seemed to me to be too closely concerned with the opportunism of the moment or the power politics of the day. But despite all these developments and possible distortions of the original passion for human betterment, I had no doubt that the Soviet Revolution had advanced human society by a great leap and had lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and that it had laid the foundations for that new civilisation towards which the world could advance. I am too much of an individualist and believer in personal freedom to like overmuch regimentation. Yet it seemed to me obvious that in a complex social structure individual freedom had to be limited, and perhaps the only way to read personal freedom was through some such limitation in the social sphere. The lesser liberties may often need limitation in the interest of the larger freedom.

Much in the Marxist philosophical outlook I could accept without difficulty: its monism and non-duality of mind and matter, the dynamics of matter and the dialectic of continuous change by evolution as well as leap, through action and interaction, cause and effect, thesis, antithesis and synthesis. It did not satisfy me completely, nor did it answer all the questions in my mind, and, almost unawares, a vague idealist approach would creep into my mind, something rather akin to the Vedanta approach. It was not a difference between mind and matter, but rather of something that lay beyond the mind. Also there was the background of ethics. I realised that the moral approach is a changing one and depends upon the growing mind and an advancing civilisation; it is conditioned by the mental climate of the age. Yet there was something more to it than that, certain basic urges which had greater permanence. I did not like the frequent divorce in communist, as in other, practice between action and these basic urges or principles. So there was an odd

mixture in my mind which I could not rationally explain or resolve. There was a general tendency not to think too much of those fundamental questions which appear to be beyond reach, but rather to concentrate on the problems of life — to understand in the narrower and more immediate sense what should be done and how. Whatever ultimate reality may be, and whether we can ever grasp it in whole or in part, there certainly appear to be vast possibilities of increasing human knowledge, even though this may be partly or largely subjective, and of applying this to the advancement and betterment of human living and social organisation.

There has been in the past, and there is to a lesser extent even today among some people, an absorption in finding an answer to the riddle of the universe. This leads them away from the individual and social problems of the day, and when they are unable to solve that riddle they despair and turn to inaction and triviality or find comfort in some dogmatic creeds. Social evils, most of which are certainly capable of removal, are attributed to original sin, to the unalterableness of human nature, or the social structure, or (in India) to the inevitable legacy of previous births. Thus one drifts away from even the attempt to think rationally and scientifically and takes refuge in irrationalism, superstition, and unreasonable and inequitable social prejudices and practices. It is true that even rational and scientific thought does not always take us as far as we would like to go. There is an infinite number of factors and relations all of which influence and determine events in varying degrees. It is impossible to grasp all of them, but we can try to pick out the dominating forces at work and by observing external material reality, and by experiment and practice, trial and error, grope our way to everwidening knowledge and truth.

For this purpose, and within these limitations, the general Marxist approach, fitting in as it more or less does with the present state of scientific knowledge, seemed to me to offer considerable help. But even accepting that approach, the consequences that flow from it and the interpretation on past and present happenings were by no means always clear. Marx's general analysis of social development seems to have been remarkably correct, and yet many developments took place later which did not fit in with his outlook for the immediate future. Lenin successfully adapted the Marxian thesis to some of these subsequent developments, and again since then further remarkable changes have taken place — the rise of fascism and nazism and all that lay behind them. The very rapid growth of technology and the practical application of vast developments in scientific knowledge are now changing the world picture with an amazing rapidity, leading to new problems.

And so while I accepted the fundamentals of the socialist theory, I did not

trouble myself about its numerous inner controversies. I had little patience with leftist groups in India, spending much of their energy in mutual conflict and recrimination over fine points of doctrine which did not interest me at all. Life is too complicated and, as far as we can understand it in our present state of knowledge, too illogical, for it to be confined within the four corners of a fixed doctrine.

The real problems for me remain problems of individual and social life, of harmonious living, of a proper balancing of an individual's inner and outer life, of an adjustment of the relations between individuals and between groups, of a continuous becoming something better and higher of social development, of the ceaseless adventure of man. In the solution of these problems the way of observation and precise knowledge and deliberate reasoning, according to the method of science, must be followed. This method may not always be applicable in our quest of truth, for art and poetry and certain psychic experiences seem to belong to a different order of things and to elude the objective methods of science. Let us, therefore, not rule out intuition and other methods of sensing truth and reality. They are necessary even for the purposes of science. But always we must hold to our anchor of precise objective knowledge tested by reason, and even more so by experiment and practice, and always we must beware of losing ourselves in a sea of speculation unconnected with the day-to-day problems of life and the needs of men and women. A living philosophy must answer the problems of today.

It may be that we of this modern age, who so pride ourselves on the achievements of our times, are prisoners of our age, just as the ancients and the men and women of medieval times were prisoners of their respective ages. We may delude ourselves, as others have done before us, that our way of looking at things is the only right way, leading to truth. We cannot escape from that prison or get rid entirely of that illusion, if illusion it is.

Yet I am convinced that the methods and approach of science have revolutionised human life more than anything else in the long course of history, and have opened doors and avenues of further and even more radical change, leading up to the very portals of what has long been considered the unknown. The technical achievements of science are obvious enough: its capacity to transform an economy of scarcity into one of abundance is evident, its invasion of many problems which have so far been the monopoly of philosophy is becoming more pronounced. Space-time and the quantum theory utterly changed the picture of the physical world. More recent researches into the nature of matter, the structure of the atom, the transmutation of the elements, and the transformation of electricity and light, either

into the other, have carried human knowledge much further. Man no longer sees nature as something apart and distinct from himself. Human destiny appears to become a part of nature's rhythmic energy.

All this upheaval of thought, due to the advance of science, has led scientists into a new region, verging on the metaphysical. They draw different and often contradictory conclusions. Some see in it a new unity, the antithesis of chance. Others, like Bertrand Russell say: "Academic philosophers ever since the time of Parmenides have believed the world is unity. The most fundamental of my beliefs is that this is rubbish." Or again, "Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms." And yet the latest developments in physics have gone a long way to demonstrate a fundamental unity in nature. "The belief that all things are made of a single substance is as old as thought itself; but ours is the generation which, first of all in history, is able to receive the unity of nature, not as a baseless dogma or a hopeless aspiration, but a principle of science based on proof as sharp and clear as anything which is known."¹

Old as this belief is in Asia and Europe, it is interesting to compare some of the latest conclusions of science with the fundamental ideas underlying the Advaita Vedantic theory. These ideas were that the universe is made of one substance whose form is perpetually changing, and further that the sum-total of energies remains always the same. Also that "the explanations of things are to be found within their own nature, and that no external beings or existences are required to explain what is going on in the universe," with its corollary of a self-evolving universe.

It does not very much matter to science what these vague speculations lead to, for meanwhile it forges ahead in a hundred directions, in its own precise experimental way of observation, widening the bounds of the charted region of knowledge, and changing human life in the process. Science may be on the verge of discovering vital mysteries, which yet may elude it. Still it will go on along its appointed path, for there is no end to its journeying. Ignoring for the moment the "why?" of philosophy, science will go on asking "how?", and as it finds this out it gives greater content and meaning to life, and perhaps takes us some way to answering the "why?".

Or, perhaps, we cannot cross that barrier, and the mysterious will continue to remain the mysterious, and life with all its changes will still remain a bundle of good and evil, a succession of conflicts, a curious combination of incompatible and mutually hostile urges.

Or again, perhaps, the very progress of science, unconnected with and isolated from moral discipline and ethical considerations, will lead to the concentration of power and the terrible instruments of destruction which it has made, in the hands of evil and selfish men, seeking the domination of others — and thus to the destruction of its own great achievements. Something of this kind we see happening now, and behind this war there lies this internal conflict of the spirit of man.

How amazing is this spirit of man! In spite of innumerable failings, man, throughout the ages, has sacrificed his life and all he held dear for an ideal, for truth, for faith, for country and honour. That ideal may change, but that capacity for self-sacrifice continues, and because of that, much may be forgiven to man, and it is impossible to lose hope for him. In the midst of disaster, he has not lost his dignity or his faith in the values he cherished. Plaything of nature's mighty forces, less than a speck of dust in this vast universe, he has hurled defiance at the elemental powers, and with his mind, cradle of revolution, sought to master them. Whatever gods there be, there is something godlike in man, as there is also something of the devil in him.

The future is dark, uncertain. But we can see part of the way leading to it and can tread it with firm steps, remembering that nothing that can happen is likely to overcome the spirit of man which has survived so many perils; remembering also that life, for all its ills, has joy and beauty, and that we can always wander, if we know how to, in the enchanted woods of nature.

What else is wisdom? What of man's endeavour
Or God's high grace, so lovely and so great?
To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;
To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;
And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?²

Text from: Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*
(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, third edition 1983), pp. 24-33.

A large, stylized handwritten signature of Jawaharlal Nehru in black ink, written in a cursive script.

Notes

1. Karl K. Darrow, *The Renaissance of Physics* (New York: 1936), p. 301.
2. Chorus from *The Bacchae* of Euripides. Gilbert Murray's translation.

