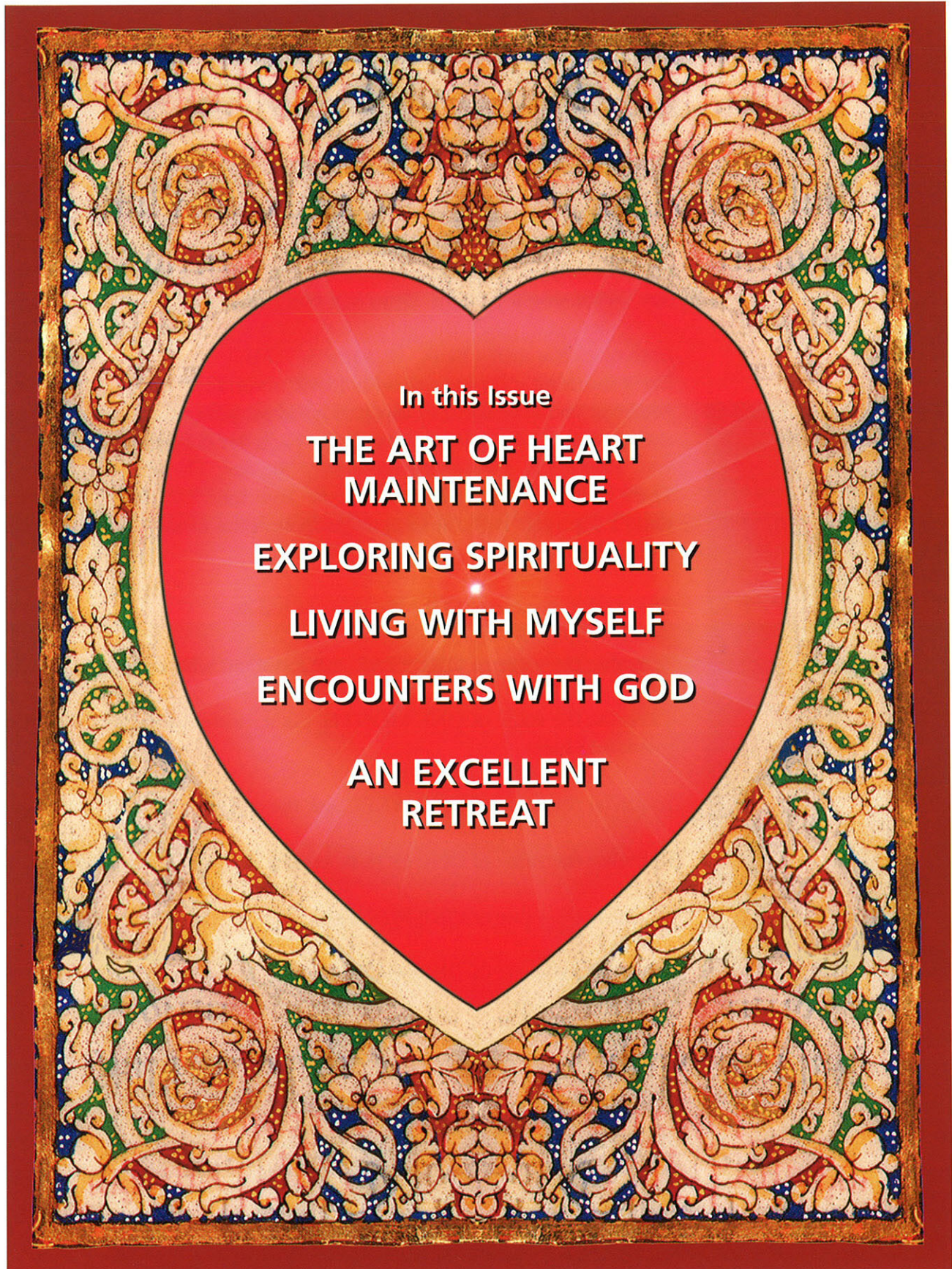


RETREAT

ISSUE
No.13

The Magazine with insights & inspirations to nourish your mind, your heart and your soul



In this Issue

**THE ART OF HEART
MAINTENANCE**

EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY

LIVING WITH MYSELF

ENCOUNTERS WITH GOD

**AN EXCELLENT
RETREAT**

Yesterday is History and Tomorrow is a Mystery



Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with £86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every morning it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use during the previous day. What would you do? Draw out every penny of course!!

Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME.

Every morning it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes off whatever you have failed to invest in good purpose as lost. It carries over no balance. It allows for no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. There is no going back. There is no drawing against tomorrow. You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost health, happiness and success.

The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realise the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who failed a grade.

To realise the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who gave birth to a premature baby.

To realise the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

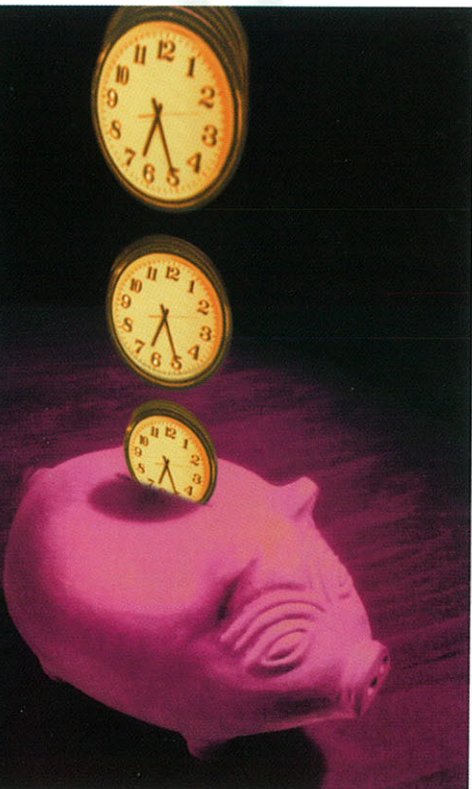
To realise the value of ONE HOUR, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realise the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who missed a train.

To realise the value of ONE SECOND, ask a person who just avoided an accident.

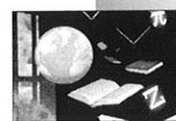
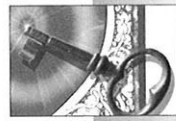
To realise the value of ONE MILLISECOND, ask the person who won a silver medal in the Olympics.

Treasure every moment you have! And remember that time waits for no one. Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. Which is why it is called the present.



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13

EDITOR

Mike George

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS

M. Newton

Lynn Henshal

ART DIRECTOR

Bipin Patel

PUBLISHER

Brahma Kumaris Information Services, Publications

Global Co-operation House

65 Pound Lane, London, NW10 2HH

Tel 0181 459 1400

Fax 0181 451 6480

<http://www.bkwsu.com>

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The Real Meaning of Courage.

During the last few weeks we have all been touched by the extraordinary pictures from Central America, and particularly Honduras, in the aftermath of hurricane Mitch. One storm and all supports are swept away. And yet how can we not be inspired by these people's courage, and at the same time be reminded that the greatest gift we all receive in life is life itself when we hear so many of them say, "I'm just just glad to be alive".

We often ignore the fact that courage is not simply one of the most important virtues but the form of every virtue at the point of its highest expression. I recently heard of one person, so fearless that he stood out like a beacon to inspire us, as well as hold a mirror up to our self centredness.

Graham Salmon is 45 and lives in Loughton, Essex, in England. As a result of cancer, he had both eyes removed before he was two years old. Yet this man's fortitude and resilience, and, of course, unyielding courage is humbling.

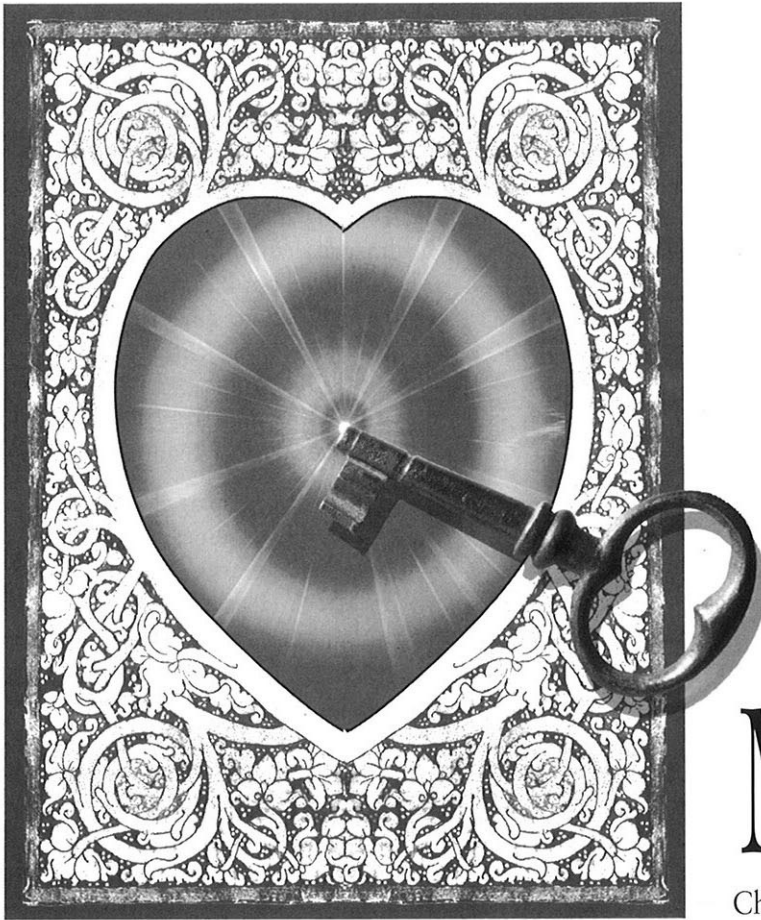
As a blind runner, he broke the 100 and 200 metres world records and completed the London marathon. As a golfer, he is the only blind man to hit a hole-in-one and played against and beat the Americans in the Ryder Cup for the blind. As an Olympian he skied in the first Winter Paralympics, as an athlete recompeted internationally as a high jumper, and as a cricketer he has appeared in an exhibition match at Lords.

Five years ago he was found to be suffering from leukaemia and since then has begun another battle with cancer. His left leg and part of his pelvis have just been amputated and he has just completed a course of chemotherapy because he has a tumour in his right leg and a cancerous nodule on his lung.

It might appear that Graham Salmon has been dealt a lousy hand but he doesn't seem down-hearted. He plans to get back out on the golf course (aided by a zimmer frame) and would like to add a few more track and field medals to his gold, silver and bronze.

He recently told a national newspaper that he feels good and that he feels healthy. He says he will make the most of what he has got for as long as he's got. Here is a classic example that life expands in proportion to one's courage.

I hope you find within this issue of Retreat some insight and inspiration which may fortify both your appreciation of life and your resilience in the face of life's many challenges.



The Art of Heart Maintenance

Charles Hogg reveals the secrets of a healthy heart.

It was my first visit to Calcutta. The pot-holed road from the airport was lined with humpies and flocks of vultures leering with menace at all passing by. The taxi arrived at the Red Shield Hostel, a little haven for travellers in the heart of Calcutta near the Queen Victoria memorial. It was a memorable week, observing life in the 'City of Joy'. Each day as I left the Hostel I was greeted by a couple of young beggar girls clothed in dirty rags with hair matted in thick knots. They repeatedly chanted the mantra "One rupee, one rupee"; that was followed with a radiant smile that would flash across their faces with a naughty twinkle in the eye. They always won. I would dig deep and pull out a rupee or two. I became quite a stable source of income, so each day I could see them waiting for me and the mantra changed to, "Two rupees, two rupees".

Nearing the end of the week I emerged from the Hostel to find an older woman with the girls. In

broken English she invited me to visit their home. We moved our way through the streets to a large vacant lot covered with humpies built with everything and anything imaginable: plastic bags, packing boxes, old tyres, hessian bags, discarded bits of wood. Many people gathered to greet me and I was offered food and drink with so much love and generosity (though perhaps partly financed by me!). Around these two little girls was a loving support structure of parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, cousins and more. In this desperate scene of abject poverty there was nothing... nothing but love, and that love was so rich it seemed to be everything that was needed. I began to think that these two little girls, who had become my friends, were lucky. It seemed to me that no matter what the circumstances, when the heart is maintained, life can be good.

