

The Eternal Message of the Gita

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3. Buddhi Yoga

*Those who turn to Me unceasingly and render
homage to me With love, I show them the path of
Buddhi Yoga which permits them to come to Me.
(the Gita, 10.10)*

*Consecrating all your actions to Me, seeing in Me
the goal supreme, practise Buddhi Yoga, your mind
concentrated on Me. (Ibid. 18.57)*

The Buddhi Yoga takes an important place in the *Gita*. How to translate the word *buddhi*? The word 'reason' carries insufficient meaning, for Indian thought distinguishes between the *higher* reason and *ordinary* reason. We shall see later on what is to be understood by 'higher reason' and how far it can take us. As to ordinary reason, it is that which we use in daily life: It is dependent on the intellect and discriminates between the true and the false. According to Indian

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 - 2 This the 3rd of a series of independent commentaries by the Swami on various themes of the Gita-teachings published in French from Gretz in their *Bulletin des Activités Culturelles* No.3, 1955. English translation and edit by André van den Brink and René Tien of Centre Védantique Ramakrichna..

psychology it is a function of the *antahkarana*, the 'internal organ', which is composed of *buddhi* (reason), *manas* (mind), *chitta* (memory) and *ahamkâra* ('I'-sense). In order to function correctly and impartially this 'reasoning' reason has to take into account many different data of experience, for the least gap, the least want of objectivity is enough to have the reasoning distorted. This is a fact which, in principle, no one will contest. And yet it happens quite often that emotion—the personal factor—distorts our vision by refusing to take certain aspects of the reality into consideration, namely those that would harm our need for satisfaction. Our individual tendencies (*vâsanâ*) are like blinkers that limit our vision.

This ordinary *buddhi*, however, has the capacity to go beyond our personal limitations so as to become universal. According to Samkhya philosophy the quality of the *buddhi* is *sâtत्वic* (pure), and its course is an ascending one. This is confirmed by the dialectical process of our thinking: As soon as a position is established, it is succeeded by another, and in this way the philosophical enquiry, stimulated by the *buddhi*, may be pursued. It is also well-known to the thinkers of the Occident that the fact of considering a conclusion to be final not only breaks off the philosophic enquiry, but also compromises the very spirit of philosophy. The conclusion becomes a dogma, thought becomes fixed into a system, and the *buddhi*, having no further *raison d'être*, disappears.

We see that the same applies to scientific research, for the spirit of science and its method are identical with those of philosophy. Science which constitutes another approach to the truth, progresses, when the position of a seeker (who is necessarily conditioned, limited by his *vâsanâs* or innate tendencies) is contradicted by another seeker who is in the possession of data that are more complete. Thus science,

while following an ascending path, stands a lesser chance of being checked in its course, for the man of science readily recognizes his errors, without giving up his research for that matter. In the *philosophical* search of the truth, however, the emotion and self-love of the author may form a great obstacle, and a philosopher is often seen to become dogmatic. In any case, whatever the position adopted by the philosopher or by the scientist, their position may be contradicted at any time.

These contradictions would be unsolvable, if the higher reason would not permit one to go beyond the level at which they are effected, namely in the waking state. Now in order to awaken the metaphysical intuition Vedanta recommends the study of the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep. In this study both waking and dreaming may be classed into the same category, namely that of the manifestation, the state of deep sleep being the non-manifestation. By thus embracing the states of manifestation and non-manifestation, the data are complete and the higher *buddhi* will go and consider these data integrally.

The lower *buddhi* which is unable to provide a final solution, causes dissatisfaction and anxiety to the seeker. With many scientists, at the end of a life of research, we observe a withdrawal into themselves, a tendency towards idealism: Having applied all their attention to the object, they then turn towards the subject. But to pass thus from realism to idealism is to acknowledge that the ultimate certainty has not been obtained. And how could it be otherwise, since realism and idealism are but positions adopted in the waking state, whereas we are concerned to consider the *totality* of the data, i.e., the manifestation as well as the non-manifestation?

In the course of this research it is the higher *buddhi* which

eliminates the errors. In fact, the ordinary *buddhi* operates in the domain of reasoning (*yukti*) and logic (*tarka*), and the philosophies which proceed exclusively from these modes of knowledge (such as the philosophy of Nyaya or *tarka shastra*, as well as the corresponding philosophies from the Occident), cannot take us to the Buddhi Yoga which alone can stop the vulnerability of the 'third eye', the eye of wisdom. In several places Shankara declares with intransigence, that the philosophical systems of Nyaya and Sarnkhya cannot yield the ultimate knowledge: 'If one wants to know the true nature of Brahman, one should reject the notions of "totality" and "part", of "unity" and "fraction", of "cause" and "effect", for the true import of all the Upanishads is to remove all definite conception with respect to Brahman' (Shankara's commentary on the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 11.1.20).

Normally our vision is veiled by prejudices and does not take the non-manifested aspect into consideration. But when the higher *buddhi* awakens, it will lead to a de-personalisation of the individual whose vision is growing more lucid, more penetrating. 'I will give you the divine eye,' says Sri Krishna in the *Gita* (11.8). Arjuna then discovers the reality as it is, that is to say, free from all *personal* colouration. By giving Arjuna the eye of wisdom Sri Krishna accords him the cosmic vision.

