

**The Opening  
of the  
Doors of the Mind**

L. C. SOPER

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE



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By  
L. C. SOPER

THE BLAVATSKY LECTURE  
delivered at the Annual Convention  
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# THE OPENING OF THE DOORS OF THE MIND

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The work of the Ear ends with hearing;  
The work of the Mind ends with ideas.  
But the Spirit is an emptiness ready to  
take in all Things.

*Chuang Tzu*

The Blavatsky Lectures were instituted by a resolution of the Executive Committee of The Theosophical Society in England in 1917, which directed that 'a Blavatsky Lecture on the analogy of the Hibbert and Gifford Lectures be . . . instituted which . . . shall take the form of a speech or paper based on some original research in connection with the writings of Mme. Blavatsky'. The operative word of that directive is 'original'. If it is true, as no doubt in some sense it is, that 'there is no new thing under the sun', then it is impossible to comply literally with the terms of the resolution, but in practice previous Blavatsky lecturers have allowed themselves considerable latitude in their interpretation of the word, and for the purpose of this lecture it will be taken in the sense of something basic and fundamental.

A brief reference should be made to the reason why we are in this Hall, dedicated to the memory of one of the great Presidents of the Society. The formal bond which unites us is our subscription to the three Objects of the Society. But there is a deeper, more fundamental bond, expressed by Mme. Blavatsky herself in the very first issue of the *Theosophist* in 1879 in an article entitled *What are the Theosophists?* in which she said ' . . . if asked what it (the Society) believes in, the reply will be: "*as a body*—Nothing". The Society, as a body, has no creeds, as creeds are but the shells around spiritual knowledge . . . as a body, The Theosophical Society holds that all original thinkers and investigators of the hidden side of nature . . . are, properly, theosophists. . . . Be what he may, once that a student abandons the old and trodden highway

of routine, and enters upon the solitary path of independent thought—Godward—he is a theosophist, an original thinker, a seeker after the eternal truth. . . .’ We are then, or should be, all seekers after ‘the eternal truth’ and this lecture is given in the hope that it may shed some light on that unending quest, unending because there is no final perfection, no ultimate wisdom.

Coming to the subject of the lecture proper, so that we shall not be at cross purposes, the spiritual life, the life of one who is enlightened, he for whom the ‘doors of the mind’ have opened, will be defined as the direct perception of that which is beyond the mind, by whatsoever name we choose to call it—God, Truth, Reality, the Eternal, or simply ‘That which Is. Let us also at the very beginning be clear about one thing, ‘to seek to apply rational processes to what is beyond reason is a waste of time’. To put it another way, that which is beyond the intellect is essentially irrational and so is beyond conceptual thought. It is said in *Light on the Path*, ‘though the ordinary man asks perpetually, his voice is not heard. For he asks with his mind only, and the voice of the mind is only heard on that plane on which the mind acts’. The utmost that the mind can achieve is to be shot through, as it were, with ‘the white radiance of eternity’, for as Farid ud-Din Attar, the great Sufi poet, says, ‘God is above knowledge and beyond evidence’.

Most of us no doubt have read more than once the passage in Mme. Blavatsky’s *The Voice of the Silence*: ‘The mind is the great slayer of the Real. Let the disciple slay the slayer,’ but how many of us have really gone into it, pondered on its implications, and tried to get at and understand its true meaning? We know *of* it, but that is about all. It is a case of familiarity breeding, if not contempt, at least the reaction that we know all about it, and the passing on to something new, something more stimulating and exciting, such as the colours of our aura, or what we were in our past lives, or the latest pseudo-occult sensation.

Do we ever stop to consider that it may mean exactly what it says, admitting of one unambiguous meaning, and if that is so, the



momentous consequences that follow? The criticism is sometimes made that it is an aphorism which is trite in content and Victorian in expression. Anyone who considers platitudinous the statement that the ultimate reality is not only beyond the mind, but that the mind by its very nature is incapable of apprehending it, has obviously gone beyond anything that this lecture has to offer. As for the charge of Victorianism, to lapse for a moment into the idiom of the twentieth century, so what? It is a foolish criticism, for all great truths have been enunciated again and again in the past, and the Victorians had at least a capacity for dramatic expression, sadly lacking in the colourless literature, occult and other, of this century.