A few dates

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| 1889 (November, 14) | — Birth of Nehru in Allahabad. |
| 1905 | — Goes to England for study in Harro and Cambridge. |
| 1912 | — Return to India. |
| 1921 | — First arrest and jail. |
| 1923 | — Elected General Secretary of the Congress Party. |
| 1929 | — Elected President of the Indian National Congress (Lahore session). |
| 1945 (June) | — End of the last imprisonment period. |
| 1947 (15 August) | — Becomes the first Prime Minister of India. |
| 1964 (May, 27) | — Death of Nehru. |

Suggestions for further reading

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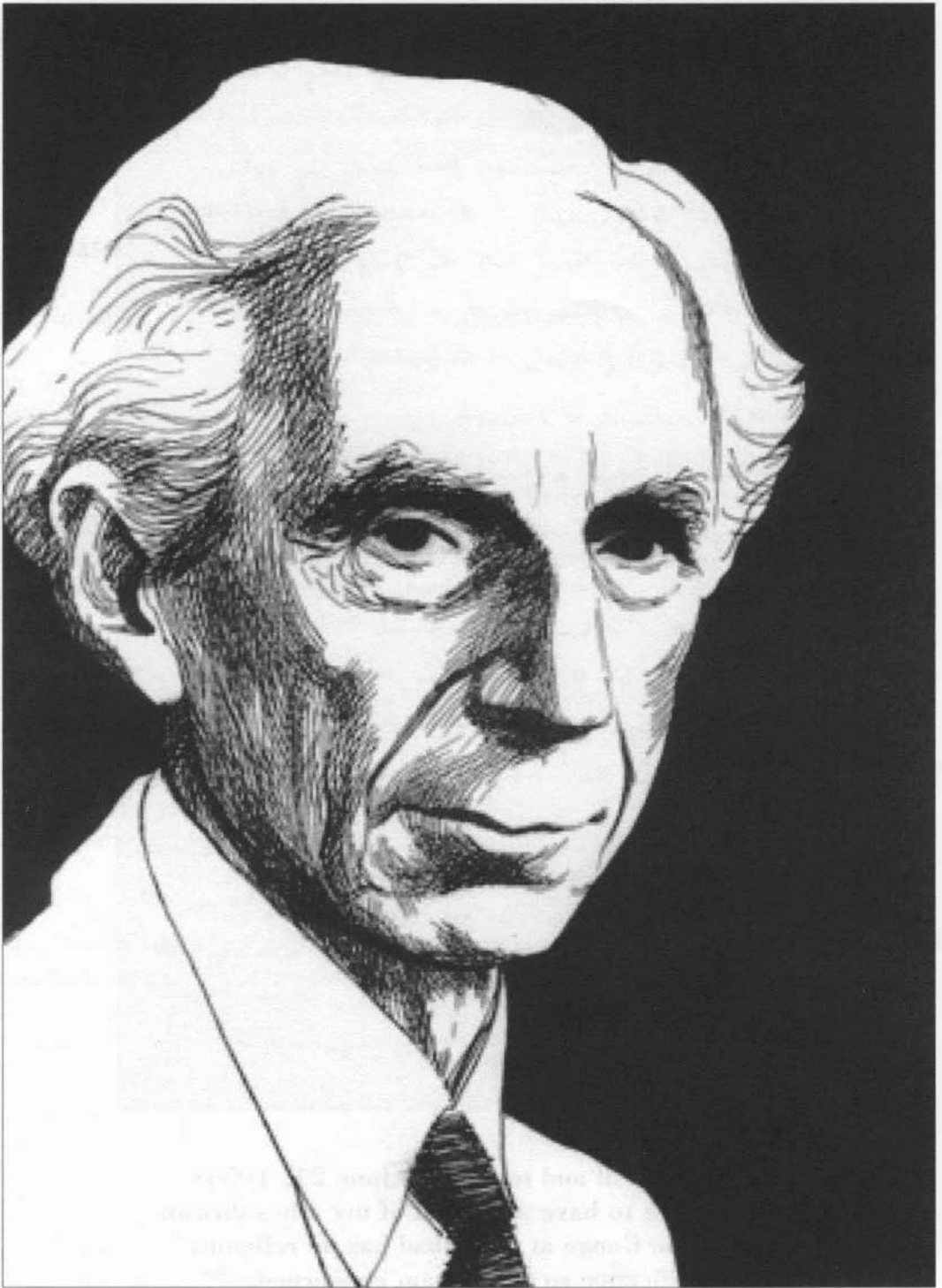
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* *

When I die I should like my body to be cremated. If I die in a foreign country, my body should be cremated there and my ashes sent to Allahabad. A small handful of these ashes should be thrown into the Ganga and the major portion of them should be disposed of in the manner indicated below. No part of these ashes should be retained or preserved.

My desire to have a handful of my ashes thrown into the Ganga at Allahabad has no religious significance, so far as I am concerned. I have no religious sentiment in the matter. I have been attached to the Ganga and Jumna rivers in Allahabad ever since my childhood, and as I have grown older, this attachment has also grown. I have watched them varying moods as the seasons changed, and have often thought of the history and myth and tradition, and song and story, that have become attached to them through the long ages ⁱⁿ ~~last~~ and become a part of their flowing waters. The Ganga, especially, is the river of India, beloved of her people, round which are intertwined her racial memories, her hopes and fears.

Nehru's will and testament, June 21, 1954:
"My desire to have a handful of my ashes thrown into the Gange at Allahabad has no religious significance so far as I am concerned..."



Bertrand Russell

A Free Man's Worship

Introduction

As mankind drew nearer the twentieth century, we find an atmosphere that called for total freedom of the mind and spirit. The age of religion seemed to be drawing to a close. Even the morality derived from religion seemed to be receding into the background. The achievements of modern science, that confirmed the validity of the methods of free inquiry and verification through experience, provided the needed leverage for securing a freedom undreamt of when religion reigned supreme among men and society.

In fact, the spirit of freedom had begun in the early seventeenth century to assert itself with Descartes and his contemporaries. In Descartes we find a method of philosophical inquiry that dared to doubt every presupposition. But still there was a kind of link, if not with religion itself, with a certain residual power and influence of religion. But when we come to the twentieth century, we find among some of the greatest thinkers a bold and radical departure from any connection with religion. In the West, there came about a wave of thought, not only in philosophy but also in other intellectual disciplines, which emphasized the necessity of looking at reality with utter objectivity and impartiality, taking nothing for granted, assuming nothing on authority.

But when all assumptions are withdrawn, is there any solid ground on which one can pose the question: What is the aim of life? One possible answer can be found in Bertrand Russell's essay, A Free Man's Worship. Bertrand Russell is considered

one of the most eminent modern mathematicians. He introduced the proof that all mathematical axioms can be traced back to logical principles. In this light it becomes clear that the Euclidian approach to reality is only one of the many possible modes of mathematical reasoning. In other words, Bertrand Russell presented a new mathematical model which could be the basis of a new way of thinking.

Bertrand Russell was also a great philosopher, and in philosophy, too, he introduced certain new concepts. He showed that logic could be the key of philosophical thought, and that when that key was applied properly, certain "insoluble" problems of metaphysics would be found to be non-existent. At least this is what he claimed. He succeeded in showing a close relationship between philosophy and science. Philosophy, according to Russell, is something in between theology and science. Like theology, it consists of speculations about knowledge which has so far proved to be unascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, whether traditional or revealed. All definite knowledge, according to Russell, belongs to science. All dogmatic beliefs about matters which surpass definite knowledge belong to theology. Russell points out that between these two is a "No-Man's Land", the ever-changing realm of philosophy where the independent mind is free to speculate about unanswered, open questions. Is the world divided into mind and matter? Is it evolving towards some goal? Are there really laws of nature? Or do we believe in them only because of our innate love of order? Is man a tiny lump of impure carbon and water impotently crawling on the surface of an unimportant planet? Or is he the humanised material that expresses the power of consciousness on its way to integral development?

In Bertrand Russell we find exceptional honesty and acuteness. He proceeds step by step while keeping his mind open to any possible objection or to any possible answer. He has in this process arrived at certain conclusions, many of which, he admits, are uncertain. There are very few things about which he feels some kind of certainty. In fact, it might be said that he represents a philosophy of uncertainty.

Bertrand Russell was born in England on May 18, 1872, into an aristocratic family. His parents were radical reformers and freethinkers. Both died before Bertrand reached the age of four. From then onwards he was raised by his grandmother, who was to have a strong influence on his life. She was a Scotch Presbyterian, liberal in politics and religion but extremely strict in all matters of morality. "She demanded", he writes, "that everything should be viewed through a mist of Victorian sentiment." As a child, Bertrand already felt that his thoughts and feelings were not close to those generally accepted. He never mentioned to adults the

important and lasting impressions of childhood that arose at certain moments, in the midst of childish occupations. The years of his adolescence were lonely and unhappy. In the life of his emotions and of his intellect he felt obliged to preserve an impenetrable secrecy. Although in later life Russell was very active on the public scene, he was solitary by nature. He tells us that his grandmother once gave him a Bible in which she had written on the fly-leaf: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." Her emphasis on this precept, he says, helped him never to be afraid of belonging to small minorities.

Along with a deep interest in mathematics and philosophy, Russell had a deep love of poetry, although this too he kept secret. From a young age he was puzzled by religious dogmas. At times he was paralysed by scepticism, at times experienced a total indifference to God. He first thought that if he ceased to believe in God he would be very unhappy. Yet the reasons given to prove the existence of God seemed to him very unconvincing. At seventeen he became convinced that there was no life after death, and a year later found good reasons for becoming agnostic, a position he found no reason whatsoever to change throughout the rest of his life. His preoccupation with the question of God's existence often filled him with a curious kind of pain, and he felt that it was only by liberating himself from the influence of religion that he could find possible ways of living with unresolved questions both about life and about the world. It is this spirit which is reflected in *A Free Man's Worship*.

It is sometimes held that if one discards the belief in design or in the moral order of the universe or in the governance of the world by God, one is led to deny the basis for any aim of life except that of snatching transient happiness.