However, if the heart is empty or broken or closed, nothing ever seems to satisfy, no matter what the circumstances. To compensate an empty heart, we crave wealth or

power or fame or anything that will fill the void. In August of last year, the world was shocked with the news of the death of Princess Diana. On one level it seemed she had everything except perhaps one missing ingredient ... love. She craved true love. Her life was a testament to the search for true love. It seems the world-wide grief was the result of people identifying with her search for love to truly maintain the heart. We are all searching for it, but how often do we find it?

I think there are a few times in life when we emerge the feelings of true love. A friend told me he was on a subway in Toronto in the heart of winter. The peak hour train was full of long grey faces, all seemingly isolated and disconnected from each other. There was a stony cold silence. The train stopped at a station, the doors opened, and in walked a young woman with a newborn baby in her arms. The innocence, the vulnerability of the baby touched them all. A new feeling filled the train. All the drawn faces began to glow with gentle

smiles. That which is authentic and pure attracts our love. The baby had no masks, no barriers or facades, and its openness kindled the dormant feelings of love amongst the watching people. Just by being itself, the baby's qualities had the power to emerge love in strangers.

Recently I spent time with someone dying of cancer. When I first met this woman, she had just been diagnosed and was full of fear and burden. Life experience had etched a deep sadness in her face. But during the last few months of her life there was a dramatic change. Her face now radiated joy and love. She had let go so many burdens carried for a lot of her life. She had let go trying to impress, let go the hurts from others, let go the pressure to be something she was not, let go the inferiority complex. But most of all she had let go of the fear of dying, which liberated her from the fear of living also. She discovered her authentic self and, like the baby, became so lovable to all around her.

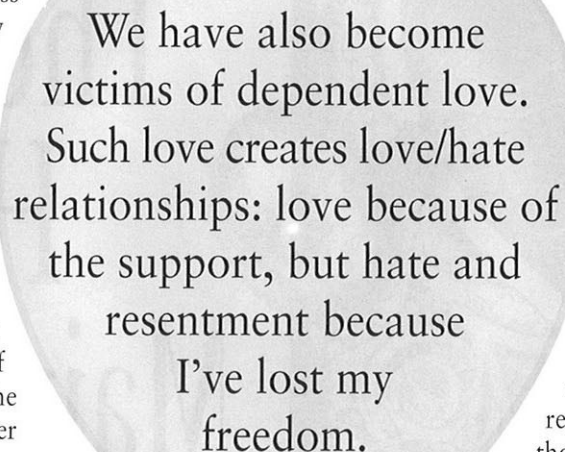
A friend once said to me, "If you were told you only had a few months to live, how do you feel it would change you?"

I thought about it quite a lot. I thought I would like to clear any regrets I had, tell others how much I appreciate them and how much they mean to me, let go of all the trivial tensions with others and focus on what is really important. I began to think ... Isn't this how I should be living anyway?

Between birth and death, what happens? We are desperate for the experience of true nourishing love, so we invest our heart in relationships with great trust and sincerity. But the Law of Life is change. Inevitably that which I love will leave, whether due to change, conflict or death. So I invest my heart again and the same thing happens. This process of loss leaves deep scars of fear and insecurity, so that as life progresses I put big barriers around my heart. The sign on my heart reads,

**"Stop!
No admittance beyond this point!"**

I want nothing more than the experience of love, but I've created so many barriers to stop it. Even if love is received, it is a polluted form of love that gives a temporary lift but does not truly maintain the heart. Sometimes the love is conditional. The sort of love that has a business contract with clauses and sub-clauses. Such love says,



We have also become victims of dependent love. Such love creates love/hate relationships: love because of the support, but hate and resentment because I've lost my freedom.

"I will love you but you must behave in the way I want".

Otherwise my love stops.

Or perhaps the love is selfish. This love only takes and never gives. The heart feels so empty. This love says, "Your very existence is to fill my heart", and if the expectations are not fulfilled, there is resentment, anger and feelings of abandonment.

At other times the glossy magazines and certain TV programmes offer us a romantic image of love! Beautiful people gazing adoringly into each other's eyes. This superficial image of love makes most people feel inadequate. Research shows romantic feelings only remain for 6 to 8 months and then love takes on new dimensions. Yet for some, when romantic feelings change there is a feeling that the love has finished. So the modern game of re-cycling relationships continues. We have also become victims of dependent love.

Such love creates love/hate relationships: love because of the support, but hate and resentment because I've lost my freedom. I feel smothered and controlled, but I forget it is my dependence that created this feeling.

Those polluted forms of love have made heart disease one of the main health problems of the world today. There is love, but it is often not of the quality needed to cure the rampant heart disease so evident.

To create a healthy heart three main stages are required:

1. A full heart check up.
2. Heart surgery (if necessary).
3. A Heart Maintenance programme.

THE HEART CHECKUP


I have a friend who prides himself on his physical fitness. He would regularly play squash and run, even though he lived an extremely busy life as a barrister and had a young family. One day after a run he developed severe pain in his chest. He immediately consulted his doctor, and tests showed that 90% of blood flow did not reach some parts of his heart. He was shocked to know this.

My friend's experience prompted me to think. How much love reaches my heart? We often don't realise how little love-flow reaches our heart, and naturally the less that goes in the less goes out.

How do I test the love-flow to my heart? The real signs are contentment with myself and others. Pure love dissolves desires for others' recognition and respect. Pure love will also replace arrogance with humility. Pure love will be so fulfilling that my natural response is to share love with others. I won't even feel empty. So, how healthy is my heart?

HEART SURGERY

Depending on my checkup, I may need heart surgery. The heart needs three types of love to become completely healthy, so sometimes surgery is required to begin the love-flow.


 *The First Surgery Procedure - Opening My Own Heart*

We all know the ingredients of a good relationship: respect, trust, honesty, openness, care, compassion ... the list goes on. Are these words that would describe my relationship with me? How do I treat myself? Do I lovingly care for my heart, or do I put myself down, beat myself, undervalue myself? This self-abusive behaviour seems to be at the core of my heart pain.

We all want to be self-loving. Why is it so hard sometimes? We are educated to try and love an image. Am I attractive, am I intelligent, am I successful? I am trying to love the very barriers and facades I have built around my heart. It has not only prevented others from coming close, it has prevented me coming close to me!

The first surgery procedure removes the old self-image of my body, my status, my beauty, my wealth, and replaces it with the awareness of my spiritual self.


First I begin to accept myself as I am. Then, when I discover that my intrinsic original state is pure, I begin to heal deeply, and loving feelings for my true, authentic self emerge. This is the story of "The Sleeping Beauty": the beautiful and lovable part of my heart was locked up in a big dark castle, overgrown with hurts, pains and sorrow. The prince gives the kiss of self-awareness that enables me to (awaken and) love my true self.

 *The Second Surgery Procedure - Opening My Heart to the Love of God*

The heart became so fragile and sensitive because I felt I was not lovable. I could not accept love from anyone, especially God, because I did not feel worthy.


By now I have discovered my pure authentic self, and this part of me can accept the love of God. Sometimes I like to sit quietly and allow myself to be loved by God. I put all other thoughts aside. This love is such a tonic that it makes a weak heart strong, a broken heart whole, an empty heart full, and a closed heart


open up. It is the true love that I have always looked for, because, by definition, true love is love that always exists. This love cannot leave me.


 *The Third Surgery Procedure - Giving and Taking Love with Others*

When my relationship with my own heart is strong and the heart of God is close, I have the foundation to care for my heart in any situation. Not only to maintain my own heart, but interaction with others helps heal their hearts also.


In my heart maintenance tool kit I carry some special tools that will help maintain my own heart and the hearts of others. Before I begin any heart maintenance procedure, I need to decide which tools will be most effective in each situation. It is suggested, if possible, to have a few moments of silence to discriminate clearly the procedure and tools required.


 *The Detachment Tool:* this tool is essential to any heart maintenance kit. To be truly loving, I must be detached. Does that sound contradictory? When I am dependent I am affected and influenced by those I am dependent on. Every word or facial expression can affect my mood. If, however, I use the tool of detached involvement, my love and support can be constant, regardless of the moods of others.

 *The Good Wishes Tool:* this tool is incredibly versatile and can fix most hearts. It comes from the realisation that the foundation of positive relationships is good feelings. This tool can fix cynicism and mistrust, and can help open hearts that have been closed. For the tool to be effective, I need to learn the positive qualities of the other person and make a commitment to maintaining my vision on those qualities regardless of their fluctuations.

 *The Forgiveness Tool:* this tool is extremely effective to clear away the rubbish of the past. It

can dissolve old rusty feelings and clear the air. As soon as the forgiveness tool is applied, it instantly relieves heart pain and often the patient remarks, "If only I had used this tool earlier!" This tool works best with broken hearts that just can't let go feelings of anger and resentment.

 *The Respect Tool:* this tool works best with heavy hearts: hearts that carry the weight of many mistakes and failures and when we just cannot see any beauty in our own heart. The powerful self-belief is that I am unlovable, and as a result there is no self-respect. Such hearts expect others not to love or like them. The respect tool rekindles self-value and begins to remove the burden.

 *The Meditation Tool:* this is an essential tool in any Heart Maintenance Kit. When the users know how to apply it, they become the master of looking after their own heart. This tool shows us how to regularly check out own heart and see that the flow of true love in and out is regular. An experienced user of this tool can instantly diagnose if a blockage has developed somewhere, and begin to remove it.

MY HEART MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

My ongoing heart maintenance programme needs a healthy diet and regular exercise. A healthy diet consists of a balanced consumption of positive and loving thoughts and feelings. I need to be careful not to consume the fatty thoughts of negative self talk that clog my love-flow. Exercise for my heart consists of giving love to others. If I do this exercise daily it will help maintain my heart.

When I learn the Art of Heart Maintenance, I have discovered the secret at the core of a happy and fulfilling life.

Charles Hogg is director of the Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Centres in Australia.

EXPLORING SPIRITUALITY

Peter Laurence describes and defines the difference between religion and spirituality.

Emerging from Interfaith Activity

In 1893, representatives of many of the world's religions were brought together in the context of the World's Parliament of Religions, a gathering held during the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. This event marked the beginning of a century of interfaith activity, carefully documented by Marcus Braybrooke in his book, *Pilgrimage of Hope*. Attitudes towards the existence of a plurality of religions have varied over the intervening time. One classic scheme that has been developed to describe these attitudes uses the terms 'exclusivism', 'inclusivism,' and 'pluralism.' As recently articulated by Diana Eck, director of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, an exclusivist feels that, "Our own community, our tradition, our understanding of reality, our encounter with God, is the one and only truth, excluding all others."

An inclusivist would say that, "There are, indeed, many communities, traditions, and truths, but our own way of seeing things is the culmination of the others, superior to the others, or at least wide enough to include the others under our universal canopy and in our own terms." The pluralist might express it this way, "Truth is not the exclusive or inclusive possession of any one tradition or community. Therefore the diversity of communities, traditions, understandings of the truth, and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement and dialogue with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments; rather, it means opening up those commitments to the

give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and indeed, transformation."



The pluralistic view has become the most supportive environment for interfaith activity, generating the formation of a growing number of interfaith organizations at local, national and international levels. Religious representation for such organizations has traditionally been accessed in several ways: through official designation by participating religious institutions, by inviting members of faith traditions who have distinguished themselves as individuals, and sometimes by including anyone who identifies with a tradition and is willing to participate. The organizational model in which religious representatives make joint decisions, issue proclamations or carry out collaborative projects is predicated on

the assumption that these individuals somehow do represent a religious tradition.

The Question of Religious Identity

Within any given tradition, however, there is usually a wide disparity of beliefs among its adherents. The divisions within religions are often more deeply felt than the differences between them. A number of long-standing religious institutions have recently been shrinking in size and influence. Many people are either abandoning those institutions or are reserving the right to disagree with official doctrines and policies. Where representatives are chosen, their ability to adequately represent the diversity within their tradition is always a concern. In addition, there is a large and growing population whose sense of personal identity is not linked to any traditional

religion. This raises the question of whether religious identity and representation continue to be the most important qualities to utilize in the search for ways to overcome the historic tensions among religions. In the process of addressing this question, we are discovering that there is, instead, a common bond which unites people without requiring that they abandon their religious roots, or that they identify with a particular tradition at all. The term that has been emerging to describe this common bond is 'spirituality.'