It is obvious that before we can begin to understand how the mind can be 'slain' we have to know what the mind is. What *is* this mind, which is the barrier between us and the Real? Whether higher or lower, it is one mind, since the difference is an artificial distinction made by the mind itself, an erroneous interpretation of analytic observation, and has no real existence. To most of us we *are* our minds; we cannot conceive ourselves as existing apart from the mind, that accumulation of experiences, ideas, hopes, fears, desires, joys, sorrows and so on, which we call our 'self'. We have in fact *identified* ourselves with our minds. The mind expresses itself through ideas, feelings, images, symbols and words, all of which constitute its thought. So much is this so that the cardinal illusion is to mistake these means of expression for the fact or experience which they express. Thus the mind functions in terms of ideas, images, symbols and words, and unless each new fact or experience can be expressed in such terms, for the mind it has no existence. Put in psychological terms, the mind is determined, conditioned or limited by its past experiences, by its conscious or unconscious memory, so that every new fact or experience is, as it were, seen through the distorting screen of the past, and the response of the self is never pure action, but a reaction, an acting-back, for pure action is never reactive, never in terms of stimulus and response; it is from inside outwards.

When confronted with a new fact or experience, the mind analyses it, compares it with other facts or previous experiences of which it has knowledge, and finally classifies it, neatly labelling it and putting it into one of the pigeon-holes of the mind for future reference. From this it follows that the mind cannot cognize any new fact or experience unless it can refer it to some past knowledge. The functioning of the mind is essentially a process of re-cognition, of backward-knowing. It experiences the present, through memory, in terms of the past.

So the mind is the 'slayer of the Real', and therefore the Real cannot be known by or through the mind. The mind, which is the result of time, the accumulation of the past, cannot cognize That which is beyond time and beyond thought. The mind cannot even know itself, any more than one can lift oneself by one's own shoelaces, for the knower cannot be the object of its own knowledge. The thinker, the self, and its thought are an integral whole, they are not two separate things, for as Parmenides put it, 'one and the same are the thinking and that for whose sake the thought is there'.

An age-old injunction which is given to the 'seeker after the eternal truth' is 'Man, know thyself', for clearly, if the mind is to be transcended by the direct perception of the Real, we have first to understand the nature and mode of functioning of the self, the 'I,' the ego, in all its heights and its depths, through that dispassionate observation of the workings of the mind to which psychologists have given the term 'awareness', which is more than merely being conscious. We are 'conscious' when we *see*, but when we *look*, we are 'aware'; we are 'conscious' when we *hear*, 'aware' when we *listen*. This implies a deep and constant observation, a continual awareness of the self, not for a few moments of the day, but all the time, during all the varied activities of daily life. It is this observation, this awareness, 'watching where the notion of the "I" arises', not wishing to change what is seen, that is real meditation.

When we are completely aware of the activities of the conscious

mind, when they are completely understood, then the mind spontaneously becomes still, not through any effort or concentration but because we seek to understand. Then the hidden layers of the unconscious will come into consciousness, and when these are likewise fully understood, then the self becomes completely known. It will be found that as we go deeper and deeper into ourselves through this passive awareness, this passive perception of our thoughts and feelings, the mind becomes still, not *made* still by any discipline or thought-control, and in that stillness, when the mind is tranquil and silent, there is the possibility of that which is beyond the mind, the 'Voice of the Silence', being heard, of the Real coming into being.

It is an inherent attribute of the mind that it seeks to modify, to alter, that which it experiences; it has a continual urge to 'do something about it'. But in this process of self-awareness, the self is, as it were, sitting on the fence, watching life go by, without any desire to react. This is not detachment, which implies an effort to be free from attachment. It is, in Evelyn Underhill's phrase, a 'self-forgetting attentiveness'. This awareness, this knowledge of the self, cannot be achieved through any system of mind-control or meditation as usually understood, or through striving for an end, whether it be spiritual progress or some lesser goal. How then can we be aware without discipline or effort? The answer is simple, which is not the same thing as saying that it is not difficult. If we are really interested in something we do not have to force ourselves to pay attention. This is common knowledge. If then we are concerned to know the self, to understand the workings of the mind, we shall be spontaneously alert and attentive.