"From dust we rise, to dust we return" — such would be the simplistic logic of a designless world. Bertrand Russell shows, however, that this is not the only possible alternative, and that it is possible to take towards life an attitude of worship, an attitude very similar to that of the mystic. Even if the world is not rooted in some absolute and omniscient reality, even if the world is not governed by inexorable moral laws, even then it is possible to formulate and develop a noble attitude towards life. *A Free Man's Worship* was first published in December 1903, when Russell was only thirty-one, and is considered a basic part of his writings. It is a short and most poetic rendering of the paradox that underlies the whole of Russell's philosophy: a curious blend of positivism and mysticism. All his instincts were on the side of the "rationalists", and he usually deplored those who exalted emotion or any sort of mystic intuition at the expense of reason. Yet even then he writes: "But the greatest philosophers have felt the need of both science and

mysticism. The attempt to harmonise the two... makes philosophy a greater thing than either science or religion." In that sense, he finds mysticism to be perfectly consistent with a world-view in which there is no place for God or for a moral order.

There is another side of Bertrand Russell, and that is his scientific objectivism which gave him a sharp and uncompromising attitude towards the distinction between mind and matter. "The distinction of mind and matter came into philosophy from religion... I think that mind and matter are merely convenient ways of grouping events: Some single events belong only to material groups but others belong to both kinds of groups, and are therefore at once mental and material." This leads him to a kind of materialism in which there are no supra-physical realities. Russell himself called his philosophy "neutral monism" according to which reality cannot be described either in terms of matter or in terms of mind, but can be seen either as matter or as mind depending upon the context in which a given object is considered. This hypothesis might seem abstruse, but many of Russell's views are rather complex and difficult. But what is important for us is to try to enter into his flow of thought, for it offers a view of life, an attitude towards life which are so refreshing that despite all the uncertainties, we are led to a new way of responding to life and its activities. One may not agree with the ultimate propositions of Bertrand Russell's philosophy, but it is undeniable that the view of life he presents is worth considering. In any case, it is necessary to know that between the extremes of religious bigotry and materialistic hedonism there are several alternative middle paths, and the one presented here in *A Free Man's Worship* is truly instructive.

Bertrand Russell was a consummate master of English prose, and he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. His wit, brevity of expression and precision of thought give to his writings an exceptional charm that is unique and inimitable.

In conclusion, we may recall what he said about himself:

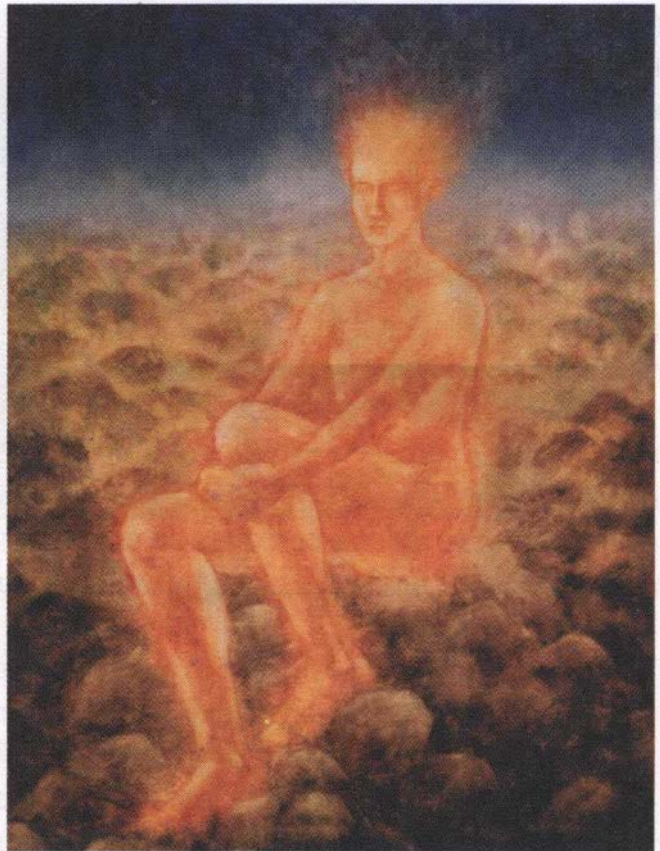
Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither; in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair. I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy — ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness — that terrible loneliness in which one shivering

1. Bertrand Russell, "Mysticism and Logic", *A Free Man's Worship and Other Essays* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976), p. 20.

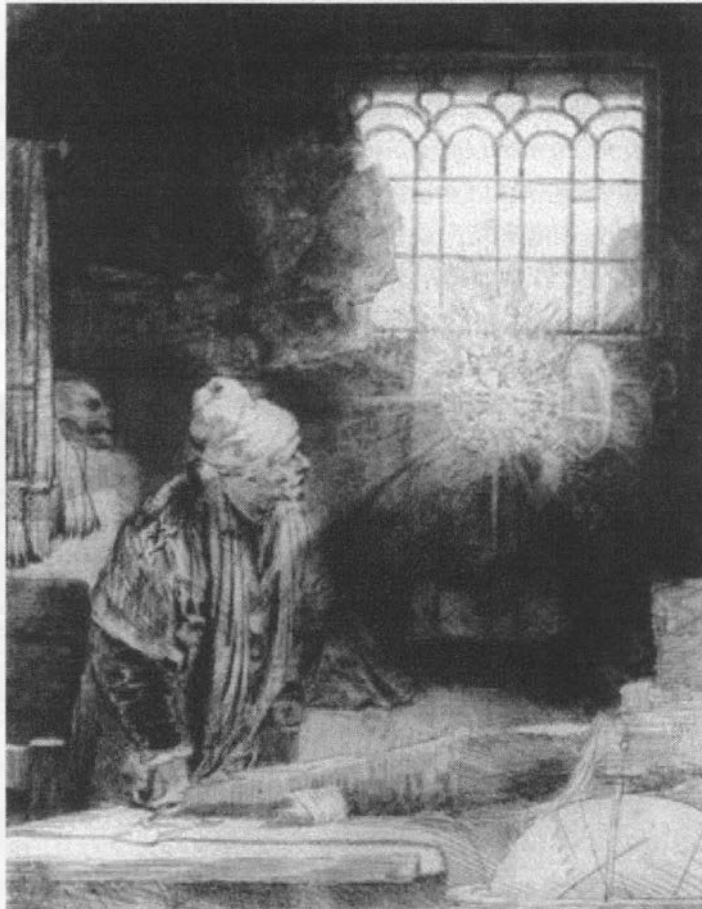
consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it, finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what — at last — I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of man. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer. This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.



Painting by Rolf, Auroville



Dr Faustus, by Rembrandt

To Dr Faustus in his study Mephistopheles told the history of the Creation, saying:

“The endless praises of the choirs of angels had begun to grow wearisome; for, after all, did He not deserve their praise? Had He not given them endless joy? Would it not be more amusing to obtain undeserved praise, to be worshipped by beings whom He tortures? He smiled inwardly, and resolved that the great drama should be performed.

“For countless ages the hot nebula whirled aimlessly through space. At length it began to take shape, the central mass threw off planets, the planets cooled, boiling seas and burning mountains heaved and tossed, from black masses of cloud hot sheets of rain deluged the barely solid crust. And now the first germ of life grew in the depths of the ocean, and developed rapidly in the fructifying warmth into vast forest trees, huge ferns springing from the damp mould, sea monsters breeding, fighting, devouring, and passing away. And from the monsters, as the play unfolded itself, Man was born, with the power of thought, the knowledge of good and evil, and the cruel thirst for worship. And Man saw that all is passing in this mad, monstrous world, that all is struggling to snatch, at any cost, a few brief moments of life before Death’s inexorable decree. And Man said: ‘There is a hidden purpose, could we but fathom it, and the purpose is good; for we must reverence something and in the visible world there is nothing worthy of reverence.’ And Man stood aside from the struggle, resolving that God intended harmony to come out of chaos by human efforts. And when he followed the instincts which God had transmitted to him from his ancestry of beasts of prey, he called it Sin, and asked God to forgive him. But he doubted whether he could be justly forgiven, until he invented a divine Plan by which God’s wrath was to have been appeased. And seeing the present was bad, he made it yet worse, that thereby the future might be better. And he gave God thanks for the strength that enabled him to forgo even the joys that were possible. And God smiled; and when he saw that Man had become perfect in renunciation and worship, he sent another sun through the sky, which crashed into Man’s sun; and all returned again to nebula.

“ ‘Yes,’ he murmured, ‘it was a good play; I will have it performed again.’ ”

Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief. Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes



God the Geometer, by William Blake (1757-1827)

and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

How, in such an alien and inhuman world, can so powerless a creature as Man preserve his aspirations untarnished? A strange mystery it is that Nature, omnipotent but blind, in the revolutions of her secular hurrying through the abysses of space, has brought forth at last a child, subject still to her power, but gifted with sight, with knowledge of good and evil, with the capacity of judging all the works of his unthinking Mother. In spite of Death, the mark and seal of the parental control, Man is yet free, during his brief years, to examine, to criticise, to know, and in imagination to create. To him alone, in the world with which he is acquainted, this freedom belongs; and in this lies his superiority to the resistless forces that control his outward life.

The savage, like ourselves, feels the oppression of his impotence before the powers of Nature; but having in himself nothing that he respects more than Power, he is willing to prostrate himself before his gods, without inquiring whether they are worthy of his worship. Pathetic and very terrible is the long history of cruelty and torture, of degradation and human sacrifice, endured in the hope of placating the jealous gods: surely, the trembling believer thinks, when what is most precious has been freely given, their lust for blood must be appeased, and more will not be required. The religion of Moloch,¹ — as such creeds may be generically called — is in essence the cringing submission of the slave, who dare not, even in his heart, allow the thought that his master deserves no adulation. Since the independence of ideals is not yet acknowledged, Power may be freely worshipped, and receive an unlimited respect, despite its wanton infliction of pain.