The Problem of Language

In the past several months, writers in a variety of publications have turned their attention to exploring the concept of spirituality, particularly as it stands in contrast with 'religion.' A

recent article in America by Michael Downey, Flannery Professor of Theology at Gonzaga University, begins with this statement,

“Spirituality is no longer tied to the notion that only priests and religious are called to the fullness of the spiritual life ... Today a great variety of persons and groups discern the presence of the Spirit in a diversity of living situations. This has called for new ways of understanding spirituality.”

One of those new ways is the attempt to define spirituality so that it transcends the limitations of what we have traditionally called ‘religion.’ There seems to be a widespread hunger for something which moves beyond structures that have characteristically divided us.

For example, an article in the *Journal of Holistic Nursing* by Joni Walton of St. Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City described this perspective as follows, “Religion may or may not play a role in individual spirituality and is quite distinctive from spirituality ... Religion is described as a framework for beliefs, values, traditions, doctrine, conduct, and rituals ... Whereas spirituality is a much more encompassing term ... a spiritual individual may or may not be religious.” “Spiritual relationships are defined as relationships to self, others, a higher power, or the environment that bring forth a sense of inner strength, peace, harmonious interconnectedness, and meaning to life.”

On a somewhat more technical note, Andrés Niño writes in the *International Journal of Psychotherapy* that, “There are many individuals who either do not have identified traditional religious sources for the construction of meaning or cannot integrate them in their experience at the service of a coherent self. The religious factor has been diffused through an unprecedented diversity. Even amongst groups previously considered homogeneous within their own faith, substantial numbers of people have modified their attitudes to adopt unorthodox forms of religiosity or have abandoned them

altogether. Yet, very often one finds that individuals in this predicament consider themselves to be cultivating a spiritual life.”

Spirituality is transcendent, unlimited by the distinctions that separate people. In an article in *Ebony Man*, Stephen C. Rasor, who teaches at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, is quoted as saying that, “[spirituality] is something that all persons have, regardless of finances or background. I don’t think age, income level, gender or race separates us.”

“Spirituality has entered organizational discourse through the back door and is now sitting in the drawing room awaiting a proper welcome.”

William Raspberry, a popular columnist, found spirituality to be the common ingredient in successful neighborhood social programs. Quoting the founder and president of the National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise in Washington, he writes, “For 20 years, says Robert L. Woodson, Sr., he had been observing the phenomenon but not really seeing it. ‘People, including me, would check out the successful social programs - I’m talking about the neighborhood-based healers who manage to turn people around - and we would report on such things as size, funding, facilities or technique. Only recently has it crystallized for me that the one thing virtually all these successful programs had in common was a leader with a strong sense of spirituality.’ ‘The thing I’m talking about may or may not be specifically religious,’ Woodson says. ‘It can happen with people who don’t even go to church. But it’s spiritual, and the people who are touched by it know it.’”

What is Spirituality?

Throughout these articles on the subject of spirituality there is a common theme that emerges. It is the concept of connectedness. *U.S.*

Catholic describes it this way, “Curiously, there’s a remarkable consistency in readers’ definitions of the word spirituality, according to the responses to a *U.S. Catholic* reader survey. Normally one would suppose that in describing an ineffable, intensely personal experience such as spirituality, the answers would be as varied as the hues in Joseph’s multicolored coat. But no. Young and old, religious and lay, women and men define spirituality as consistently as if they were reciting the Baltimore Catechism. Rare is the definition that fails to mention relationship or connectedness.” “Spirituality is an awareness of my connection to God, earth, and others,” writes Karen Fitzpatrick of Burnsville, Minnesota. Many acknowledge that spirituality is not some otherworldly, escapist pursuit but rather, in the words of one reader, an intermingling of all that is divine with ‘the delicious humanness’ of our humble earthly existence. “Too often we separate our spiritual life from what we call our regular life. It should be our life - what completes us as human beings,” suggests Judi Gualtiere of Amarillo, Texas.

As reported in *Holistic Education: Principles, Perspectives and Practices*, edited by Carol Flake, a statement adopted by eighty international holistic educators affirms that “Spiritual experience and development manifest as a deep connection to self and others, a sense of meaning and purpose in daily life, an experience of the wholeness and interdependence of life, a respite from the frenetic activity, pressure and over-stimulation of contemporary life, the fullness of creative experience, and a profound respect for the numinous mystery of life.” Specifically addressing their concern about education, they state that, “One of the functions of education is to help individuals become aware of the connectedness of all life. Fundamental to this awareness of wholeness and connectedness is the ethic expressed in all of the world’s great traditions, ‘What I do to others I do to myself.’”

Interest in spirituality is beginning

to take shape in the world of organizational development. Diana Whitney, writing in *World Business Academy Perspectives*, tells us that "Spirituality has entered organizational discourse through the back door and is now sitting in the drawing room awaiting a proper welcome." "The modern focus on objectivity and the separation of science and spirituality, taken to fullness, leaves people separate from one another, separate from nature, and separate from the divine." "Organizations are still suffering under the modern fiction of fragmentation, functionalism, and division of labor." Diana's vision of spirituality includes a description of "Spirit as Sacred" which she explains, "acknowledges the connection of all life and all energy such that actions of the part affect the whole." "As modern communication and transportation enable us to experience the world as one being, we see the reality of our connectedness. As we see the effect of local actions on global existence, we wonder if perhaps we have been connected all along and just didn't know it." "With this sense of wholeness and connectedness comes a deep reverence for relationships. Spirit as Sacred places relationships at the center of social organization."

Even the popular literature follows the same pattern. *Self* magazine recently conducted its own survey on spirituality and records the following ways its readers distilled the spiritual life, "connection to a reality that is more than self and comforts me and guides us; "belief in a higher power; a connection to all living things and to the Earth and universe." The magazine further reports that, "No matter how you define it, though, hunger for the spiritual life is nearly universal: 93% of you believe that having a spiritual life is important."

The Need for a Spiritual Renaissance

An article in the *Utne Reader* by Jon Spayde entitled "The New Renaissance" identifies a new breed of visionaries who "view recorded history and the growth of societies as phases of a

much longer and more profound process of evolution ... For them, human society in the 20th century has reached a crisis point at which our species could descend into ecocidal disaster or - if we make the right choices - bring off a sort of second Renaissance on the global scale."

"Most of all, the new Renaissance would spark the widespread proliferation of new modes of thinking and feeling into the far reaches of global society: true partnership between the sexes; the conviction that racial and ethnic identities are complex and valuable human options, not fixed fates; and the ever-growing sense that our daily struggles serve something greater than ourselves: a universal Higher Power toward which all religions point."

Brother Wayne Teasdale calls this spiritual renaissance "The Inter-spiritual Age," and attributes its emergence to the maturing "of the world's religions. Writing in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, he proposes that "Global spirituality or interspiritual wisdom has become possible because of a tangible sense of community among the religions and the real necessity for the religions to collaborate on the serious challenges to the world, notably the ecological crisis. Only spirituality can move us from within to change and become more responsible for the Earth and one another." "... spirituality is a resource for building a universal and enlightened civilization." "Global spirituality in the development of individuals inspires them to be genuinely cross-cultural in their outlook. It gives them a universal perspective that puts the entire planet before the interests of their own tradition. It allows them to appreciate and assimilate the moral, psychological, mystical, and cultural values of the world's religions."

"Global spirituality is a fundamental component of a culture of peace or a culture of awareness as far as the religions are concerned because it is a profoundly useful inner resource for creating and sustaining the inner conditions to support such a nonviolent, wise culture. Religion

cannot be content simply to contribute a moral dimension to such a culture. Again, that is not enough. It has so much more that it can offer from its hidden treasures of the Spirit. These gifts of religious consciousness in its most advanced form can and will strengthen the foundation, widen the scope, and extend the horizon of the dawning global culture and universal civilization. Spirituality can offer deep roots to this new world society that will ensure its endurance through the coming millennia."

Indian-born Raimundo Panikkar gives us the following poetic vision of the transcendent harmony of faiths. "The rivers of the earth do not actually meet each other, not even in the oceans, nor do they need to meet in order to be truly life-giving rivers. But they do meet: they meet in the skies - that is, in heaven. The rivers do not meet, not even as water. They meet in the form of clouds, once they have suffered a transformation into vapour, which eventually will pour down again into the valleys of mortals to feed the rivers of the earth. Religions do not coalesce, certainly not as organised religions. They meet once transformed into vapour, once metamorphosed into Spirit, which is then poured down in innumerable tongues."

Exploring Spirituality

Spirituality is a connectedness that transcends our various religious traditions, which have historically placed boundaries on community. Because everything is connected we care for each other, for the Earth, and for all its forms of life. This is the primary relationship. Our programs in peacemaking, ecology and caregiving all flow from this basic understanding. By placing a priority on spirituality, we have an opportunity to explore a new dimension of relationship, moving with the spirit that seems to be emerging in every aspect of human activity.

PETER LAURENCE is director of the EDUCATION as Transformation Project at Wellesley College and Chair of the Board of the *North American Interfaith Network*.

The Feminine Principle

Gayatri Naraine anticipates the emergence of the feminine at the level of spirit.



Personal growth and human development are perhaps two of the more popular banners flapping in the breeze at the eve of the twenty-first century. So what's new? Aren't these two old chestnuts that humanity has been chewing over throughout history? The issues may indeed be the same but what is new is the emergence of a suppressed part of the human dynamic that can be called the feminine principle. This principle does not cater to a prejudiced belief in the superiority or inferiority of one group compared to another. Nor does it seek to replace male chauvinism with female chauvinism. Its aim is to allow the blossoming of a full and balanced personality that is at once vigorous and serene in an era of both light and might.

The feminine principle is a subtle energy which has remained untapped within the psyche of both men and women. It is merged in the essence of our spiritual identity and is marked by qualities attributed to the more gentle side of the human being - care, respect, trust, patience, loyalty, love, honesty, empathy, and mercy. When this principle is understood and realised, it is a force so powerful that it awakens us to new realities and realigns us to the true purpose and meaning of life. Both men and women possess this feminine principle but throughout history it has often been equated with emotion, weakness, and vulnerability and, in the context of social, economic, and political issues, flushed from the mainstream of development to a backwater and then labelled as 'women's issues'. The feminine principle was thereby controlled and crushed by the iron hand of patriarchal power, which almost invariably demanded nothing less than the sacrifice of intuition at the altar of rigid logic, the suppression of gentleness for the sake of brute strength, and the compliance of women with the dominance of men.

If the problems which have arisen through the suppression and control of this principle are to be corrected in

a way that will last, then this must be done through a change of consciousness rather than a reversal of positions or roles: a change of consciousness which takes its birth from a base of spirituality and not from a base of sexuality. The feminine principle, this untapped subtle potential which lies at the core of our being, must now be realised to restore a balance between intellect and intuition, facts and feelings, reason and realism.

The feminine principle, which has come to be seen as the light at the end of the tunnel in the latter years of the twentieth century, will become a natural way of being in the future.

At the brink of the new millennium, in the midst of the most turbulent of times, the feminine principle is the clear, cool spring that can give life to humanity's arid wasteland; the sacred water from which to draw purpose and meaning.

LESSONS COME FROM HINDSIGHT

Looking back at the twentieth century, one may say that the progress of women has been slow and laborious, for up until the '60s women were best known for their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, nurses, and secretaries. As women's liberation movements asserted that women were also entitled to human rights, the international community responded with a series of women's conferences that have contributed to the great strides made in putting women's concerns high on the global agenda. Yet most women who managed to claim the positions they

deserved in the world did so at the expense of the feminine principle and were either caught in the power play of sexuality or achieved their positions only by developing an iron-fisted control over others. While such measures were doubtless successful in the short term, any individual who has to compromise on who she is, and knowingly or unknowingly deny herself access to the source of her own strength, will sooner or later succumb to the trap of exploiting, manipulating, and discriminating against others - the very evils she sought to dispel. Deprived of the strength that comes from within, these are the only tools available to a person living outside the borders of their own being.