In the symbolism of the word *AUM* this vision is represented by the letter *A*, and according to the *Mandukya Upanishad* (9th *mantra*) it concerns the *virat purusha*, the Cosmic Person, comprising the whole of the universe. Thanks to the Buddhi Yoga Arjuna beholds the person of Krishna both at the level of duality and as the *virat purusha* in which Krishna, the son of Yashoda and friend of Arjuna, is equally perceived by the latter as the Totality of all that exists: 'For You yourself are everything' (10.40).

The Buddhi Yoga thus permits one to know 'That by which, being known, everything, by the same token, is known'. But this knowledge of the Totality can only be there, if the *de*-personalisation of the individual has been achieved completely. The waking state, symbolised by the *virat purusha* (the cosmic, universal Man), will then be grasped intuitively as an integral *whole*, assuming the significance which it should have, when no longer interpreted from the limited point of view of the individual: It will appear as Consciousness in its totality, including the subtle world (*hiranyagarbha*) as well as the non-manifested (*avyakta*).

The study of the three states permits one to obtain this comprehension of the manifested and the non-manifested. It will be noted, however, that the very impulse leading us to undertake this study and to carry it to its conclusion, is a gift that is bestowed on us. It is not normally within the human possibilities to obtain the cosmic vision. In the *Gita* Sri Krishna says that this vision may only be obtained by the grace of God, while St. John of the Cross speaks of an 'in-fused' contemplation. Indeed, it is a divine gift, a mystical experience.

The experience by itself, however, would not suffice, if the *buddhi* would not step in to interpret the data. In the 11th chapter we find Arjuna receiving this highest gift which the cosmic vision is, but he is unable to support the intensity of it, he is unable to interpret this vision correctly. And, although God seems to have given him everything, Arjuna thus finds himself powerless to resolve the most acute, the most essential of problems: that of his own liberation. This is because the relationship between man and God—whether this relationship be sweet or strict—always remains on a personal level. The personal God appears under two aspects: On the one hand there is the historical God, Krishna, the son of

Yashoda, whom Arjuna appeals to, terrified as he is by the cosmic vision (11.46): This is the divine incarnation (*avatâra*). The other aspect of the personal God is the one which Arjuna beheld in the cosmic vision itself and which constitutes the *Saguna* Brahman. In Indian thought there is no conflict between the notions of *avatâra* (divine incarnation), *Saguna* Brahman (Brahman with qualities), and *Nirguna* Brahman (Brahman without qualities). The ultimate comprehension can only be attained by the realisation of the impersonal God, the *Nirguna* Brahman.

According to Shankara an experience is of no value, unless it is explained by the *buddhi*. An enquiry (*vichâra*) is needed in order to determine the nature of the experiences that we have—experiences of the manifested state (dreams, visions—authentic or hallucinatory), and experiences of the non-manifested (deep sleep, loss of consciousness), all of which assume their significance only after having been interpreted by the *buddhi*. As a matter of fact, if Krishna would have considered the cosmic vision accorded to Arjuna to be sufficient and final, the *Gita* would have ended with the 11th chapter. But Sri Krishna thought it necessary to devote seven more discourses to the instruction of His disciple, and it is only with the last chapter that Arjuna will say: 'My delusion, my error has gone; I have regained my memory' (18.73). This disappearing of the delusion, this restoring of the memory is the work of the higher *buddhi*.

Numerous seekers on the spiritual path entertain a great desire for religious experiences and then, just like Arjuna, they find themselves bewildered and in a confusion that will be so much bigger as the experience (such as visions etc.) has been out of the ordinary. Such confusion may lead to the destruction of the *buddhi* (*buddhi-nâsha*) and, 'when this destruction comes about, man perishes' (2.63). Only a *dhira*

buddhi, a man of superior intelligence (as opposed to a *manda buddhi*, a lower intelligence) can interpret correctly all that happens to him. If we are seeking experiences without examining their true nature, our anxiety will only increase.

When Sri Krishna showed Arjuna the Lord to be *all* (XI,13-40), Arjuna remained *outside* of this 'all'. If he would have been able to integrate himself into this 'all' with the help of the *buddhi*, he would have obtained peace of mind. What Krishna had told him in the 10th chapter, 'Among the Pandavas I am Arjuna,' he did not grasp, until he had 'regained his memory (18th chapter)', until the higher *buddhi* had been awakened in him.

The object of the Vedantic discipline is to continually remind us of the primordial role which this *buddhi* should play in our lives. As long as a reality or a concept remains *outside* the *buddhi* which is trying to assimilate what appears foreign to it, we remain on the plane of duality: In that case we are only dealing with an exercise of the lower *buddhi*. But the knowledge which the higher *buddhi* yields is *immediate*, without any intellectual processing. In fact, this *buddhi* embraces all things, it alone exists. This is the reason why the Scriptures tell us that the knower of Brahman '*actually becomes Brahman*' (*Gita*, 13.30; *Mundaka Upanishad*, III.2.9). The terms *buddhi*, Brahman and Absolute are thus interchangeable.



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