But gradually, as morality grows bolder, the claim of the ideal world begins to be felt; and worship, if it is not to cease, must be given to gods of another kind than those created by the savage. Some, though they feel the demands of the ideal, will still consciously reject them, still urging that naked Power is worthy of worship. Such is the attitude inculcated in God's answer to Job² out of the whirlwind: the

divine power and knowledge are paraded, but of the divine goodness there is no hint. Such also is the attitude of those, who, in our own day, base their morality upon the struggle for survival, maintaining that the survivors are necessarily the fittest. But others, not content with an answer so repugnant to the moral sense, will adopt the position which we have become accustomed to regard as specially religious, maintaining that, in some hidden manner, the world of fact is really harmonious with the world of ideals. Thus Man creates God, all-powerful and all-good, the mystic unity of what is and what should be.

But the world of fact, after all, is not good; and, in submitting our judgment to it, there is an element of slavishness from which our thoughts must be purged. For in all things it is well to exalt the dignity of Man, by freeing him as far as possible from the tyranny of non-human Power. When we have realised that Power is largely bad, that man, with his knowledge of good and evil, is but a helpless atom in a world which has no such knowledge, the choice is again presented to us: Shall we worship Force, or shall we worship Goodness? Shall our God exist and be evil, or shall he be recognised as the creation of our own conscience?

The answer to this question is very momentous, and affects profoundly our whole morality. The worship of Force, to which Carlyle³ and Nietzsche⁴ and the creed of Militarism have accustomed us, is the result of failure to maintain our own ideals against a hostile universe: it is itself a prostrate submission to evil, a sacrifice of our best to Moloch. If strength indeed is to be respected, let us respect rather the strength of those who refuse that false "recognition of facts" which fails to recognise that facts are often bad. Let us admit that, in the world we know, there are many things that would be better otherwise, and that the ideals to which we do and must adhere are not realised in the realm of matter. Let us preserve our respect for truth, for beauty, for the ideal of perfection which life does not permit us to attain, though none of these things meet with the approval of the unconscious universe. If Power is bad, as it seems to be, let us reject it from our hearts. In this lies Man's true freedom: in determination to worship only the God created by our own love of the good, to respect only the heaven which inspires the insight of our best moments. In action, in desire, we must submit perpetually to the tyranny of outside forces; but in thought, in aspiration, we are free, free from our fellow-men, free from the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl, free even, while we live, from the tyranny of death. Let us learn, then, that energy of faith which enables us to live constantly in the vision of the good; and let us descend, in action, into the world of fact, with that vision always before us.

When first the opposition of fact and ideal grows fully visible, a spirit of fiery

revolt, of fierce hatred of the gods, seems necessary to the assertion of freedom. To defy with Promethean⁵ constancy a hostile universe, to keep its evil always in view, always actively hated, to refuse no pain that the malice of Power can invent, appears to be the duty of all who will not bow before the inevitable. But indignation is still a bondage, for it compels our thoughts to be occupied with an evil world; and in the fierceness of desire from which rebellion springs there is a kind of self-assertion which it is necessary for the wise to overcome. Indignation is a submission of our thoughts, but not of our desires; the Stoic freedom in which wisdom consists is found in the submission of our desires, but not of our thoughts. From the submission of our desires springs the virtue of resignation; from the freedom of our thoughts springs the whole world of art and philosophy, and the vision of beauty by which, at last, we half reconquer the reluctant world. But the vision of beauty is possible only to unfettered contemplation, to thoughts not weighted by the load of eager wishes; and thus Freedom comes only to those who no longer ask of life that it shall yield them any of those personal goods that are subject to the mutations of Time.

Although the necessity of renunciation is evidence of the existence of evil, yet Christianity, in preaching it, has shown a wisdom exceeding that of the Promethean philosophy of rebellion. It must be admitted that, of the things we desire, some, though they prove impossible, are yet real goods; others, however, as ardently longed for, do not form part of a fully purified ideal. The belief that what must be renounced is bad, though sometimes false, is far less often false than untamed passion supposes; and the creed of religion, by providing a reason for proving that it is never false, has been the means of purifying our hopes by the discovery of many austere truths.

But there is in resignation a further good element: even real goods, when they are unattainable, ought not to be fretfully desired. To every man comes, sooner or later, the great renunciation. For the young, there is nothing unattainable; a good thing desired with the whole force of a passionate will, and yet impossible, is to them not credible. Yet, by death, by illness, by poverty, or by the voice of duty, we must learn, each one of us, that the world was not made for us, and that, however beautiful may be the things we crave, Fate may nevertheless forbid them. It is the part of courage, when misfortune comes, to bear without repining the ruin of our hopes, to turn away our thoughts from vain regrets. This degree of submission to Power is not only just and right: it is the very gate of wisdom.

But passive renunciation is not the whole of wisdom; for not by renunciation alone can we build a temple for the worship of our own ideals. Haunting

foreshadowings of the temple appear in the realm of imagination, in music, in architecture, in the untroubled kingdom of reason, and in the golden sunset magic of lyrics, where beauty shines and glows, remote from the touch of sorrow, remote from the fear of change, remote from the failures and disenchantments of the world of fact. In the contemplation of these things the vision of heaven will shape itself in our hearts, giving at once a touchstone to judge the world about us, and an inspiration by which to fashion to our needs whatever is not incapable of serving as a stone in the sacred temple.

Except for those rare spirits that are born without sin, there is a cavern of darkness to be traversed before that temple can be entered. The gate of the cavern is despair, and its floor is paved with the gravestones of abandoned hopes. There Self must die; there the eagerness, the greed of untamed desire must be slain, for only so can the soul be freed from the empire of Fate. But out of the cavern the Gate of Renunciation leads again to the daylight of wisdom, by whose radiance a new insight, a new joy, a new tenderness, shine forth to gladden the pilgrim's heart.

When, without the bitterness of impotent rebellion, we have learnt both to resign ourselves to the outward rule of Fate and to recognise that the non-human world is unworthy of our worship, it becomes possible at last so to transform and refashion the unconscious universe, so to transmute it in the crucible of imagination, that a new image of shining gold replaces the old idol of clay. In all the multiform facts of the world — in the visual shapes of trees and mountains and clouds, in the events of the life of man, even in the very omnipotence of Death — the insight of creative idealism can find the reflection of a beauty which its own thoughts first made. In this way mind asserts its subtle mastery over the thoughtless forces of Nature. The more evil the material with which it deals, the more thwarting to untrained desire, the greater is its achievement in inducing the reluctant rock to yield up its hidden treasures, the prouder its victory in compelling the opposing forces to swell the pageant of its triumph. Of all the arts, Tragedy is the proudest, the most triumphant; for it builds its shining citadel in the very centre of the enemy's country, on the very summit of his highest mountain; from its impregnable watch towers, his camps and arsenals, his columns and forts, are all revealed; within its walls the free life continues, while the legions of Death and Pain and Despair, and all the servile captains of tyrant Fate, afford the burghers of that dauntless city new spectacles of beauty. Happy those sacred ramparts, thrice happy the dwellers on that all-seeing eminence. Honour to those brave warriors who, through countless ages of warfare, have preserved for us the priceless heritage of liberty, and have kept undefiled by

sacrilegious invaders the home of the unsubdued.

But the beauty of Tragedy does but make visible a quality which, in more or less obvious shapes, is present always and everywhere in life. In the spectacle of Death, in the endurance of intolerable pain, and in the irrevocableness of a vanished past, there is a sacredness, an overpowering awe, a feeling of the vastness, the depth, the inexhaustible mystery of existence, in which, as by some strange marriage of pain, the sufferer is bound to the world by bonds of sorrow. In these moments of insight, we lose all eagerness of temporary desire, all struggling and striving for petty ends, all care for the little trivial things that, to a superficial view, make up the common life of day by day; we see, surrounding the narrow raft illumined by the flickering light of human comradeship, the dark ocean on whose rolling waves we toss for a brief hour; from the great night without, a chill blast breaks in upon our refuge; all the loneliness of humanity amid hostile forces is concentrated upon the individual soul, which must struggle alone, with what of courage it can command, against the whole weight of a universe that cares nothing for its hopes and fears. Victory, in this struggle with the powers of darkness, is the true baptism into the glorious company of heroes, the true initiation into the overmastering beauty of human existence. From that awful encounter of the soul with the outer world, renunciation, wisdom, and charity are born; and with their birth a new life begins. To take into the inmost shrine of the soul the irresistible forces whose puppets we seem to be — Death and change, the irrevocableness of the past, and the powerlessness of man before the blind hurry of the universe from vanity to vanity — to feel these things and know them is to conquer them.

This is the reason why the Past has such magical power. The beauty of its motionless and silent pictures is like the enchanted purity of late autumn, when the leaves, though one breath would make them fall, still glow against the sky in golden glory. The Past does not change or strive; like Duncan, after life's fitful fever it sleeps well; what was eager and grasping, what was petty and transitory, has faded away, the things that were beautiful and eternal shine out of it like stars in the night. Its beauty, to a soul not worthy of it, is unendurable; but to a soul which has conquered Fate it is the key of religion.