Twentieth-century women will be remembered as pioneers of a hard and perilous path to freedom and liberation. Their efforts brought phenomenal breakthroughs and taught significant lessons. The starting point was action-oriented and was influenced by characteristics associated with the left hemisphere of the brain - courage, determination, will-power, and advocacy. The result was the formation of an international network of women's organisations and groups whose fingers are on the pulse of political, social, and economic changes, and who know how these impact the lives of women all over the world. Faced with the paradox of some material and professional success but very little emotional and spiritual fulfilment, such women continued to feel a sense of inner depletion and a lack of self-worth and self-esteem. Recognising that the advancement of women was an uphill task, a whole of many parts, it became apparent that progress on the outside had to be nurtured by growth on the inside. Soon, programs on self-development and personal growth began to mushroom. Conferences, seminars, and forums were replaced by dialogues, discussions, and conversations. The significant lesson learned was the patience to trust that whatever happened was part of a process that

would lead to a successful outcome and the rediscovery of characteristics such as intuition, creativity, spirituality, nurturing, sustenance, care, love, and compassion. This shift in consciousness became the backbone of their stories.

VISION COMES FROM FORESIGHT

Women of the twentieth century have developed guidelines and set standards for women of the twenty-first century to pursue and develop further. The feminine principle, which has come to be seen as the light at the end of the tunnel in the latter years of the twentieth century, will become a natural way of being in the future. Trust, respect, and wisdom will lie at the heart of authentic leadership by women and men; integrity and high moral standards will sustain it. Power will no longer lie in the hands of others who make decisions for us, but within the hearts of each one of us. As natural leaders, we will lead from the core of our inner strength and will follow our own inner principles, conscience, and truth, thus creating our own disciplines.

It will be an integral part of the awareness and attitudes of women responsible for the growth and development of children that every child has the right to participate fully in all areas of society and to equality of opportunity. These guardians of humanity's future will ensure that the worth of an individual is not determined by gender and will bestow the love and respect with which the true self of each young person may flourish. To a great extent, it lies in the hands of women to master a process that will rescue us and succeeding generations from being restricted by discriminatory attitudes, abusive patterns of physical and emotional behaviour, and the

limitations we may have put on ourselves. This will be the sine qua non of our ultimate freedom.

WISDOM COMES FROM INSIGHT

“Who am I always keeping an ‘eye’ on ‘I?’”

At the confluence of the two millennia, one of the most challenging insecurities to be overcome is that felt by people in relation to themselves - the question: Who am I?

By using the feminine principle as the

Something somewhere has gone wrong with feelings and so we need to understand deeply what true feelings are.

premise to explore this mystery, we can embark on our journey of discovery from a perspective of faith in one's self. We are often reluctant to look within ourselves because we lack the confidence to come face-to-face with the person we fear the most - our own true selves. Spiritual knowledge gives a deeper level of understanding that can remove the fear of the unknown and open the door to insight. Insight gives the spiritual clarity to recognise the self and the inner strength to accept the self, including our present limitations. Insight also serves as a searchlight with which to see through the layers of limitations we have acquired by overemphasising the temporary or physical aspects of our identity and focus on the realisation of our original and eternal identity - “Who I am always.” To identify with the inner self is the method to free myself from the confines and constraints of the physical limitations. Faith in myself elevates and divinises my intellect and opens my third eye of wisdom. This is the kind of faith that creates trust and gives me the courage to accept the past, enjoy the present,

and create the future I want. It is this wisdom that women must embody. This wisdom is born from the depth of a spiritual consciousness and has been remembered as *shakti* - will-power received directly from God. Such wisdom, when brought into action, has a truly transforming effect on our lives, and the lives of those around us, bringing about integration with integrity.

Using the feminine principle to bring about integration with integrity is the most powerful tool now at our disposal. The practice of returning to one's original identity and remembering “Who I am always”, as we play our different roles and honour our various responsibilities, is crucial as it enthrones us on our seat of self-respect. When our subtle inner abilities

are integrated in the wholeness of our being and allowed to be expressed with the support of self-respect, actions are performed with a high level of integrity.

The feminine principle has often been mistaken for femininity on a physical level and so respect for inner beauty has often yielded to an obsession with beauty that knows nothing deeper than the skin. A woman's worth comes from the original and innate qualities of the soul: truth, love, purity, joy, and peace, and it is from these values that a woman's beauty is derived and radiated through her features. To believe in the beauty of one's innate worth and to see the self in the context of this eternal reality, rather than just the transitory physical appearance, gives a tremendous boost to one's self-esteem and self-confidence.

To feel is a basic human trait, yet when it comes to expressing our feelings in a particular relationship, our passion for a task or admiration for a piece of art or music, often we either overindulge ourselves and lose

our sense of reason or we suppress ourselves with the fear of being rejected or of being too emotional. Something somewhere has gone wrong with feelings and so we need to understand deeply what true feelings are. Feelings are linked to motives, intentions, desires, and expectations, and I can control the way I feel when

capacity. Every test has a benefit merged in it. What needs to be understood during these battles is that I must not shrink my capacity to trust just because someone betrays this trust, or my capacity to be honest just because someone lies to me. It is so easy to be influenced by someone else's behaviour and to internalise

principles. If they are not we must use our sense of self-worth to allow us to delay the decision and, if they are, then that alignment gives us the authority to take a stand, make the decision, and be committed to it.

Within the heart of the human soul, a new world is waiting to be born. The gift we can, and must, offer - to ourselves and to each other - is to rekindle within ourselves the flame of the feminine principle and then to keep that flame glowing strong and steady in our souls, sustaining it with the oil of pure feelings, faith and determination. A commitment to live by this principle is a commitment to ignite the spirit of the twenty-first century in the hearts of all humanity. If I don't make this commitment, who will?

Gayatri Naraine is the Brahma Kumaris Representative at the United Nations in New York. This article is extracted from her contribution to *The Fabric of the Future - Women Visionaries Illuminate the Path to Tomorrow*. Published by Conari Press, Berkley, CA, and edited by M.J. Ryan.

Walking the tightrope of daily life can also challenge our ability to make decisions with integrity. This is why it is so important to periodically keep an 'eye' on 'I' to see whether my actions, words, thoughts, and values are in alignment with my principles.

I am in touch with these. I am empowered when my feelings are based on the strength of what is true to me and come from respecting and believing in myself. I am disempowered when I allow external influences to create doubts and fears in the way I feel, causing me to look outward to validate my own feelings. Looking outside myself is the way to let loose waves of victimisation, uncertainty, and insecurity and so feelings are often suppressed and never dealt with. This suppression of feelings leads to depression as I am unable to trust my own feelings and I am reluctant to talk about them, fearing being misunderstood, criticised, or rejected. Staying close to my own truth, innate values, and inner strength enables me to trust my feelings. I am responsible for the way I feel and I have the capacity to remove any painful feelings and to create pure feelings in their place.

Capacity building is the art of balancing feeling with reason. This balance is especially needed in areas of trust, honesty, loyalty, and love. Reason tells me that when I begin to cultivate and nurture any of these values, my own insecurities, fears, and doubts will arise to test the strength of my commitment and to stretch my

their weakness in a way that causes me to lose faith in my own capacity and to waver from staying in alignment with my own values. This is where space is required to maintain healthy and long-standing relationships and not to become so wrapped up in another that I lose all sense of who I am. This stepping back to maintain my own independence and integrity nurtures my growth and increases my capacity to exercise freedom of choice rather than succumbing to the pull of external influences or the expectations of others.

It has been observed that a woman's intuition guides her ability to make decisions, almost like a sixth sense. However, intuition on its own is not enough for effective decision-making. It is only when motives are clean and devoid of selfish desires that the intuition can give clear signals to help make objective decisions. These subtle abilities must be applied or expressed in relation to facts and not fancy or imagination. Walking the tightrope of daily life can also challenge our ability to make decisions with integrity. This is why it is so important to periodically keep an 'eye' on 'I' to see whether my actions, words, thoughts, and values are in alignment with my



Personal Resources and Coping Skills for Teaching in the 21st Century

Professor Bart McGettrick highlights some of the insights and skills which can help teachers to cope more effectively in the new millennium.



LIVING A VIRTUOUS LIFE

Ninety percent of what we now know will be out of date within seven years, and ninety percent of what we will have to know in seven years is currently not known by anyone! That is the pace of change of knowledge. And so what is the point of expressing a curriculum in terms of content? The content is not the most important thing in education, but the way in which we give young people values and ideals; ways of living their lives; the values that they have and the skills and competencies for living, in what is a very old-fashioned phrase, 'a virtuous life'. Education is not about 'delivery of the curriculum', but about engaging in the interaction and the richness of education, which actually takes place when the teacher looks into the eyes of the student and the student looks into the eyes of the teacher, only to see a smile there.

THE INTERNET SOCIETY

You are now dealing with young people in schools who are the first generation of 'the Internet society'. They have access to information of all kinds, a body of knowledge and ideas that has no boundaries, and there is no-one who is censoring it. Controls are no longer external, they have to be internal. Young people have to be brought up recognising that a virtuous society is built from the inside, and the coping skills of teachers have to be built from the inside as well.

AN EDUCATION ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

Values are not transmitted; they are largely formed in the relationships of life ~ including schools. What are the relationships that we're developing in this school, in the classroom, with children? What are they developing in their personal lives and their home lives domestically, and what are the values that are coming through in those sorts of relationships? When looking at coping skills, we must try to understand what's happening in schools and we must try to develop an education that is about relationships,

about the climate and ethos of a school and about the way in which we relate to children in the school. It's done within the context of a National Curriculum. In coping, you have to merge a kind of desire for interaction and relationships on the one hand and some concept of accountability in the National Curriculum on the other.

With a child, education and thinking, one should have an open hand, not a clenched fist that is looking for results, outcomes and targets.

RESOURCES FOR COPING SKILLS

To cope with education you've got to have some idea of what education is. It is not instruction, but the conversation from generation to generation about matters of significance. Not only do you speak, but you have to listen, and because we've got twice as many ears as we have mouths, we should listen twice as much as we speak! To cope is to listen. It is not about talking all the time and telling children what they should be thinking. It should be about recognising children's rights as human beings to live a life of dignity and liberty and find expression in what they say and do; their right to be educated, competent in language and mathematics, knowledgeable about science and humanity, to express themselves in matters of music and art and drama, live in an environment which is sustainable and developable, in a world of peace and harmony.

Many teachers have the most remarkable inner qualities and should be praised in season and out of season for what they do in the classrooms. Their inner resources are often enormous but they are battered, day in day out, by the media, by politicians, by other people, so that their self-esteem often begins to flag and there is no-one there to stop the downward spiral of the reduced self-esteem. For

those who are in positions of responsibility, my advice to them is on a Monday morning you should have 5 cards on your desk, each saying, "Thank you". On Friday afternoon you should have no cards on your desk. People need affirmation; leadership, development. You need somebody to give you some affirmation, otherwise, where are you going to get self-belief and self-awareness of what you're doing? How are you going to build up your coping skills? You need someone in your life who's going to give you support. If you don't have self-belief, you're not going to be able to give it to students in your classes. Nobody can give what they don't have. Teachers have to look at themselves, for their own sake, and for the sake of those whom they're serving.

In your schools you will have children who come from homes where relationships are perhaps strained, whose parents have been homeless, feel marginalised, are hungry, or feel that they are not valued by society or that society is not giving them a way of life. They will not accept the view that we are looking for freedom through education. Some children whom you test will see that the school has, for them, become a prison and the bars come closer and closer every time you ask a question or test them. But they will feel dignified if they feel that the teacher can smile at them and assist them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN OPEN HAND

The most important things in life are carried in an open hand. If you try to pick up water, you have to do it with an open hand. If you close your hand it disappears. If you try to hold a butterfly, and if you close your fist it won't last long. If you try to pick up a flower, you'll crush it in a clenched fist. With a child, education and thinking, one should have an open hand, not a clenched fist that is looking for results, outcomes and targets. We should also recognise the importance of the spirit, "We value you for who you are, and not just for what you can do".

VALUING PEOPLE FOR WHO THEY ARE, NOT FOR WHAT THEY CAN DO

A mother of a child who had Down's Syndrome, aged 10, was overjoyed by the fact that the child was in a mainstream primary school and was now able to read a very simple sentence, even though it was way behind in terms of any national targets. The child was due to go to a secondary school and someone at the secondary school told the mother, "Look, we'd prefer that your child didn't come to this school. We think that you should send your child to a special school because if your child comes to this school it will adversely affect our place in the league tables." That is the kind of thinking that policies can lead to. It was an illustration of valuing people, not for who they are but just for what they can do.