When through systems of thought-control, through concentration and meditation, we attempt to still the mind, to train it to be quiet, the mind is never quiet; it is only held down, suppressed. We know, or should know, the effect of the constant mortifying of the mind, of the efforts to overcome faults and weaknesses and transmute them into virtues. For years the attempt to clamp them down may be successful, but there is no real transformation, and

eventually the pressure sends an uprush of long pent-up thoughts and feelings to the surface, or else the supression leads to overt, or more often hidden, neurotic, psychotic and psychosomatic diseases. But as Ma-tzu, the Zen Buddhist, said: 'In the Tao, there is nothing to discipline oneself in. If there is any discipline in it, the completion of such a discipline means the destruction of the Tao.' Not by the mortification of the mind, any more than through the mortification of the body, is the self known. We have been told in *Light on the Path*, 'Learn from sensation and observe it . . . grow as the flower grows, unconsciously'. Is this merely a sentimental simile, or does it too mean exactly what it says? For unconscious growth means growth without effort, without striving after some goal or ideal, and to observe and learn from sensation can only be accomplished through the dispassionate observation of the workings of the mind and the content of our own consciousness, our self-consciousness.

If we are really in earnest in our quest of the Real, which is not the same thing as a desire for spiritual growth, and if we experiment with this process of right meditation, watching, observing, being aware of the self, which, as has been said, requires extreme alertness and attentiveness, then we shall understand each experience of life, fully, completely. From which it follows that each such experience will be a *new* experience. Is this not what Jesus meant when He said, 'Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven'? For what distinguishes a little child is its ability to come to each experience of life directly, without the interposition of the screen of the past, the 'scar of memory' of past hopes, desires and fears. Is it not also what is meant when in the *Voice of the Silence* it is said, 'The pupil must regain the child-state he has lost'? Note that Jesus did not say 'children' but 'little children', for the conditioning of the mind begins at a very early age and it is only the children who are free from this conditioning whom Jesus asked should be suffered to come unto Him, because 'of such are the Kingdom of Heaven'. The nature of this 'innocence of childhood' cannot be better



conveyed than in the words of William Walsh in a discussion of Coleridge's *Vision of Childhood* where he says 'it is both a quality of sensibility and a mode of insight. It includes candour which has not yet come to acquiescence in the routine corruption of the adult world, single-mindedness untainted by the hypocrisy of conventional valuation, spontaneity undrilled into the stock response, and a virtue of intense, of the fiercest honesty.' Again, is not this capacity for direct experience, free from the psychological conditioning of the past, the meaning of the injunction in *The Voice of the Silence* 'Kill in thyself all memory of past experiences. Look not behind or thou art lost'?

It is perhaps necessary to point out that the memory of past experiences which we are told to 'kill' is not the memory of facts, of techniques, of skills, which is essential to the living of a meaningful life. It is what may be called (for want of a better term) the psychological memory, the memory which conditions, limits, the mind, and therefore distorts our experiences so that we are prevented from truly learning from them. To take a crude example; we meet a person for the first time and for one reason or another we take a dislike to him. Thereafter, when we meet him again, there is this memory of the unfavourable impression in the background, which distorts our subsequent reactions. Even if it is suppressed into the unconscious, it is still there. Now, if we can observe objectively the fact of the existence of this past reaction and discount its effect, then we can, in our subsequent relations with that person, really learn from the experience because it is undergone without distortion. We are no longer conditioned, biased, by what has happened in the past, and therefore the experience is integrated, complete. There is an old saying 'to forget is the secret of eternal youth. One grows old only through memory'.