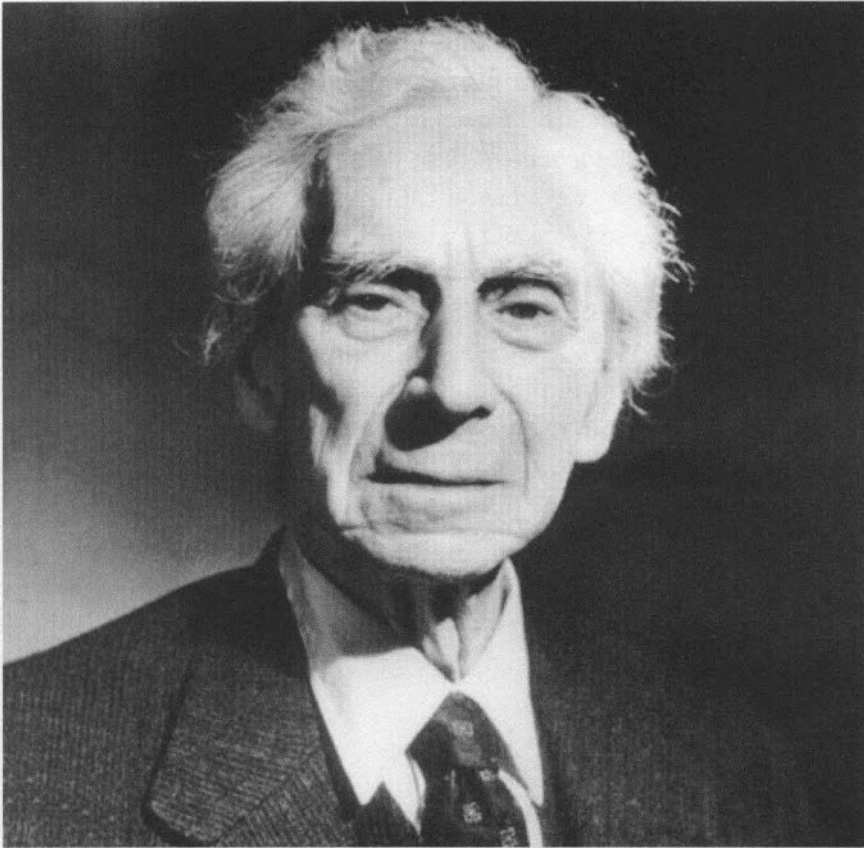
The life of Man, viewed outwardly, is but a small thing in comparison with the forces of Nature. The slave is doomed to worship Time and Fate and Death, because they are greater than anything he finds in himself, and because all his thoughts are of things which they devour. But, great as they are, to think of them greatly, to feel their passionless splendour, is great still. And such thought makes us free men; we no longer bow before the inevitable in Oriental subjection, but we absorb it, and

make it a part of ourselves. To abandon the struggle for private happiness, to expel all eagerness of temporary desire, to burn with passion for eternal things — this is emancipation, and this is the free man's worship. And this liberation is effected by a contemplation of Fate; for Fate itself is subdued by the mind which leaves nothing to be purged by the purifying fire of Time.

United with his fellow-men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always, shedding over every daily task the light of love. The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair. Let us not weigh in grudging scales their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need — of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives; let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause, but wherever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement, with sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed.

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas,⁶ the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

Essay written by Bertrand Russell in 1902 and published in 1903.



Notes

1. *Moloch*: A god of the Ammonites and Phoenicians to whom parents offered their children to be burnt in sacrifice.
2. *Job* is the chief character in the Book of Job (part of the Bible's Old Testament), who, despite great suffering and adversity, kept his faith in God.
3. *Thomas Carlyle* (1795-1881): Scottish essayist and historian.
4. *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche* (1844-1900): German philosopher. One of the principles propounded in his philosophy is that the strong must rule over the weak.
5. *Prometheus* is a Titan of Greek mythology who stole fire from heaven for mankind and as a punishment was chained to a rock. Daily an eagle devoured his liver, which was made whole again at night.
6. *Atlas* is a Titan of Greek mythology who supported the heavens on his shoulders; by extension, an "Atlas" is anyone bearing a great burden.

A few dates

1872 (May, 18)	— Birth at Revenscroft, England.
1890	— Enters Trinity College, Cambridge.
1908	— Made a Fellow of the Royal Society.
1910	— Entire decade devoted to collaboration with A. N. Whitehead on <i>Principia Mathematica</i> . First volume published this year.
	— Lecturer in Mathematical Logic at Trinity College, Cambridge.
1914	— Public speaker and pamphleteer against World War I.
1916	— Fined in the Everett Case because of a pamphlet criticising a two-year sentence of a conscientious objector.
	— Loss of his lectureship at Trinity College.
1918	— Six months in Brixton Prison because he quotes a “confidential” report on the use of American troops against strikers.
1920	— Visit to Russia.
1921	— Visit to China and Japan. Lectures in Peking.
1922-23	— Labour Candidate for Parliament.
1924-31	— Several lecture tours in the United States.
1938-44	— Stays in the United States. Very active in lecturing, radio, discussions, etc.
1944	— Returns to England. Elected to Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, for the second time.
1950	— Nobel Prize for Literature.
1955	— Awarded the Silver Pears Trophy for work on behalf of World Peace.
1957	— UNESCO Kalinga Prize.
1950-70	— Struggle for World Peace and Nuclear Disarmament.
1970 (February, 2)	— Death of Bertrand Russell.

Suggestions for further reading

Russell, Bertrand.	<i>A Free Man's Worship and other Essays</i> . London: Allen & Unwin, 1976.
	<i>A History of Western Philosophy</i> . London: Allen & Unwin, 1979.
	<i>Autobiography of Bertrand Russell</i> . London: Allen & Unwin.
	<i>Wisdom of the West</i> . London: Macdonald, 1959.





The Mother

The Ascent to Truth

Introduction

The Mother was born in Paris on February 21, 1878, in a very materialistic, upper middle class family. She completed a thorough education of music, painting and higher mathematics. A student of the French painter Gustave Moreau, she befriended the great Impressionist artists of the time. She later became acquainted with Max Theon, an enigmatic character with extraordinary occult powers who, for the first time, gave her a coherent explanation of the spontaneous experiences occurring since her childhood, and who taught her occultism during two long visits to his estate in Algeria.

In 1914 she visited the city of Pondicherry, which was at that time a French colony, in South India, and met Sri Aurobindo. She returned permanently to Pondicherry in 1920 via Japan and China, and when Sri Aurobindo “withdrew” from outer contact in 1926 to devote himself to the “supramental yoga”, she collaborated with him and at the same time organised and developed the Ashram.

The Mother is the author of several books. Prayers and Meditations and On Education are her short but important books. She presided over the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in which hundreds of students studied. The Mother herself taught classes, and her talks to the children constitute a series of nine books entitled Entretiens or Conversations. She also wrote stories and short plays which were staged under her direction. Her plays are symbolic and bring out through meaningful dialogues a profound message. The play given here, The Ascent to Truth,

provides an insight into various aims of life and their limitations. Towards the end of the play she indicates the secret of an integral aim of life and of the new world.

In 1958, eight years after Sri Aurobindo's departure, she in turn withdrew to her room to come to terms with the problem of evolution. From 1958 to 1973, she slowly uncovered the "Great Passage" to the next species and a new mode of life in matter, and narrated her extraordinary exploration to her closest confidant, Satprem. This tremendous document of six thousand pages in thirteen volumes is called Mother's Agenda. It is a document of experimental evolution, and goes to the heart of the question of our times. For, whatever the appearances, mankind is not at the end of a civilisation but at the end of an evolutionary cycle. Are we going to find the passage to the next species or perish?

Man tries to excel himself. This is the secret of his growth, his progress, his evolution. In this continuous march, a stage comes when he is no longer satisfied with what he is. His field of enquiry widens and his search becomes intense. He wants to know the anatomy of certain phenomena that he has always accepted. He questions his faith in things that he has been told and has believed in, and asks what is true and what is untrue. Is truth just an absence of falsehood or is it an independent, dynamic reality?

It is such questioning that brings together the people in this "Drama of Life" as Mother called it. It is not given to everyone to have an intense aspiration for a rather difficult search, but there are some whose aim of life is to constantly move forward and not to stop till they have arrived at their goal, whatever it may be. The characters in the play represent people of different backgrounds, interests and age groups; but they are all united in their aim to find the Truth. They do not know what it is or what it will turn out to be when they have realised it, but they are all driven by an urge to find it.

Many people begin a search for the Truth, but not all reach their destination; for in order to reach the destination, the spirit of enquiry must continue in spite of the alluring temptations on the way. These temptations are not merely of worldly pleasures but even of the highest idealisms. All these need to be experienced and even surpassed, and it is only when one is prepared to give oneself entirely, not to an idea or an ideal, but to the ultimate Truth, that there is a possibility of finding it. The Ascent to Truth underlines the theme of complete surrender to the Divine as the key to the meaning and fulfilment of human life on earth. According to the Mother, the aim of life is integral, and it consists of knowing the supreme Divine Reality and working for its full manifestation in physical life.

The Mother

The Ascent to Truth

A Drama of Life
in a Prologue, Seven Stages
and an Epilogue

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

THE PHILANTHROPIST
THE PESSIMIST
THE SCIENTIST
THE ARTIST
THREE STUDENTS
TWO LOVERS
THE ASCETIC
TWO ASPIRANTS

Prologue: In the Artist's studio, preliminary meeting.

Seven stages of the ascent, of which the seventh is at the summit.

Epilogue: the new world.

Prologue

In the Artist's studio

*Evening, at night fall; the end of a meeting held by a small group of people
united in a common aspiration to find the Truth.*

Present:

The man of goodwill, the philanthropist.

*The disillusioned man who no longer believes in the possibility
of happiness on earth.*

The scientist who seeks to solve the problems of Nature.

The artist who dreams of a more beautiful ideal.

*A group of three students (two boys and a girl) who have faith
in a better life and in themselves.*

Two lovers who are seeking for perfection in human love.

The ascetic who is prepared for any austerity in order to discover the Truth.

*Two beings brought together by a common aspiration, and who have chosen
the Infinite because they have been chosen by the Infinite.*

The curtain rises.