ELDORADO IS WITHIN

In 1958 the now Head of the Pedagogical Institute in Albania was a student at the University of Tirana and was involved in some political activity. He was allowed to finish his degree in mathematics, and then told to go and live in a village. He wasn't allowed to have pencil or paper in his possession from 1960 until 1989, and taught maths orally.

He said to me, "Of course you're fortunate; you're going back to Eldorado."

For eight days, I had worked with this man and seven others, in a room in Tirana, yet, even after intense discussion, I still had no sense of a relationship with these people. The tragedy is, that man didn't even know where to look for Eldorado. It's not to be found in Glasgow, in Scotland or in Britain, but inside himself; that's where you find the city of gold, the coping skills. We have to recognise our own self-awareness, and take an holistic view of our own life. It's not just looking externally for more time and resources, but inside ourselves so that we can cope ~ an integration of

our life and our professional work.

It's about self-empowerment; the people who learn from inside themselves, about who they are and their strengths and areas for development. One of the coping skills for teachers is, "Think positively": don't think of failure or people who can't do things, think of the next step in development needs. Assessment is identifying what the next steps in our development are, not telling someone that they've got a particular mark.

Some schools are like an oasis of peace and real power, in terms of the relationships that they develop, by paying attention to how they celebrate the value of young people.

HOPE AND JOY

The role of the teacher is largely about serving other people ~ the ministry of hope, ministering to people in the hope that they will develop something.

What you're trying to do is to hope for a better life for young people ~ motivation of the person through the energy of the teacher. Education is always concerned with creativity but it's not concerned with production ~ like beans off an assembly line ~ we're always creating something new, and mostly, these are ideas. The best of your schools will be celebrating the children, their ideas, their thoughts, and the community. As I talk of these ideas, they change in your minds, because of your experience. So, education is not a transmission. It's actually to do with the ways we interact with people and produce new ideas ~ that is the real joy of education. The word 'coping' may give a kind of minimalist view implying that we're just coping. We're going to thrive in education, with enthusiasm, confidence and ability. You cope by having enthusiasm for what you do and for the children with whom you work. Education is a very rich way of working with generations

who are in our schools, and those yet to be born, with energy, a sense of hope, care and love.

There is no more noble profession than the teaching profession. If we don't have a hope for a better future, what are we doing in education? It is about a forgiving past and optimistic future.

UNDERSTAND THE VALUE SYSTEMS

We've got to try and understand the different value systems of our students. Teachers don't quite understand why children are so different. Why is it that they have to have the brand shoes or a certain sweatshirt?

RECOGNISE PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS

Teachers sometimes feel frustrated by parents,

particularly when parents' evenings are held and some parents just don't turn up. But maybe the last thing they need is to come along to an evening at school and get another earful of what the problems are with their children! They had experiences of that when they were at school! It's the relationships of life that matter. We need to take the time to understand the value systems of each family.

SETS OF VALUES

In Scotland, The Children's Act gives a child, about whom a decision is being made, the right to participate. It's a value system that's a little ahead of our social system and certainly of our education system. However, if the child is working with the police, social worker, probation officer, head teacher, teacher, sheriff or Justice of the Peace, do they have a consistent set of values and how does the child make sense of this?

Are there different value systems, and if so, where and why are they different? Therefore, in education, what and whose values are we talking about?

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY

Management and structures of

schools are very important in how we look at coping skills. teachers have enormous inner resources and schools, collectively, have the most immense capacity for their own learning ~ usually untapped. The learning organisation seems to me to be the way ahead. Usually staff development has meant individual professional development. The school involves children, parents, grandparents, industry, business in the area; it involves all those who have an interest in what we're doing as a learning community. Some schools are like an oasis of peace and real power, in terms of the relationships that they develop, by paying attention to how they celebrate the value of young people, and they in their turn, value us.

PROFESSIONAL LOVE OF CHILDREN

Part of the tension for so many teachers is, that they don't quite know what the values of the school are or what the mission is. Is it just to 'deliver the curriculum' or instruct? We should have a vision of the school and an understanding of what it's about. There should be a balance between care and learning and it's the professional love of children that is at the heart of education. Education is about being part of a community where they care about you as much as you care about them. Teachers have got to have that self-confidence, sometimes even to share a wee bit of your inner self, a wee bit of love and care, and make sure they know that you're a human being as well.

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

A teacher is not an isolated person battling his or her way through the National Curriculum from August till June. There's no such thing as individual leadership in any community, it's got to be corporate. Students need to participate in what they do, so that they sometimes set their own standards, targets, and outcomes. Tell them what they can

expect to achieve, "At the end of this lesson I want you to be able to do the following 2 or 3 things." Check up at the end whether they've done that. Do they know what it is they're supposed to be learning as they paint Vikings or the Romans?



ETHICAL DIMENSION

We've got to know what the values and ethical principles of the school are and that children know what they are expected to do, within an ethical framework. If you have children in the school with certain needs, they also have certain rights, for example, to participate in everything. Don't exclude children from anything. Of course, teachers have to be very careful these days, because of the litigious nature of our society. For example, there was the case of a dyslexic child, who was not recognised as being dyslexic at school, and was given an award in compensation!

ACCOUNTABILITY

The external environment of teaching is the accountability ~ nationally imposed tests and indicators of performance. If you think, "I'm only conforming to that", then that will continue to be a pressure on you. In the past, teachers were also accountable but they were internally accountable. They knew when they were doing a good job. One of the coping skills is to make sure that there's a balance between the internal and the external, that you have actually internalised what's important and that becomes your professional accountability.

It is like saying, "Who's the more stressed? Is it the senior manager or the secretary?" More often it's the secretary, because the secretary is not in a position to take decisions because there's an external accountability. In teaching, one of the ways of coping is to make sure that you know what you're about and that you have taken in whatever external requirements there are and you have internalised them and said, "Yes, I can live with this, this is a reasonable thing for me to be working on and I will work on it." We are accountable to society, children, government, a whole lot of people, ourselves and God. It's not

just a personal accountability but accountability to some greater Spirit and Being for this better society. If you can internalise and reflect on that, then that is one of the coping skills that you can have, recognising that accountability is not just examination, performance and test outcomes, but a personal, inner accountability. It's a way of saying, "I have an important and worthwhile mission on this earth and this is how I will conduct it."

Stress will be created by a lack of control. Don't separate your professional life from the rest of your life. It's all part of an integrated wholeness. Recognise that your friends and family also have a place in that. The personal qualities that you have as individuals and as members of families will grow the goodness in your personal and professional life, and you will develop the strength of your inner self. You'll develop ways of coping that seem to me to be at the heart of what education is about and that are realistic. And at the end of the day it's the worthwhileness of what you are doing for yourself, and for God, that matters.

Extracts from a presentation at a recent retreat on *Coping Skills for Teachers*. Professor Bart McGettrick, Principal of St. Andrews College, Glasgow, and former Chairman of the Gordon Cook Foundation

Encounters with God



Anthony Strano explains what happens when we have a direct personal relationship with God and why it is important.

I remember when I was thirteen and I thought, “What am I going to do with my life? I’ve got the energy of youth, the aspirations of youth and what will I do?” I was growing up in Australia, a very free country; you can practically do anything you like at that age. I just picked up the Bible and opened it. It was God asking Solomon, “What is it that you would like most of all?” I was surprised, Solomon didn’t ask for more money or a bigger palace or anything like that; he just said, “I would like to have wisdom.”

I thought, “That’s a good thing to ask for, to be wise and understanding.” Further on I read, “Beware of youth! Youth is like the green grass. Today it is fresh and glowing and tomorrow it will be dry and the wind will come and just blow it away.” So I was thinking, “When I’m thirty or

forty and I look back on what I have done, what will I say? Will I be happy with the decisions I made?” I remember that whole day, just staying in silence. I always liked silence. It was a mirror through which I could understand many things, not analytically, but I could feel them. I had a characteristic that I never quite trusted my own perception about things. I felt it was easy to delude yourself, so you must always have a point inside yourself from where you are observing.

One Christmas Day, I woke up very early and decided to go into the forest. It was just around dawn and there was an oval fir tree with a lot of dew on it. I was watching it. The sun rose higher and higher and rays of light hit the drops of dew and the wind started to blow. It was a beautiful experience, all those drops of dew

started to reflect many different colours, green and blue and red and yellow, and as the wind was blowing lightly the colours were changing. It was like a Christmas gift to me, nature’s Christmas tree. Then of course the sun rose completely and all that finished. I thought it would be nice to be like one of those drops, somehow able to reflect something hidden, something silent, but also very beautiful.

I began to realise that to have a true connection with yourself, with God, with other people, it is important to keep a very deep faith and a very consistent humility, because the faith in yourself, in God and in other people, helps you to go beyond many difficulties, doubts and tests, and makes you confident that even though you may not understand there is always a solution. You also need humility

to never ever get into the trap that I KNOW. Always keep the self open, for only when I am open is truth given to the self as a gift. All divine things are gifts, the only effort one needs to make is to position the self in such a way that one is able to receive those gifts. As one receives those gifts they increase as one shares. But you share them simply as an instrument - not as one who made the gifts. Whether it is of wisdom, of peace, of happiness - those were given, absorbed and shared.

As you read about others' encounters with God, you find with some that it transforms their life, becomes the foundation of all their life. Others have it but then forget it, and get lost in routine again, lose the awareness, the wonder of that encounter. When there is a genuine encounter with the divine, the human being feels three things - deep transformation, deep insight and great inspiration.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is driven by the desire to really change the self, to return to something pure and original that has been forgotten or that has been polluted, and knowing very deeply that if there has been this transformation within the self then certainly one will be in a position to help and co-operate with other human beings. A deep transformation only comes when there is that encounter with God, because what transforms the depths of the self is love. If God remains abstract, as for many people, then there is very little transformation. When God becomes personal and real then one is able to experience the relationship, and it is through relationship that one begins to experience the love that gives one faith in oneself and the courage to change.

INSIGHT

The encounter which is silent and

very personal often cannot be described. In some ways it shouldn't be described too much. In the silence there arises insight. Insight is the opening of the third eye and spiritual blindness is taken away. In particular the blindness of being very critical about things and people, of getting lost in weaknesses of others and caught up in trivial things. Insight is where I am able to see the positive reality of others, no matter what their appearance may be, no matter how negative they may appear to be. The insight of the one who has encountered God, is to see through God's eyes, to be able to see others as my brother or my sister. It is this insight that starts to create a sense of unity and friendship, and a sense of belonging to all.

INSPIRATION

A personal encounter with God

It is important to understand the difference between God and human souls, because one characteristic of this play of life is the uniqueness of each individual: we are all unique, there are no two the same and God also has that uniqueness. There are not two Gods, two Christs, two Buddhas. Yes, people can be Christ-like, Buddha-like, God-like, but each soul, each of us is a unique actor within this drama, including God.

also gives me great inspiration. The impossible can become possible. There's nothing that I can't do. There is always that support, acceptance, faithfulness from God in His relationship with you. He doesn't abandon, damage or diminish you, but holds you. You are sacred to Him. It is great inspiration when you feel this, not just knowing it intellectually but feeling it.

From abstract to real, this is something we all have to make an effort for. That comes from going into stillness, silence and listening. When there is this encounter, one's faith and courage are empowered.

There are always tests, problems, difficulties, but one always has that strength to overcome them because one is now able to look and see with another 'eye'. One sees with an invisible eye, you hears with another ear, an invisible ear. One does not have to see everything ready and tangible in front. I don't have to see the solution because I know it's there and it comes at the right time. The person who has a genuine encounter and ongoing experience develops a lot of kindness, generosity, tolerance, but especially non-violence. They never think they are better or superior, or inferior. There is a feeling of equality with others, that others are as good as me, that whatever good I have in my own self, others have it also.