Just as one cannot reach the sky through climbing, so the Real cannot be attained through degrees of knowledge. It is a 'sudden attainment' and cannot be approached through stages or methods, all of which belong to the processes of the mind. 'To know truth',

says Lao-tzu, 'one must get rid of knowledge.' To reply that we have to acquire knowledge before we can get rid of it, is one of those superficial answers by which the mind seeks to evade issues such as those posited by Lao-tzu. Tennyson puts it another way when he makes Ulysses say, 'All experience is an arch where-thro' gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades for ever and for ever when I move', and the more the untravelled world of the Real is sought, the more, mirage-like, it will recede, for it cannot be reached through any effort in the ordinary sense of the word. 'When the modifications of the thinking principle are inhibited', as Patanjali puts it, that is, when the mind is silent, not *made* silent, its chattering stopped, when it is in a state of 'idealessness', when it is passively aware and alert, passively sensitive in the same way that a photographic film is sensitive, still like the surface of a pool which responds to every breath of wind that passes over it, then the Eternal, the Real, may come into being, but there are no means of communicating the nature of that Reality to another, and therefore those who have attained It, when asked what It is, remain silent.

The way to the attainment of the Real 'is not a course laid out, with a known end. One must enter the uncharted sea.' There must be an 'aloneness', which is not the same thing as loneliness. It is the 'flight of the alone to the Alone' of which Plotinus speaks; the flight of the alone to the Unknown and Unknowable, to the Cloud of Unknowing of the Christian mystical treatise; Sunyata, 'the fullness of the void', of the Buddhists.

The way to this illumination is not to be found away from life, by retiring to the ashram or the cave, or to the ivory tower; it can only be found through and in life itself. Nor can it be found by cultivating an attitude of detachment, for detachment is running away from life. Rather will it be found in non-attachment, in, as it were, running *with* life, in an acceptance and complete understanding of life, from which comes freedom. If we fear life we are for ever running backwards or forwards. Those who run backwards

are rooted in the past; they are the 'backward-lookers' who wish the past would for ever continue. The 'forward-lookers' who run forwards from life are dominated by the future, by some goal to be achieved or some ideal to be realized. For both, as for Alice in Wonderland, it is 'jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, but never jam today'. If we are content with our illusions we remain where and what we are. But if we accept and fully understand life, completely understand each experience as it comes to us, then we have finished with it and are free to 'walk on'. Our lives are not then motivated by an ideal to be lived up to or a goal to be reached, but a spontaneous living in the Eternal Now. To take an analogy from music, when one is listening to a symphony, to hear the symphony as an integral whole one must, as it were, go with the music. If one stops to consider one's emotional and intellectual reactions, to consider how much one is enjoying (or not enjoying) it, to analyse a chord or a melody, meanwhile the music has passed on. One must be aware of the notes, the chords and the harmonies as they come into being and pass away, otherwise the reality, the experience of the music as a whole, is lost.

This then is 'the narrow way proving him worthy of immortal life', that man should come to know himself as he is, completely, without any desire to achieve any goal, only the 'wintery smile upon the face of Truth'. Then, 'listening to the essences of things', 'the whisper of the gentle wind' (as the Vulgate Bible puts it) heard by Elias, the Eternal, the Real, comes into being. Then the self, the ego, that accumulation of innumerable experiences over many lives, dissolves, and there remains only a self-transcending consciousness; an ecstasy, literally a 'standing outside oneself', but the nature of that consciousness and what it is that remains after the self has been transcended cannot be put into words. In theosophical terms, the causal body, the repository of all the experiences of the past, vanishes, and henceforth consciousness is centred at the Buddhic level, creating at will a vehicle at lower levels. We have been told that this process is part of an initiation,

but do not let us put the cart before the horse. It is what he is that makes a man an initiate, and not *vice versa*, and buddhic consciousness can be attained apart from any initiation. This is the significance of the tradition that at the conclusion of the Buddha's first address after he had attained Illumination all those who heard him became Arhats. They listened, and then there was the 'sudden attainment'.