ARTIST

My dear friends, our meeting is drawing to an end and before we close and take the final resolution which will unite us in action, I must ask you once again if you have anything to add to the declarations you have already made.

PHILANTHROPIST

Yes, I would like to state once again that I have devoted my whole life to helping humanity; for many years I have tried all known and possible methods, but none has given me satisfactory results and I am now convinced that I must find the Truth if I want to succeed in my endeavour. Yes, unless one has found the true meaning of life, how can one help men effectively? All the remedies we use are mere palliatives, not cures. Only the consciousness of Truth can save humanity.

PESSIMIST

I have suffered too much in life. I have experienced too many disillusionments, borne too much injustice, seen too much misery. I no longer believe in anything. I no longer expect anything from the world or from men. My last remaining hope is to find the Truth — always supposing that it is possible to find it.

FIRST ASPIRANT

You see us together here because a common aspiration has linked our lives; but we are not bound by any carnal or even emotional ties. One single preoccupation dominates our existence: to find the Truth.

ONE OF THE LOVERS (*indicating the Aspirants*)

Unlike our two friends here, we two (*he puts his arm around his beloved*) live only by each other and for each other. Our sole ambition is to realise a perfect union, to become a single being in two bodies, one thought, one will, one breath in two breasts, one beat in two hearts that live only by their love, in their love, for their love. It is the perfect truth of love that we want to discover and live: to that we have dedicated our lives.

ASCETIC

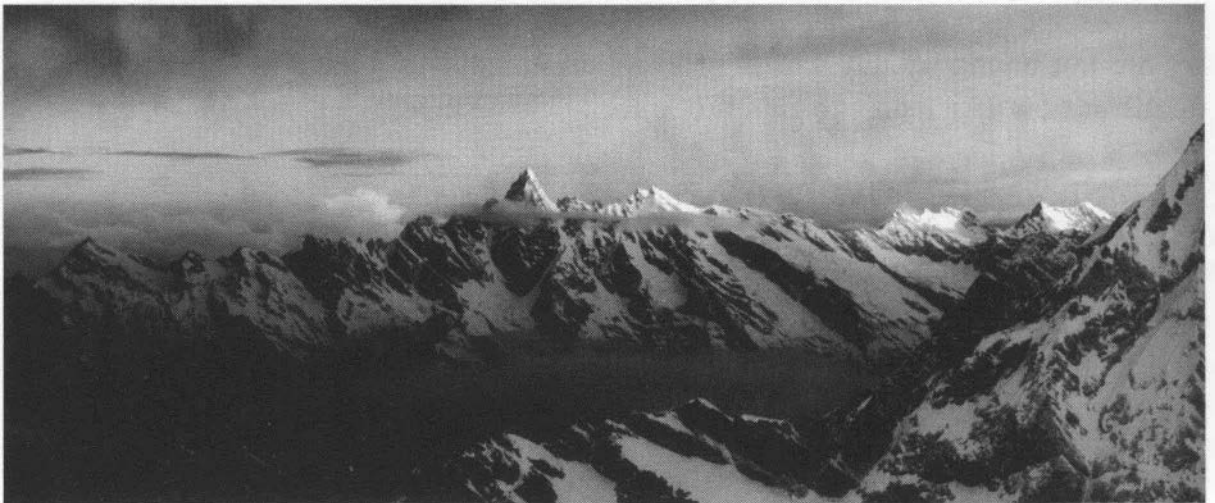
It does not seem to me that the Truth can be reached so easily. The path that leads to it must be difficult, steep, precipitous, full of dangers and risks, of threats and deceptive illusions. An unshakable will and nerves of steel are needed to overcome all these obstacles. I am ready for every sacrifice, every austerity, every renunciation in order to make myself worthy of the sublime goal I have set before me.

ARTIST (*turning to the others*)

You have nothing more to add? No. So we are all agreed: together, by uniting our efforts, we shall climb this sacred mountain that leads to the Truth. It is a difficult and arduous enterprise, but well worth the attempt, for when one reaches the summit, one can look upon the Truth and all problems must necessarily be solved.

So tomorrow we shall all meet at the foot of the mountain and together we shall begin the ascent. Good-bye.

All withdraw after saying good-bye.



Seven Stages of the Ascent

FIRST STAGE

A kind of green plateau from which one has a view of the whole valley.

*From this plateau, the path which has been easy and wide so far
suddenly narrows and winds round the spurs of the massive
and rocky mountain rising to the left.*

*All arrive together, full of energy and enthusiasm. They look down on the
valley below. Then the Philanthropist calls them together with a gesture.*

PHILANTHROPIST

Friends, I must speak to you. I have something serious to tell you.

(Silence. All listen attentively.)

Cheerfully, easily, we have climbed the mountain all together as far as this plateau from which we can look at life and better understand its problems and the cause of human suffering. Our knowledge is becoming vaster and deeper and we are nearer to finding the solution I am seeking... *(Silence)* But here we come to a decisive turning-point. Now the ascent will become steeper and harder and above all, we are going to cross over to the other side of the mountain where we shall no longer be able to see the valley and men. This means that I shall have to give up my work and betray my pledge to help humanity. Do not ask me to stay with you; I must leave you and return to my duty.

*(He starts back on the downward path. The others look at one another
in surprise and disappointment.)*

ASCETIC

Poor friend! He has gone back, vanquished by his attachment to his work, by the illusion of the outer world and its appearances. But nothing should slow us

down; let us continue on our way, without regret, without hesitation.

They set out once more.

SECOND STAGE

A part of the path where the slope becomes steeper and turns at right angles, so that it is impossible to see where it goes. Below, a long, white, very dense cloud completely isolates it from the world.

They all pass by more or less cheerfully except the Pessimist who comes last, dragging his feet, and sinks down on the bank by the roadside. He holds his head in his hands and sits there without moving. The others notice that he is not following them and look back. One of the Students retraces his steps and touches him on the shoulder.

FIRST STUDENT

Well, well, what's the matter with you? Are you tired?

PESSIMIST (*waving him away*)

No, leave me, leave me alone. I have had enough! It's impossible!

FIRST STUDENT

But why? Come on, take heart!

PESSIMIST

No, no, I tell you I am worn out. It's a stupid and impossible venture. (*Pointing to the cloud beneath their feet.*) Just look at that! We are completely cut off from the world and life. Nothing, nothing is left on which we can base our understanding.

(*He looks back towards the point where the path turns at right angles.*) And there! We can't even see where we are going! It is an absurdity or a delusion —

perhaps both! After all, there might not even be any Truth to discover. The world and life are only a dead end — a hell in which we are imprisoned. You can go on if you like, but I won't move, I refuse to be taken in!

He buries his head in his hands once more. The Student, losing all hope of convincing him and not wanting to linger, leaves him to his despair and joins the others. They continue their climb.

THIRD STAGE

The Scientist and the Artist arrive together after the others, as if they had dropped behind while talking. They are nearing the end of their conversation.

SCIENTIST

Yes, as I was telling you, I believe we set out on this adventure a little rashly.

ARTIST

It is true that so far our ascent seems to have been rather fruitless. Of course, we have made some very interesting observations, but these observations have not had much result.

SCIENTIST

Yes, I prefer my own methods — they are much more rational. They are based on constant experimentation and I do not take a step forward until I am sure of the validity of the previous one. Let us call our friends — I think I have something to communicate to them. (*He beckons and calls to the others. They draw near and the Scientist addresses them.*)

My dear friends and fellow-travellers, as we move further and further away from the world and its concrete reality, I have the growing feeling that we are behaving like children. It was revealed to us that if we climbed this precipitous

mountain whose summit no one has yet been able to scale, we would reach the Truth — and we set out without even bothering to study the way up. How do we know that we have not taken the wrong path? Where is our assurance that the result will conform to our hopes? It seems to me that we have acted with unpardonable imprudence and that our endeavour is not at all scientific. I have therefore decided, although to my great regret, since my friendly feelings towards you all remain intact, that I must stop here in order to study the problem and if possible to form some certainty about the path to follow, the right path, the one which leads to the goal.

(After a pause) Besides, I am convinced that if I can find the secret of the composition of the smallest thing in Nature, for example this humble stone on the path, I shall have found the Truth we are seeking. So I shall stay here and bid you *au revoir* — yes, *au revoir*, I hope; for perhaps you will come back to me and to scientific methods. Or else, if I find what I am looking for, I shall come to you to bring you the good news.

ARTIST

I too am thinking of leaving you. My reasons are not the same as those of our friend the scientist, but they are just as compelling.

During this interesting climb of ours, I have had some experiences: new beauties have been revealed to me; or rather, a new sense of beauty has taken birth in me. At the same time, I have been seized with an ardent and imperious need to express my experience in concrete forms, to cast them in Matter, so that they may serve for the education of all and especially so that the physical world may be illumined by them.

I am going to leave you, then, regretfully, and stay here until I can give form to my new impressions. When I have said all that I have to say, I shall take up the ascent again and rejoin you, wherever you are in quest of new discoveries.

Good-bye, and good luck!

*All the others look at one another in some dismay.
The second Student (the girl) cries out:*

SECOND STUDENT

What do we care about these defections! Each one follows his destiny and acts according to his own nature. Nothing can turn us away from our endeavour. Let us

continue on our way, courageously, boldly, without weakening.

They all go on except the Scientist and the Artist.

FOURTH STAGE

*The two Aspirants and the Ascetic pass by together without stopping and
continue their ascent at a firm and steady pace.*

*Behind them, the two lovers, absorbed in each other, walk hand in hand,
taking no notice of the others.*

*Just behind them the three students arrive, visibly tired.
They stop.*

FIRST STUDENT

Well, my friends! This is what I call a climb! What a path! It goes up and up without a break — there's no time to catch your breath. I am beginning to feel tired.