When you have that genuine encounter with God, the vision of universality is restored and there is an attention on personal change and giving. There is never an inflated sense of superiority. However many forget to protect their genuine encounter with God with humility and self-respect. Instead they start to say, "I saw this vision, I saw this light, and I got this message." So what did I do with the message, with the light? Did I grow? Growth is measured by the respect I have for others and the non-violent attitude towards all things, I accept any differences as some-thing divine and enhancing for the world, I realise such differences do not limit but enrich.

One thing is very important in cultivating our encounter with God. While we have to make an effort in our movement towards God, equally we need to be aware of the point at which to stop, to be still, and be guided. We grow up in the West feeling that we have to create everything, we have to make it happen, that it's up to us. It is in a way, but it's not all up to me. Sometimes I just have to

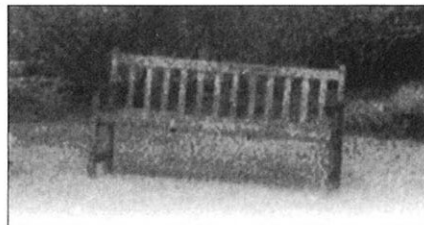
position myself. When I first went to learn meditation as a method to get closer to God I had very good experiences of God, which I didn't expect so quickly. I remember, the very first time, feeling God, not just as the Father, but as the Mother. I had never thought about the Motherhood of God before, but as the rather traditional Fatherhood. I had the feeling of God, my eternal Mother, looking at me sweetly and whispering, "I love you as you are, you do not have to prove yourself. You are what you are and I love and accept that. But, yes, make the effort to change, to awaken the purer part of the self and this will bring you great joy." Quickly afterwards I felt the Fatherhood of God, like a wave of great gentleness soothing the self. He was definitely not 'the stern authority in charge', which I had learnt about in school.

I never felt God was really strict and authoritarian anyway. As well as a Mother and Father, He was a wise and concerned Teacher trying to keep me on the right path.

When I was very young and some adults were upset with me they told me, "God is looking at you and only forgives you 3 times if you are naughty." I got really afraid because I know I had been naughty many more times than just 3. Every day, my naughtiness or 'mistakes' were in the vicinity of at least 33! because one day I had made a conscious count of my 'sins'. When you are very young the things you are told impress themselves on you. But deep down I thought, "I'm sure God's not like that. God doesn't measure." God is a Friend. And the blessing of such a benevolent friendship is a true gift from Him.

My own experience with meditation has been that when I step into silence and I tune my mind and connect with this benevolent point, this point of

benevolence for all of the universe, when I can connect to that current, then I fill myself, not just with light, but with deep compassion and understanding. In that compassion and understanding, there is change in the self,



attitudes, vision towards others. This is why when people say God, Allah or Father, and then there is a lot of violence in their behaviour towards others, it is clear that

To be able to keep your courage, faith and principles, even in times of opposition, and to keep a kind eye on those who oppose you - this is spiritual!

they are very far from God. The one who is pure cannot be violent, cannot give sorrow. In silence we have that encounter with the Benevolent One. Then we are able to feel ourselves lifted, our consciousness is lifted and made positive, encompassing, and reconciling with other souls. We feel the joy of being alive, of being a human being. We don't reject anything and we don't get attached to anything, because both poles do not keep the balance and the harmony necessary to maintain joy. When we have an encounter with God we experience God's Fatherhood, God's Motherhood and above all God's friendship, sweet friendship. Yes, the ancient Egyptians were very right, God the Father, the Mother, is the Lord of Sweetness, and it is that sweetness that takes away the bitterness of the past, enables us to experience the power of forgiveness, to let go of

things, not hold grudges. When there is that forgiveness for my own self then I can start to realise who I can really be.

In the practice of silence in the early morning I'm very aware of what God's love is creating in me. You feel that God is truly unique in the way He can transform your feelings and attitudes thus enabling you to come close to the self and to others.

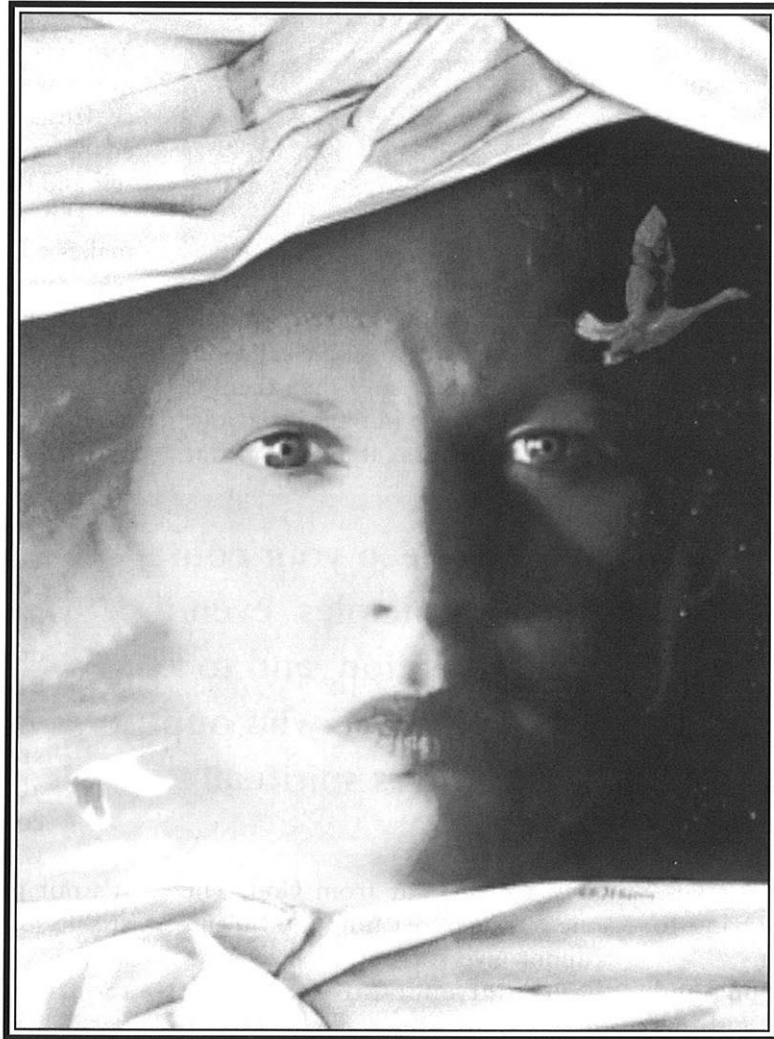
This love-filled transformation makes a human being spiritual. A true relationship transforms and frees you, it does bind and limit. When we encounter God as He truly is, then our consciousness ascends to a level of universality and compassion where there are no barriers of resentment, accusation or fear.

To be able to keep your courage, faith and principles, even in times of opposition, and to keep a kind eye on those who oppose you - this is spiritual! This is the ability to have mercy and compassion towards those who criticise and oppose.

It's not just a question of being stable and strong but having a kind eye for everyone. For that we require the sustenance of a personal relationship with God or else we can't do it. If you don't feel that relationship, I can be kind once or twice to people who are negative towards me, but to keep doing it requires a very positive, continuous flow of strength within the self. This is why meditation is important, not just for the self, but also for others. It's in meditation that I get close to God and experience the power he is constantly offering me. This closeness to God is called bliss. Bliss is the experience that is internal, beyond touch, sight or anything physical, and no-one can ever take that away from me. I carry it with myself.

Anthony Strano is Director of the Brahma Kumaris Centres in Greece and Hungary.

Living with Myself



Jacqueline Berg describes how we can break out of our self imposed prisons to which we have committed ourselves.

Recently I read an advertisement that said: Be different, be yourself. It reminded me of a story I once heard about a lion who had been separated from his parents at birth. He grew up in a flock of sheep. Because the cub believed himself to be a sheep, he behaved like one. He was a lion in a sheep-trance.

The story of the lion is a bit like many of our stories. We too are often in a trance. We too seem to have forgotten who we really are. And because of this mistake, we have identified ourselves with different images and ideas. We have put on

masks and have actually begun to believe that we are these masks. Of course it is impossible to be happy if you are a lion and live like a sheep. The secret of getting to know yourself is that there is something inside you that is totally different from what you pretend to be.

The only way to get to know this real self is through thorough research. Most people don't have time for this. Or should I say that they don't make time for this? That's the beauty of time: you can make it! During my research I came up with four things that are of vital importance. The first

is silence. The second is the relationship with myself. Third is the relationship with the Supreme and finally comes my relationship with those around me. It is actually important to think of them in this order. We usually approach them the other way around. We are very concerned about the relationships we have with others, some of us think about God, few think of their inner self and hardly anyone has a relationship with silence.

Before I began meditation - some sixteen years ago - silence was not very high on my priority list. I hadn't

a clue what it was really. I was a workaholic, and workaholics don't waste time on futile hobbies like silence. My life was active, dynamic. And it ran in the family. After she got a divorce, my mother told me why she had always been so incredibly busy. She had literally been running away from the pain she had felt because of her unfulfilling marriage. It made me aware that work can be just another addiction, a way to cover up pain, a way to avoid the things we don't know how to deal with. So, that's the way I was brought up: Never stopping, never being, always doing.

My inner journey started with the wish to break through this vicious cycle of running around and trying to 'just be' for a change. The first few years in meditation weren't easy. I found it hard to relax and couldn't sit still. My creative mind kept racing. It was actually my body that came to my rescue and forced me to sit - or rather lie - still. Slowly but surely my mind accepted defeat and while the white flag was hoisted the silence set in.

It takes time to get used to being silent and doing 'nothing'. I remember one morning sitting on the sofa - meditating - when one of the neighbours passed by the window. Before I knew it I had picked up a magazine and pretended to be reading. For so long I had lived with the idea, "I do, therefore I am." I was afraid that the neighbours would think that I was doing nothing. But I was even more afraid of that inner voice, the Inner Critic, who had been pushing me beyond my limits for many years. Now that my mind was becoming more silent, I became more aware of this inner voice. It took me some time to understand what this inner criticism does, how destructive it is.

Many people mistake criticism for intellectualism, they think it is good to have an opinion about everything and to judge others. But I have found that it is actually a very negative habit. It hurts others, but above all you hurt yourself with this kind of negative judgement. I think it derives from the wrong notion of perfectionism. Perfectionism is not the

same as perfection, in the sense of completion. Being complete means being whole with all powers and virtues inside the self. Perfectionism is something different. Perfectionists try to control people and situations so that nothing goes wrong. They want everything to be smooth and can't handle a ripple in the pond. Instead of being focused on the beauty of life they are obsessed by the shortcomings and imperfections of themselves and others. They continually correct themselves and others - sometimes in words, always in thoughts.

Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't try to make things better and strive for perfection. After all, we all come from that state of inner harmony and wholeness. So, it is only natural that we would want to return to that state once more. But the projected anger at having lost your own perfection is not going to bring this wholeness back. In fact it creates a lot of problems in relationships. It is not easy to face, or even see, your own shortcomings. It is easier to see this in others and so the Inner Critic lashes out at others. And there is always something: the way someone dresses, talks, behaves... there's no end to it. But what we are actually doing is criticising our own behaviour.

The way to get to know the Inner Critic is to pay attention to your feelings: how do I feel about myself? How do I feel about other people? Recently my dentist told me that if he were to remove my mercury fillings, my feelings about myself would change. Isn't it amazing, that something like that can actually change the way we feel about ourselves? Feelings can change so rapidly and there is so much influence, that the best way to look at feelings is: They are just feelings. And one feeling leads to another. When you look behind all those feelings and emotions there is still you. It is like with anger: You can feel angry, but that doesn't make you an angry person. It is good to separate your feelings from your self.

Take fear, for instance. A few years ago I travelled in Australia. I was on a domestic flight that would only take forty-five minutes. But on the way we

got caught up in a tropical storm with lots of rain. We tried to land, went up again, tried to land again. This went on seven times. The experience was terrifying, people were screaming. The thing is that I am afraid of flying anyway, so you can imagine how I felt. My fear grew and grew until I had reached the limits of the fear. I just couldn't be more frightened. Then, suddenly, it disappeared. It was gone. I began to smile. I saw how funny the situation was and was able to calm others around me as well. When we reached our destination eleven hours later I had realised deeply: a feeling is only a feeling. It can bother you for many years, then - suddenly - it can be gone. Feelings change, we don't!