He who has slain 'the great slayer of the Real' and gone beyond is the 'houseless wanderer', of whom it is said in the Gospel according to St. John, 'the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth:—so is everyone that is born of the spirit'. He is one with the Alone. The ancient Greeks knew of such and called them autarkhs, the 'alone-walkers'. The Hindus also, for in the words of the *Mundaka Upanishad* 'to a pupil who comes with mind and senses in peace the Teacher gives the wisdom of Brahm, of the spirit of truth and eternity'. To the Buddhists he is the Tathagata, the 'thus-gone', because he has gone beyond where human thought can follow. Such a one who has attained the direct perception of the Real has achieved that which the Hindus call Sahaja Samadhi, the complete and final dissolution of the self, the ego, the 'I' and its limitations. He has reached the Kingdom of Heaven of the Christians, the Liberation of the Hindus, the Nirvana of the Buddhists, and henceforth lives that infinite and eternal life beyond the reach of the mind. He has made the 'sacrifice of the intellect' and overcome the 'I', not only of the personal self, which is relatively easy, but of the individual Self.

This way of illumination is sometimes called the Gnanamarga, the path of wisdom or spiritual enlightenment, and the gnani is one who has attained enlightenment or liberation, since 'gnana', usually translated as 'knowledge', is more correctly 'enlightenment'. The gnani has reached the 'state of faultless vision' of the *Voice of the Silence*; he knows the false as false and the truth as true, and because of his capacity for direct and immediate experi-



ence, each experience of life is for him unique; it is lived fully, completely and spontaneously. There is therefore no residue of incomplete experience which necessitates his rebirth. Any rebirth is voluntary, since he has no psychological 'loose ends' which he must at some time or other tie up. In theosophical terms he creates no karma, because each experience is undergone to its end and concluded, and it is only that which is not completed which continues.

For he who is liberated death loses its mystery. We may know in theory, and some may know in practice, that there is no such thing as death in the sense of the extinction of life, but at the actual witnessing of death in others or its approach in ourselves we still feel that we are on the verge of a journey to a land 'from whose bourn no traveller returns'. But to one who has attained liberation it is continuity that means death. There can be no life without renewal, that is, there is death as it were from moment to moment, and the death of the physical body is only an episode in that continuous renewal of life. Because he is immortal man must die unceasingly.

There are those who believe it would be a wonderful thing if the life of the body could be prolonged indefinitely. Do they realize that this would mean the continual addition to a burden of memories and experiences to be carried around as Sinbad the Sailor carried the old man of the sea? Do not most of us, as we reach the 'allotted span', long that we could wipe the slate clean and start anew? But we shall never be able to begin afresh unless we live, and therefore die, from moment to moment, by the completeness of our living. It is only when we have no incomplete experiences, no unresolved problems, that the necessity for rebirth is overcome, since these, our karma, are the cause of our rebirth. In this living and dying from moment to moment there is constant renewal of life, that true immortality, which is not continuity as the mind knows it.

If the attainment of illumination, of the direct perception of the Real, is not a question of time, how can this be reconciled with

what is called evolution? Does it mean that evolution is a myth, or at best a useless process 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'? Evolution is a process taking place in space and time. It is not necessarily, as thought by some, a process of development from the simple to the complicated, from the lowly to the highly organized. It is essentially a growth in the increase of awareness and the expression of that awareness. *Pari passu* with an increasing impression, there is an increasing expression, of Reality. The Transcendence of the Real becomes the Immanence of the Real increasingly through evolution. But liberation is not perfection; there is no final goal, no state of static perfection, 'to which all creation moves'. Life exists for its own sake; it is its own goal, and its essence lies in its continual becoming. The smallest flower is an expression of the Real, whose loveliness can, for those who are sufficiently aware, who have the necessary heightened perception, bring them to an immediate apprehension of Reality. The greatest sage is likewise an expression of the Real. The difference between them is in the range and the capacity of that expression, not in its quality, the sage expressing more than the flower of the Immanence of the Reality which they both transmit.

Evolution then is a process, not of self-enhancement but of life-enhancement, of life—not self—fulfilment, but while it unfolds in time it is itself an atemporal process, having neither a beginning nor an end. It is continuous creation. From below the mineral kingdom, through the vegetable, animal and human kingdoms and beyond, are developed the vehicles and instruments of consciousness, of awareness, through which the manifested universe may be contacted on all the planes of matter and in all the kingdoms of nature, with, to use a striking phrase of Mrs. Ransom, 'unblinded exactness'. Some idea of what this means may be gained from a letter from one of the Masters in which he says, 'There comes a point in the life of an adept, when the hardships he has passed through are a thousandfold rewarded. In order to acquire further knowledge, he has no more to go through a minute and slow process of investigation and comparison of various objects, but is

accorded an instantaneous, implicit insight into every first truth.' Shankaracharya said, 'Brahman is real; the universe is unreal; Brahman is the universe'. In other words, the phenomenal universe perceived apart from Brahman is an illusion. It is real when cognized as That which is beyond phenomena, and illusion when experienced apart from That.