SECOND STUDENT

What! You too want to give up? That's not very sporting of you!

FIRST STUDENT

No, no, there's no question of giving up. But why don't we rest a while and sit down for a moment to get our breath back? My legs are hurting me. We shall climb much better after relaxing a little. Have a heart, let's sit down for a moment, only for a moment. Afterwards we shall set out with more enthusiasm. You'll see!

THIRD STUDENT

All right! We don't want to leave you here moping all alone. Besides, I feel rather tired too. Let's sit down together and tell each other what we have seen and learnt.

SECOND STUDENT (*after a moment's hesitation, she too sits down*)

Well, it's only because I don't want to part company with you. But we must not stay here long. It is dangerous to linger on the way.

The Lovers look back and seeing them sitting there, continue on their way.

FIFTH STAGE

Much higher up. The path is narrower and overlooks a wide horizon. The valley is still hidden from sight by dense white clouds. To the left, just off the path, stands a small house facing the sky. The first three pass on without stopping. Then the Lovers arrive arm in arm, absorbed in their mutual dream.

GIRL (*noticing that they are alone*)

Look, no one is left... We are alone.

What do the others matter! We don't need them — aren't we perfectly happy together?

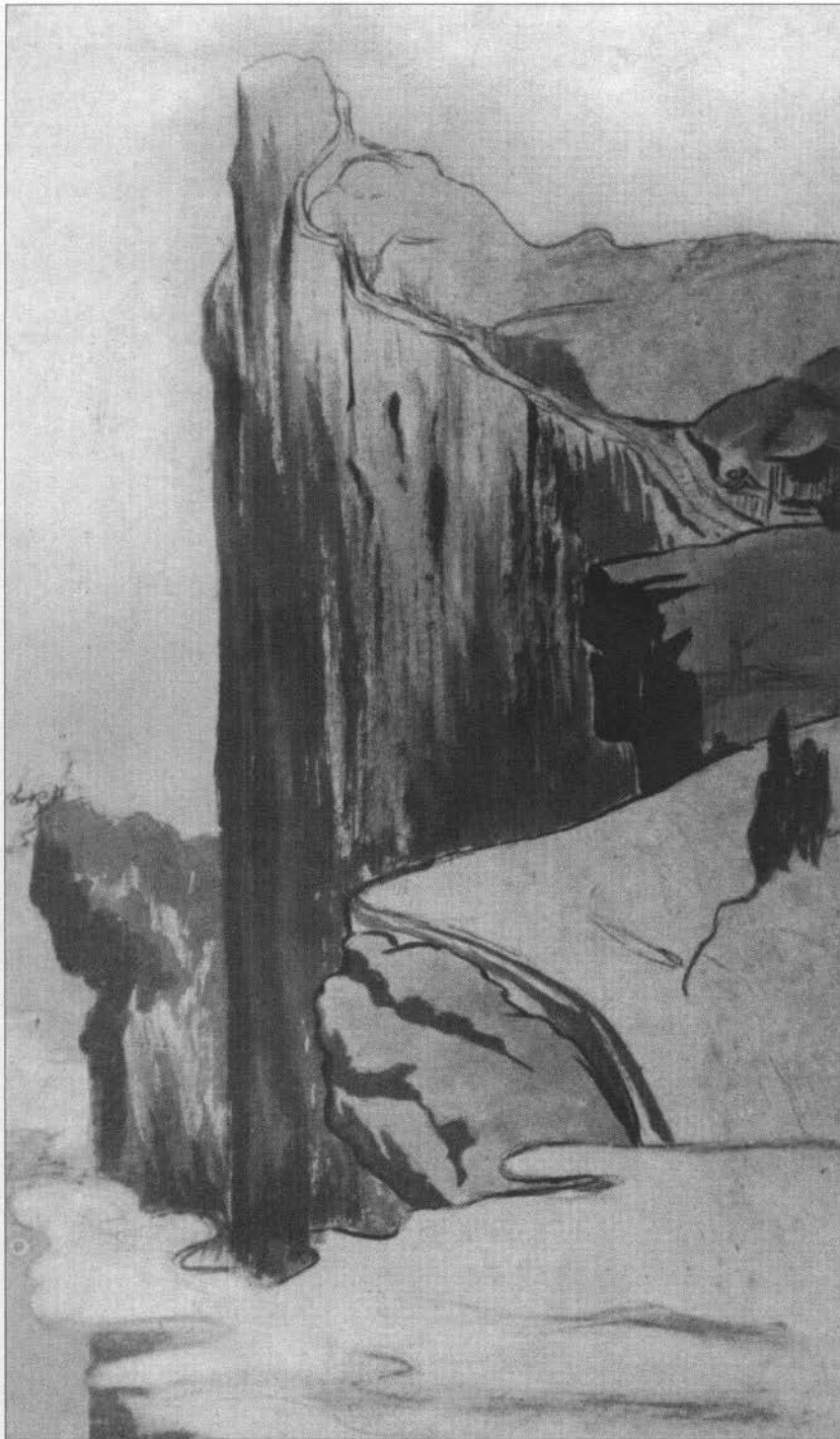
BOY (*seeing the house on the roadside*)

Look, darling, look at that little house on the hillside, isolated and yet so welcoming, so intimate and yet opening onto infinite space. What more do we need? An ideal place to shelter our union. For we have realised, we two, a perfect, total union, without shadow or cloud. Let us leave the others to their climb towards a problematic Truth — we have found our own, our own truth. That is enough for us.

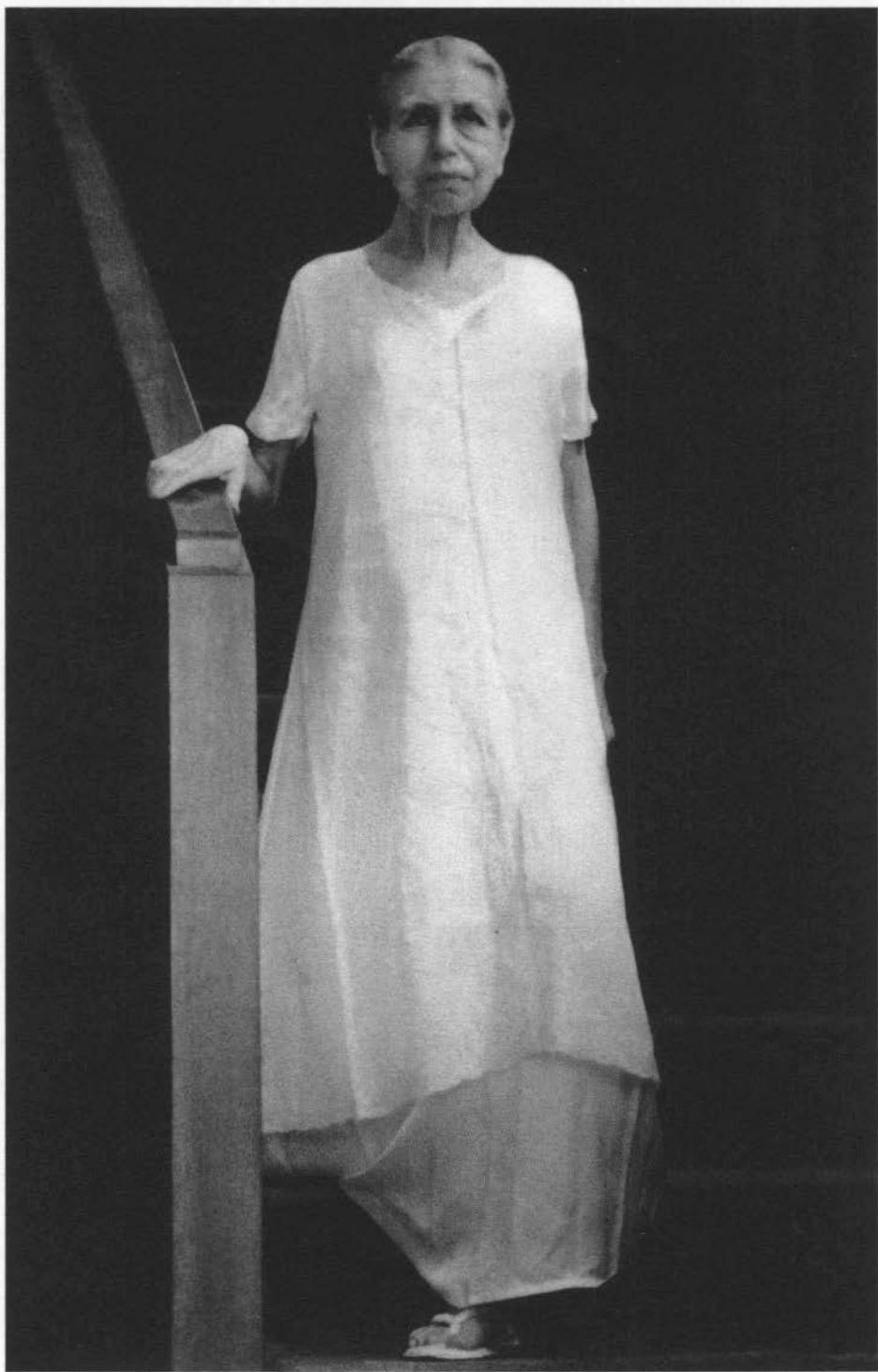
GIRL

Yes, my love. Let us settle in this house and enjoy our love without a care for anything else.

Still arm in arm, they leave the path and go towards the house.