When I allow silence to enter my mind, I come to know who I am, deep down inside. I begin to understand my motivations. With myself I can be honest, I don't need to fool myself. When I begin to listen to myself, it is possible to discover things which are different from what I was expecting to find. Maybe I am a very different person from whom I thought I was. Maybe I am a lion living in a sheep-trance. If I am, then the process of recognition and change begins. It can be a bit painful to destroy the self-created images of ourselves, but above all it is liberating. Of course people around us will say, "Hang on, that's not who you are, that's not how I know you." They will try to pull you back. It takes courage to change. It can be painful to discover how little your friends and family really know you. But, actually, you can't blame them. After all, it was you who has been misleading them by not showing your real self. You only showed them the mask.

We have identified ourselves with so many external things. People have different faces. Our identity is in the clothes we wear, the jobs we have, where we live and so on. Some people are completely different at work from at home. They show only a part of themselves at work. In a way they mislead their colleagues. In the Dutch State Prison I teach meditation to young men who are there because of drug related crimes. So, apart from

their punishment, they are also addicts. Not an easy group of youngsters! They are offered psycho-therapeutic sessions to make them aware of the pain of their past. This is important, as they have tried to flee from the past by means of drug-abuse. After they are sober I get the opportunity to do meditation and positive thinking sessions with them. These boys have taught me so much about myself. They have nothing left to hang on to, nothing worth identifying with. Their friends and girlfriends don't want to see them any more, often they have lost their teeth and hair. I talk to them about freedom and imprisonment. They are always telling me, "What do you know about imprisonment? When you leave this place you are free."

But what is freedom? Maybe I'm addicted to my work, my relationship or to negativity. These soul cages are prisons too. Some of us are locked up so tight, it's like we have given ourselves a life sentence. I tell the inmates that I honestly don't know who is more free, them or us outside. After all, they have all the time in the world to rethink their life. Away from the struggle of everyday life, it is a lot easier to change patterns. Some people even pay lots of money to spend time in a monastery or a private island just to get away from it all to straighten things out. When I tell those young men in prison that some people might even be a bit jealous of them, they laugh, but they understand.

They are also open to meditation. They love it. They lie down on the floor, hang in their chairs, sometimes they cry. For a few minutes they experience themselves as they really are. Sitting together in meditation makes you forget that you are in the same room with murderers or muggers. They also forget these things. We just sit together and forget the masks. We meet as souls. In therapy people often focus only on what went wrong. When I meet these boys I tell them, "Forget your past for a little while. Let's see what qualities and specialities you still have left." When they express some of these qualities, I remind them of these. I

don't remember their names, but I remember their qualities.

Forgiveness is a big issue to them. Only when they learn to forgive themselves can they let go of their false identity. They need to understand why they have been doing these things: not because they are bad people, but because of misunderstandings. Only then can they forgive and regain their self worth again.

Forgiving yourself means healing your heart. If you keep punishing yourself, you are still behind bars. You are still in prison. And because you are in prison, you imprison others as well. No-one wants to be in prison on their own. We want company. If your identity is shame-based, you will look for others who have the same problem. You will always hurt one another. Hurt people hurt people.

The practice of meditation is about learning to be uninfluenced, to be you, safe and protected in that pure energy

These projections on each other will keep going on until you heal yourself. And only when you heal yourself will you be able to heal others.

We have to understand that we are free. Souls are free. No-one can encage us, we have chosen the cage ourselves. We have made ourselves into victims. And if we enjoy playing the role of victim there is always someone who is willing to play the role of victimiser. The bird and the cage. If we want to be free, my advice is: don't run away from your 'cage', don't run away from the relationship(s) you are in, instead understand what's going on and change yourself. To me this is honesty. And it is the only way to really free yourself. Don't spend all your energy on trying to change others. It's no use. All your energy will go into arguments, fights and repeating the same quarrels over and over again. Others will only change when they want to change, when they

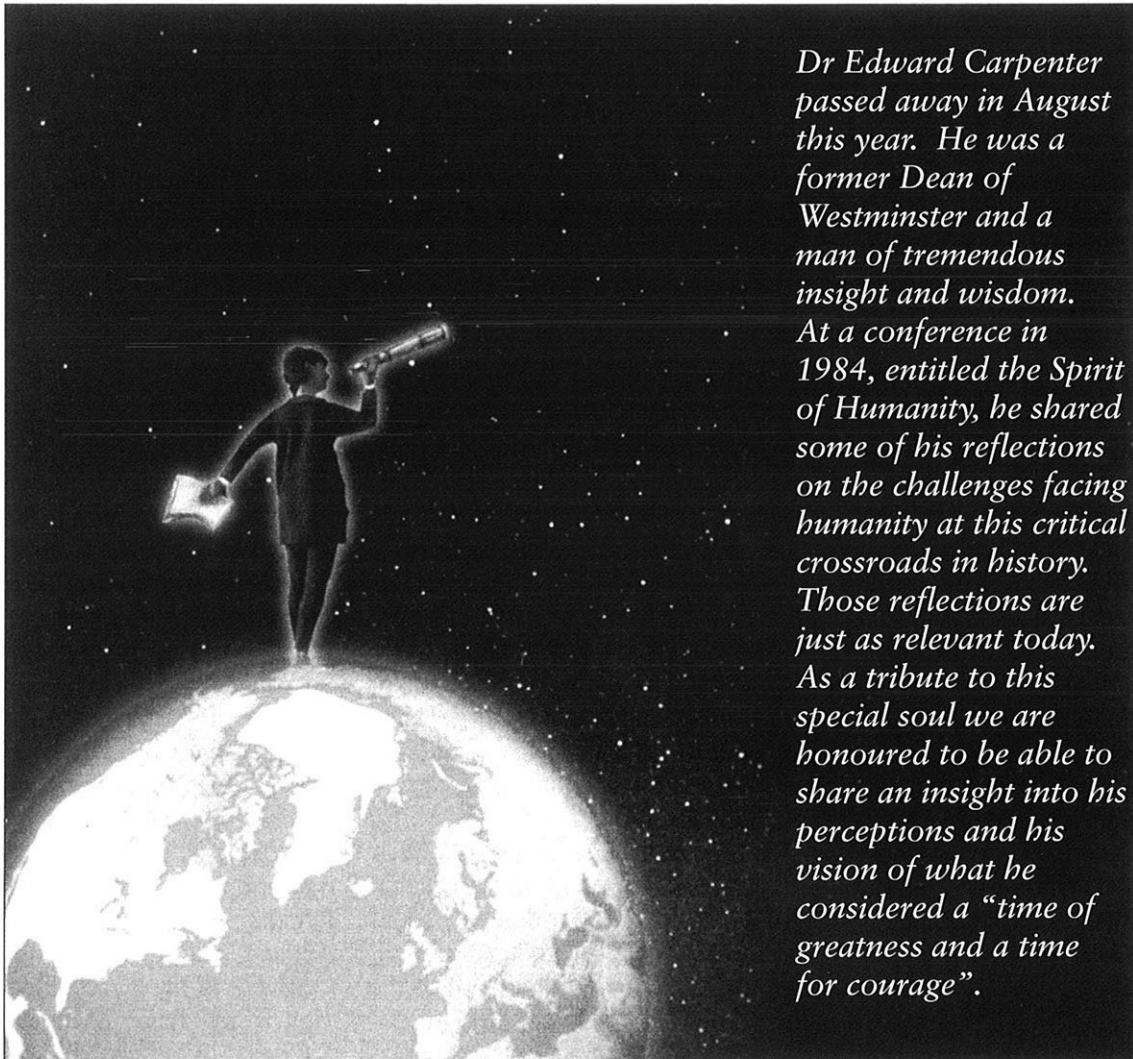
understand they have to change. Change comes from an inner motivation. But if we use our precious energy on changing ourselves, the chances are that the other will also change. It's time to reclaim your soul.

Real relationships start with silence. Then you can begin to create a better relationship with yourself, then with the Supreme, then with others. The reason why relationships with others come last is because others never see in us what God sees in us. We often see ourselves through the eyes of others. So, if someone only sees 20 percent of who we are, we also only see that much. God sees us as we are, he sees our complete potential. If you learn to look at yourself the way God looks at you, you will begin to see your real you. If you learn to connect with the Supreme Being your pure feelings are being stimulated and enforced. It is so wonderful to be in contact with a being who is so close to your original nature. You feel so comfortable in the presence of someone who is soul conscious. You begin to relax, because you are being recognised. You don't need to prove yourself any more.

I feel we are now in a time period in which people are beginning to understand these things. But we have to stop wasting energy and concentrate on what is really necessary. The practice of meditation is about learning to be uninfluenced, to be you, safe and protected in that pure energy. Meditation is about feeling your own soul-energy. Really feeling: this is me. That feeling that I am unique, I am special. Then the whole process is to express that energy in your daily life, in your relationships. But first you have to practise to feel it. Becoming stable in your true identity. When you begin to feel who you really are, there is no need to fight against addictions or people around you. In fact there is no need to fight at all. It is a very natural process. When we change our attitude, we will be able to change the world. You see, God needs help. He needs free minds.

Jacqueline Berg is a writer and author, and the Director of the Brahma Kumaris in Holland.

A TIME FOR GREATNESS AND A TIME FOR COURAGE



Dr Edward Carpenter passed away in August this year. He was a former Dean of Westminster and a man of tremendous insight and wisdom. At a conference in 1984, entitled the Spirit of Humanity, he shared some of his reflections on the challenges facing humanity at this critical crossroads in history. Those reflections are just as relevant today. As a tribute to this special soul we are honoured to be able to share an insight into his perceptions and his vision of what he considered a "time of greatness and a time for courage".

We are living in and through one of the greatest and most formative periods of all human history. The different parts of the world - culture, race, religion, territory - which used to be almost clinically immunised one from another are being brought together cheek by jowl. We may not be neighbourly in conduct, but we are all neighbours one of another.

This is a momentous fact. Toynbee in his great studies of history has reminded us that cultures tend to remain static when they are not subjected to stimulus; and very often not to be submitted to stimulus is to be geographically remote. What has happened today is precisely the opposite.

So we are living in a very significant age, and this significance affects everybody. We are not discussing something remote from everyday human experience. It comes up everywhere, in lifestyles, in patterns of family life and sexual behaviours, in philosophy and metaphysics.

This age is asking questions. It is being manoeuvrable. It is opening itself to the winds of change. It is seeking with more openness the encounter with that which ultimately is. There is an encounter of faiths which is unique in human history. In the Christian Church we are seeking outward to other versions of Christian faith, but in a sense the ecumenicity of world religions is the

staggering fact of our day and generation.

It is an age fraught with peril, which must make us think and think hard. There is always an intellectual content in the solution of problems. It isn't that the head is supreme over the heart, but what we need of course is a synthesis of the one with the other. The final allegiance is with the truth as it is and not to the truth as we would necessarily hope that might be.

A very famous eighteenth century scholar who browsed in the perilous fields of unorthodoxy was hounded out of Cambridge - from the Lucasian professorship which Isaac Newton once held - and spent many years as a supplicant, and an unsuccessful one, at the gates of Lambeth Palace and

Fulham Palace. When this great man died, the epitaph chosen for him was the Latin tag, "Quocunque veritas duxit ausus sequi" (Wherever truth led, there I dared to follow). It is a magnificent testimony to any human being, and it constitutes a writ, a loyalty, an obedience, for us all.

What most of us are beginning to think is that the truth is wider than we had hitherto supposed, and that we cannot have neat, tidy packages of knowledge and learning, separate from one another, with scholars following their individual ways. Scientific method was developed as a process of discovery - and a very fine one at that. It was formulated in England by Francis Bacon in his famous book *Novus Organum* (A New Organ of Knowledge). What he basically said was, "Forget your platonic ideas about the planets moving in circular orbits because a circle is a perfect form. Instead, take your weighing machines, your balances, your microscopes, and sit down humbly at the feet of nature to try to systematise, to discover uniformities, in your sense experience of the reality that you find."

This is a good method, but it is an abstraction. It is not the totality of human experience, nor is it the only form of knowledge which is available to us. It has of course enabled us to put a man on the moon and it could help us, given vision, to feed the hungry and to give learning to the illiterate. But it is not total knowledge. When the poet says, "My love is like a red, red rose that's newly sprung in June", that is not an untruth. It is bearing witness to one of the most significant experiences in all human life, the encounter of person with person.