The universe which, as Heraclitus said, 'no one, either god or man, has made, but it always was, and is, and ever shall be, an ever-living fire', exists in order to make manifest the Infinite and Eternal; it is the mirror by which the Transcendence is reflected into Immanence. For if the objects (using the word in the widest sense) of the universe were not there to reflect the light of the Infinite, It would remain invisible, and if that light were not present, the objects would remain unrevealed, so that the universe and That of which it is the manifestation are two facets of a unity.

What can be usefully said of the nature of that Reality which comes into being when the mind is transcended? Since, as has been said, the Real is beyond the mind, we cannot know it, we can only know *of* it. As one of the Masters wrote to a member of this Society, 'the recognition of the higher planes of man's being on this planet cannot be attained by mere acquirement of knowledge. Volumes of the most perfectly constructed information cannot reveal to man life in the higher regions. One has to get a knowledge of spiritual facts by personal experience and from actual observation.' The Real is not located in space and time, and therefore to cognize it is not a question of developing the capacity to function on the higher planes of nature, the Buddhic, Nirvanic and beyond. Nor is the experience of Reality a process of the development of higher and higher grades of consciousness over a period of time. To quote Dr. Besant, man 'may be for ever extending his knowledge of the transitory, but will never reach the peace of the Eternal . . . experiences of . . . the phenomenal worlds, indefinitely repeated, could never lift the veil of illusion and reveal to us the Real that is One. . . . The Reality underlies

every phenomena and may be found as readily under the phenomena close at hand as under any far away, or that need the inner vision for the seeing.'

Science shows us that the reports we receive through the senses of the objects and events of the physical world are very different from their intrinsic nature. 'Things are not what they seem.' There is no reason to suppose that the corresponding perception of the higher worlds by means of the superphysical senses is any more accurate. Not until we can, as it were, stand outside them shall we be able to see them as they really are. Further, too great a concern with the beings, objects and experiences of the superphysical worlds is as great a hindrance to the direct perception of the Real as is immersion in those of the physical world. In fact it is greater, since their attraction is more subtle, although they equally belong to the world of illusion, of phenomena.

That which Is is here and now, outside of space and time, but any attempt to communicate its nature by means of language, which is an instrument of the mind, must necessarily fail. It cannot be explained by or to the intellect: it can only be experienced. Bearing in mind that the Real is beyond the realm of 'Names and Forms', and that although words are essentially a means of communication, the word is not the thing, the name is not the thing communicated, we may consider what we may know *about* Reality, without mistaking the words we use for Reality itself.

The Hindus have confined themselves to stating that what can be said about the Real can only be expressed in negatives. To whatever is predicated of the Real they reply 'neti, neti', 'not this, not this'. Mystics, especially Christian mystics, have sometimes tried to communicate the nature of the Reality which they have experienced by means of allegories, parables and paradoxes, but the result is unintelligible to those who have not themselves had that experience, and for those who have, the attempt is unnecessary. Plotinus himself could only say, 'beholding a wondrous Beauty . . . and that I am become one with God . . . and then, after thus dwelling in the Godhead, coming down from Contemplation



... I am at a loss how to explain the manner of my coming down...'