The Ascent to Truth, by The Mother



The Mother

The end of the path has become extremely narrow and stops abruptly at the foot of a huge rock whose sheer wall rises towards the sky so that the summit is out of sight. To the left, there is a kind of small plateau at the far end of which a small low hut is visible. The whole scene looks bare and deserted. The last three climbers arrive together. But the Ascetic stops and halts the others with a gesture.

ASCETIC

I have something important to communicate to you. Will you kindly listen to me, both of you? In the course of our ascent I have discovered my true being, my true Self. I have become one with the Eternal and nothing else exists for me, nothing else is necessary. All that is not That is illusory, worthless. So I consider that I have reached the end of the path. (*He gestures towards the plateau on the left.*) And here is a sublime and solitary spot, a place that is truly favourable to the life I shall lead from now on. I shall live here in perfect contemplation, far from earth and men, free at last from the need to live.

Without another word, without a gesture of farewell, without looking back, he goes straight towards the realisation of his personal goal. Left to themselves, the two Aspirants look at each other, moved by the greatness of his gesture. But they recover themselves immediately and the girl cries out:

SECOND ASPIRANT

No! That cannot be the Truth, the whole Truth. The universal creation cannot be merely an illusion from which one has to escape. Besides, we have not yet reached the summit of the mountain, we have not yet completed our ascent.

FIRST ASPIRANT (*indicating the end of the path stopping short at the wall of rock that rises almost vertically*)

But here the pathway stops. It seems that no human being has ever gone any further. To climb this sheer rock that rises before us and seems to be inaccessible, we must discover for ourselves the way to go on step by step, by our own efforts, with no other guide or help than our will and our faith. No doubt we shall have to hew our own path.

SECOND ASPIRANT (*eagerly*)

Never mind! Let us go on, ever onwards. We still have something left to find: the creation has a meaning that we have yet to discover.

They set out once more.

SEVENTH STAGE

The Summit.

The two Aspirants who have valiantly withstood every test, haul themselves up with a supreme effort to the summit, bathed in brilliant light. Everything is light except the little patch of rock on which they stand and which is hardly big enough for their feet.

FIRST ASPIRANT

The summit at last! The shining, dazzling Truth, nothing but the Truth!

SECOND ASPIRANT

Everything else has disappeared. The steps by which we so laboriously climbed to the summit have vanished.

FIRST ASPIRANT

Emptiness behind, in front, everywhere; there is only room for our feet, nothing more.

SECOND ASPIRANT

Where do we go now? What shall we do?

FIRST ASPIRANT

The Truth is here, Truth alone, all around, everywhere.

SECOND ASPIRANT

And yet to realise it we must go further. And for that another secret must be found.

FIRST ASPIRANT

Obviously, all possibility of personal effort ends here. Another power must intervene.

SECOND ASPIRANT

Grace, Grace alone can act. Grace alone can open the way for us, Grace alone can perform the miracle.

FIRST ASPIRANT (*stretching his arm towards the horizon*)

Look, look over there, far away, on the other side of the bottomless abyss, that peak resplendent with brilliant light, those perfect forms, that marvellous harmony, the promised land, the new earth!

SECOND ASPIRANT

Yes, that is where we must go. But how?

FIRST ASPIRANT

Since that is where we must go, the means will be given to us.

SECOND ASPIRANT

Yes, we must have faith, an absolute trust in the Grace, a total surrender to the Divine.

FIRST ASPIRANT

Yes, an absolute self-giving to the Divine Will. And since all visible paths have disappeared, we must leap forward without fear or hesitation, in complete trust.

SECOND ASPIRANT

And we shall be carried to the place where we must go.

They leap forward.

Epilogue

The Realisation

A land of fairy light.

ASPIRANT

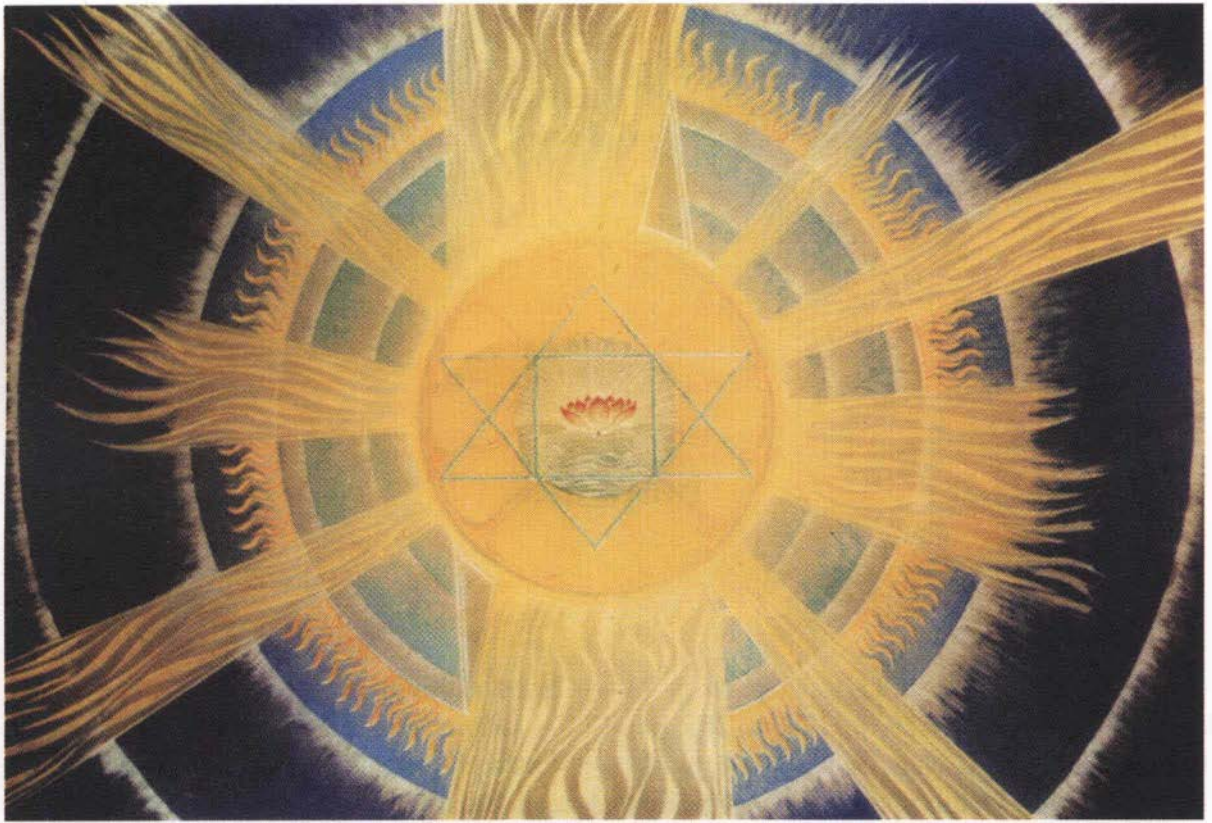
Here we are, borne upon invisible wings, by a miraculous power!

SECOND ASPIRANT (*Looking all around*)

What marvellous splendour! Now we have only to learn to live the new life.

Curtain

Text from: The Mother, *On Education*, pp. 501-516.



Painting by Rolf, Auroville

Suggestions for further reading

The Mother. *Questions and Answers*. Pondicherry: Centenary Edn., 7 Volumes, 1977.

Mother's Agenda. Paris: Institute for Evolutionary Research (13 Volumes).

For distribution in India: Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore.

Satprem. *Mother*. 3 Volumes: I *The Divine Materialism*,

II *The New Species*,

III *The Mutation of Death*.

Paris: Institute for Evolutionary Research

For distribution in India: Mira Aditi Centre, Mysore.

Pictures credit

— Mayaura, Auroville: p. 13, p. 15, p. 16. p. 19. — Carlos, Auroville: p. 20, p. 166. — Rolf Lieser, Auroville: p. 124, p. 129, p. 176, p. 285, p. 317. — Olivier Barot, Auroville: p. 140, p. 148. Chughtai, N.G.M.A., New Delhi: p. 208, p. 214. — Nandalal Bose, N.G.M.A., New Delhi: p. 217. — JMML, New Delhi: p. 268. — Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, Pondicherry, p. 298, p. 312.

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There are states and states of consciousness; there are profundities and widenesses; there are heights over heights. To discover them one has to enlarge and explore ever-widening possibilities of psychological experience. In the depths of the being we may begin to integrate the threads and complexities of what we are and can become. It is there, perhaps, rather than in books or preachings, that we may begin to perceive and live what precisely is our aim of life. Free from dogmas and fixed beliefs, in the purity of experience, we may hope to discover the answer to the all-important questions: What am I to do? What role do I have to play in the vast and mysterious universe? What is the best and highest goal that I should aim to realise?

But from no human endeavour — particularly when at a collective and general level — is it easy or desirable to eliminate intellectual inquiry. On the contrary, such an inquiry can be an excellent aid in the ultimate search for the aim of life — a direct search that is based on disciplined practice and experience. But the inquiry must be unfettered by narrow or exclusive assumptions, and carried out in the spirit of sincere exploration. Throughout the history of awakened thought, there has been a persistent questioning as to what is the aim of human life. Answers have been sought at various levels of reflection and critical thought. Answers derived from morality, religion or spiritual experience have also often been expressed in ways which are accessible to our rational understanding. The inquiring mind needs to reflect on these answers and arrive at its own conclusions.

All those who have the responsibility of educating children and youth will have to think out the implications of value-oriented and integral education. They will also have to undergo the training required for them progressively to embody, in their lives and personalities, the experiences gained in their pursuit of values and of integrated development of the being. This book is especially addressed to all those who have this responsibility. The material presented here is meant to encourage a free exploration into the theme of the aim of life. The texts have been selected from many important works related to the aim of life, in the spirit of collecting at random some flowers from a beautiful garden.