The Real is infinite and eternal. We think of infinity as endless extension in space, and eternity as endless duration in time, neither having a beginning or an end. But the Real is infinite in the sense that it is sizeless and spaceless, and eternal in the sense that it is timeless. It is beyond spatio-temporal extension. It may be conceived as having no size at all, so that from the point of view of space it exists in its entirety at every point in space; and it may be conceived as timeless, so that from the point of view of time it is present at every moment, so that every instant of time, past, present and future, is *now*. 'Brahman is bliss', say the Hindus, but that bliss is not joy or happiness as we understand them. 'God is love', say the Christians, but again, not love as we understand it, for it is what Krishnamurti calls a 'flame without smoke', which 'exists only when there is self-forgetfulness, when there is complete communion, not between one or two, but with the highest'. Then, as the *Narada Sutra* puts it, there is that love which is immortal, because it is its own end, and he who 'becomes possessed of love, he gains that Dearest'. God, Reality, Truth, the Eternal, is beyond all demonstration. There can be a demonstration of some particular truth, but not of Truth itself, for, in the great Augustinian expression, God is the Truth by which all truths are true.

Some of us at least once in our lives have experienced, if only for a moment, That which is eternal, perhaps through some scene of great natural beauty 'with every common bush afire with God', in listening to great music, or experiencing a great love. Or it may come in the unattended moment when we are engrossed in the mundane affairs of life. For an instant the self is forgotten, and we and the beauty, or the music, or the beloved, are one, and there is only a self-transcending consciousness. There is the moment of perception, of vision, of truth:

'A sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean, and the living air  
 And the blue sky, and the mind of man,  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things.'<sup>1</sup>

Such an experience may only be a flash, but even although it is too much for the mind and the mind may reject it, yet it will still have its effects, for we see something of the eternal order which underlies the flux of time. As is said in *Light on the Path*, 'even although the disciple waver, hesitate and turn aside. . . . The Voice of the Silence remains within him, though he leave the Path utterly, yet one day . . . he will return', for this moment of insight is the 'point of no return' to life as it was before. But the experience cannot be analysed, or repeated, or sought after; it has to come to us. We cannot possess beauty, love or wisdom, they must possess us, for as Farid ud-Din Attar says, 'you must know God by Himself and not by you; it is He who opens the way that leads to Him, not human wisdom'. This is echoed in the *Katho Upanishad*: 'The Self cannot be reached by the Vedas, neither by understanding nor by much study. Only him whom the Self chooses, by him can the Self be reached.' By the Self is to be understood the One, the All, the Ultimate Reality. And the experience cannot be communicated in words to another, for it is beyond all words. Just as the nature of colour cannot be conveyed to one who has been blind from birth, so the experience of That which Is is a matter of direct perception.

To sum up, the way to illumination, to the direct perception of Reality, lies through the slaying of the 'great slayer of the Real', the mind. Illumination comes when there is a 'self-forgetting

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth. Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.

attentiveness' in which the thinker, the self, the ego, is absent. When the mind is transcended and it has become

'the radiant unshaken mind of him  
Who at his being's centre will abide,  
Secure from doubt and fear'<sup>1</sup>

then it is man's servant, working with the same unconscious ease as the heart or other bodily organs, of whose existence we are normally aware only when they are out of order. Then, as Chuang-tzu said, it is employed 'as a mirror, it grasps nothing, it refuses nothing, it receives but does not keep', and it can become the instrument of creative activity. Such a mind has the quality of 'sophrosene' as the ancient Greeks called it—whole-mindedness, wisdom, serenity,

'the serenity of inward joy,  
Beyond the storm of tears'.<sup>1</sup>

But the mind cannot be transcended until the self is known, until we have discovered what the self is, what we are. This discovery comes about as the result of a discipline which is the cultivation of an effortless technique of relaxed concentration, through which the mind becomes still, so that That which is beyond the mind can come into being. 'Everything is void, lucid and self-illuminating. There is no strain, no effort, no wastage of energy. To this region thought never attains.' The way to this illumination lies in relationship with the world; not in withdrawing from it, but in living *in*, although not *of*, it. For man and the world, the world of persons, objects and living things, in short his environment, are an integral whole. And the first law of this relationship is that all persons are equal. This does not mean that there are not immense differences between them, but that these are less important than their similarities. These differences are the basis of the infinite variety of expression which is shared through relationship. A life so lived is truly spiritual, religious, since religion is essentially an integrated

<sup>1</sup> Bliss Carmen, *Sappho*.

response to the whole of life. It is the experience of Reality 'without escape', without, that is, wishing life to be other than it is. For until there is self-knowledge how can we begin to mould things nearer to the heart's desire? A glimpse of what life might mean when lived in such a way can be gained from Chuang-tzu where he says: 'In the Golden Age good men were not appreciated; ability was not conspicuous. Rulers were mere beacons, while the people were free as wild deer. They were upright without being conscious of their duty to their neighbours. They loved one another without being conscious of charity. They acted freely in all things without recognizing obligations to anyone. Thus their deeds left no trace.'

Through self-knowledge we shall also discover that life is not a 'struggle for existence' and nature is not 'red in tooth and claw', but that, as is said in *The Voice of the Silence*, 'life itself has speech . . . and its utterance is not, as you that are deaf may suppose, a cry; it is a song'. Life exists for its own sake; it is its own goal, which is the expression of value, the bringing of the transcendence of the Real into immanence, and living things are, to use a simile of Aristotle, not as the clay moulded by the potter, but the clay modelling itself; the 'universe unfolding out of its own essence, not being made'.

Of the nature of the Reality which comes into being when the self is transcended we can *know* nothing, since it is beyond the mind and beyond thought and cannot be communicated. It is the theophanic experience, the appearance of God to man. In the words of the *Kena Upanishad*: 'He alone grasps Him who does not grasp Him. Anyone who understands him does not know Him. Unknown of the knower, known of him who does not know.' Even the teaching, the Dharma, of the Buddha, regarded by many as wisdom incarnate, was only concerned with the *way* to enlightenment, not with enlightenment itself, and when questioned on the ultimate mysteries of life 'he maintained a noble silence'. The Hindus call this way Dakshinamurti, Siva teaching in silence, for as Jacob Boheme said, 'if thou canst for a while cease from all

thinking and willing, thou shalt hear the unspeakable words of God. When thou standest still from the thinking and willing of self, then the eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed in thee.'

Nothing has been said that has not been said many times before, but if we are only concerned with whether it is mysticism (unless indeed we accept Dean Inge's definition of mysticism as 'reason above rationalism') whether or not it is the same as the Vedanta or Zen Buddhism or the teaching of Krishnamurti, we shall be merely indulging the passion of the mind for intellectual analysis in a region where it has no place. For it is none of these things, which are only categories of the intellect, the 'either-or' mentality which is an infirmity of little minds. Clear-cut and knife-edged, the perception of the Real is not subject to the laws of logic or psychologic, and from that perception comes the wisdom which informs the self, although the self can never itself be wise. The only question is, whether what has been said is true, or whether it is only a 'tale told by an idiot', and this can only be found out by experiment, each for himself. To suppose that what we do not know is not knowledge is arrogance. It is still more arrogant to assume that what we have not experienced has no existence. The sunlit uplands of the spirit exist, although those who dwell in the cloud-mists below have never seen them. The Real is all around us, we have only to open our eyes and look. We hear the lark in the clear air, singing, but we do not *listen*; we see the meadow in the noonday sun, but we do not *look*; above all, we do not look and listen, slowly. Jesus said, 'seek ye first the Kingdom of God', but 'the young man turned away sorrowful, for he had great possessions'; so have we all, not only physical possessions, but psychological possessions, the desire for security, to be sure, with which we are encumbered throughout our lives. But 'the only security is the acceptance of insecurity'. The young man was not prepared to tread the 'narrow way' and 'renounce all easy hope, all consolation', but if we, 'resolute, self-sustained, alone', set out upon this quest, then the 'doors of the mind' will open. The journey

through darkness is ended; the journey into light begins, for 'He who has once begun the heavenward pilgrimage may not go down again into darkness and journey beneath the earth, but dwells forever in the light'.

Further than this there is nothing to be said, for in the words of the Buddhist verse:

'When they curiously question thee, seeking to know what It is,  
Do not affirm anything, and do not deny anything.  
For whatsoever is affirmed, is not true,  
And whatsoever is denied, is not true.  
How shall anyone say truly what That may be,  
While he has not himself fully won to What Is?  
And, after he has won, what word is to be sent from a Region  
Where the chariot of speech finds no track on which to go?  
Therefore, to their questionings offer them silence only,  
Silence—and a finger pointing the Way.'





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