We are learning of the complexities, the subtleties, and that people are not clinically removed from one another. That the baby at birth and the mother who produces the baby are not at that stage isolated units; indeed the baby in touching the mother thinks he is touching himself or herself. The experience is undifferentiated. Only with time is there withdrawal. And then the art of living is to come

together at a higher dimension and with an enrichment of experience within which the will takes its part.

We need somehow to probe reality and systematise it much more widely, to enter into experience, to obtain a sense of enlargement. This is one of the most significant factors of our day and generation: it is happening. G.K. Chesterton said that the most beautiful words in English verse (though he's not right there) are, "Over the hills and far away". I think I know what he meant. "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my strength." There is always a plus, extra, something beyond.

It is a kind of knowledge that you cannot really get to grips with through the precision of formal logic, or the sort of uniformities handled by mathematics. All of them tend to fade off, the further you go with them, into mystery. There can be confusion about mystery. So often the word is used as an excuse for laziness, for intellectual abandon. But you cannot have mystery until you have pushed thought to the periphery of human understanding.

The toughest intellectual and moral problem for the Christian is that if you begin with the conviction that the ultimate ground of human existence - the unconditional ground, that which lies behind - is loving, the mind is then faced with a large area of dis-value in the world.

The world itself has a question. It is that which Shelley wrote in his *Adonais*, when Keats tragically died in his mid-20s, "Whence are we, and why are we? Of what scene the actors or spectators?" I believe that is every person's question, subliminally at least, and that it is behind all our thought and reflection when we try to discover meaning and purpose. Questions long, long regarded as closed are now open. People who have not encountered another individually or as groups are now brought together cheek by jowl by modern technology. And hanging over us all there is the threat of near-total destruction - a threat that is bound to have repercussions spiritually and psychologically.

What ought our reaction to be? St. Augustine of Hippo saw the great, and on the whole, civilising empire of Rome collapsing miserably in North Africa, as the 'barbarian hordes' pressed east to west, and what had been the granary of the Roman Empire become a desert. His reaction was to take up his pen and write *De Civitate Dei* (Concerning the Kingdom of God). Only those who were themselves seeking a fatherland, he said, could understand what was happening, turn the edge of its evil, and recreate.

A similar truth lies in that wonderful saying of the black American evangelist Martin Luther King, "I have a dream, I have a dream." I think that is basically what all of us need. Without vision, the people perish. We are living at a time when we need hope. Not the kid's stuff of wishful thinking, but a real hope built upon the substantial ground of a reality that is.

Gilbert Murray reminds us that Greek civilisation collapsed not simply because their cities were despoiled and exposed to violence but because they were set in that curious psychological condition which he described as a failure of nerve. They began to cease to believe in themselves. Surely we are met together to say that finally there need not be and there must not be failure of nerve.

This is a time for greatness, a time for courage. Living out the vision of 'yonder shining light' is difficult. We cannot apply the vision of the perfect city by any formal logic to differing and passing situations. What we need is intuition, awareness, great imagination, and within all these a very hard core of intellectual understanding.

A great deal is going on, and I thank God that it is. The greater the challenges - the more terrible the possible consequence - the greater the call to heroism and to self-giving.

Dr. Edward Carpenter was Dean of Westminster from 1974 to 1985. He wrote several books including *Cantaur: The Archbishops in their office*.

THE HOLY GRAIL OF HIGH SELF ESTEEM

Lesley Edwards goes straight to the core of the challenge that faces us all, every day - the rebuilding and the maintenance of high self esteem

For sixteen years Lesley Edwards did her inner work as she pursued her personal Holy Grail. Her career took her into teaching and she gave herself wholeheartedly to her work with children at various schools in London. She was equally committed to her spiritual quest and as a student and teacher with the Brahma Kumaris she was a much loved and respected member of the BK family. For almost four years she conducted a largely private battle with MS and eventually cancer. She passed away in July this year, but the legacy she left in all our hearts and minds was a vision of tremendous courage, selfless service and a serene acceptance of her role amongst us in this lifetime.

During the past five years one of her main areas of focus was the development of self esteem. She designed and ran courses throughout the UK sharing all that she had learned on her own journey. This is the second of two articles which she wrote before her death. As you will see from the profound and articulate way she talks about this most important topic for us all, she had done her inner work, and spoke directly from her own experience.

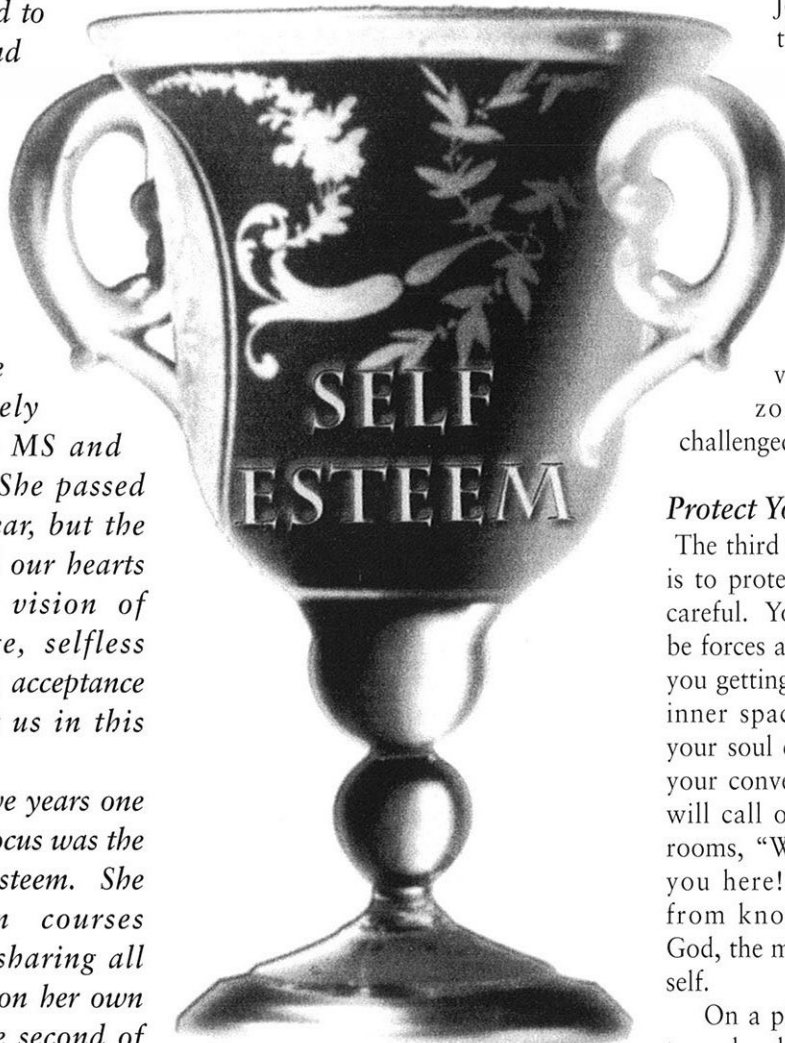
In the first article on Building Self Esteem I described the first two steps as Knowing Yourself, and Accepting Yourself. To know and accept yourself as you are, good and bad, and to know and accept yourself as you could be, making the choice

going to, the next step is to commit yourself to the journey. The challenge of building true self esteem is a pilgrimage in search of the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is our worthiness, our purpose in life, our dignity, our beauty, true love, and a satisfying peace of mind. Journeys can be dangerous things. Sometimes it's safer to stay at home with the comfort of denials and attachments and support systems that tell us how wonderful we are - blissfully ignorant of all the work that needs to be done. It is when we venture outside our comfort zones we get tested and challenged.

Protect Your Self

The third step to building self esteem is to protect yourself. This means be careful. You have enemies. There will be forces at work that will try to stop you getting to your 'Soul Room', that inner space where you can sustain your soul consciousness and cultivate your conversation with God. Voices will call out to you from the other rooms, "Where are you?" "We need you here!" They will prevent you from knowing and learning from God, the master architect of your new self.

On a pilgrimage it is often best to travel alone, at least for the substantial part of the journey, while you are regaining your self esteem. The purpose of your life at the moment is to find the Holy Grail. But that is not an end in itself. What is most important is what you do with it when you have found it. Then the purpose of your life is to give, to



to realise your full potential for positive transformation, and appreciating the spiritual process that makes this possible. Having understood and accepted where you are coming from and where you are

express, to share what you have found. It is true that in a sense you cannot separate the two, for in giving, expressing and sharing you also discover yourself. But it is a fine balance and one that is easily lost. So make sure if you are travelling closely with others, give yourself plenty of space.

While Noah built his ark, people came and laughed at him, and teased him. "What on earth are you doing Noah?" They thought he was mad. It may be that others won't understand why you want to go to your Soul Room to be quiet and to know God. The cocoon is not the most attractive phase in the life of the butterfly, but it is an essential step. No cocoon, no butterfly, simple as that. God has a preservation order on you at this time. Trust, and have faith that if you keep going inside to find power that the power will do its work.

Protecting yourself is a lot to do with the relationships in your life, your relationship with yourself, with God and with other people. Put your relationship with yourself and God first. Your lessons will come through other people, but don't lose sight of who is learning and who is teaching.

Relationships with others are a way of knowing ourselves on a deeper level. They are intense and interesting and real. We need someone to bounce off, to mirror back to us our reality. But we need to be wary about what they are mirroring back, which reality, which identity. If you are on a pilgrimage to find your true identity then be careful what other people see in you, because you will see yourself with those eyes too and this could give you a false sense of security; you think you are fine, when really there's a lot you could be working on. When you are close to someone, your perception gets mixed up with their perception, sometimes you can't even tell whether your feelings are your own or theirs. If they are not seeing

themselves clearly, they will project what they don't like in themselves onto you, and if you are not doing your work properly you will project what you don't like in yourself onto them! All relationships are an exchange of power, people competing for energy. A and B taking support from each other, until A no longer has the energy or the interest and withdraws affection. And B, having become dependent, is then unable to find that energy either from within or from anywhere else.

and gentle, we may find extrovert and confident people attractive. If we are strong and dynamic, we may find gentle and calm people attractive. In either case, the only and real lasting solution is to find whatever quality we are looking for in someone else inside ourselves. For the power that can be found by returning to the natural state of the soul has all the ingredients for the making of any quality.

Within the cocoon of spiritual transformation there is a perfect balancing out of qualities; a balancing of the male and female within us all. For we all can be both strong and gentle, responsible and free, adventurous and cautious. When we see the alchemy of what was once weak becoming strong, what was once idealistic becoming visionary, what was once worry becoming freedom, then relationships change from being dependent to interdependent, from unhealthy to healthy.

God teaches us to love ourselves. Because He has no hidden agenda He will mirror back to us only our highest qualities. We will not be able to project onto Him our own weaknesses, we will simply have to accept them and own them. He will not project onto us, because He has no weaknesses. He will not take our power away, nor will He withdraw His power, because it is unlimited. Having a relationship with God is necessary when our batteries have run down. And for anyone looking for self esteem that is likely to have happened.

Empowerment

The final step to building self esteem is to empower yourself. Power comes from all sorts of places. Some energy will be temporary, like the buzz of caffeine or cocaine that ends up leaving you feeling low. The energy spurt of a temporary attraction can also leave you feeling deflated when it

Are you really ready
to love another
human being properly?
Or do you need to learn
to love yourself first?

In an ideal relationship there will be an exchange of high quality love. Some recent scientific research from New York, which has been attracting media attention, has identified three types of love; lust, attraction and attachment. Lust and attraction speak for themselves. They can be lots of fun, but there may be a hefty price to pay in terms of your self esteem, and they will ultimately be distracting for anyone on a true pilgrimage. Attachment perhaps promises a deeper love, but how many people do you know who can't live without each other, but they can't really live with each other either? They love to hate each other! So be careful of the quality of your relationships. Are you really ready to love another human being properly? Or do you need to learn to love yourself first?

The things that attract us to other people are often qualities we would like to have ourselves. If we are quiet

fades, or damaged when it is not reciprocated. Even riding high on success and achievement carries within it the inevitability of coming down to earth with a bump when there is criticism and misunderstanding.

True energy will leave you feeling quietly confident, contented, satisfied, accepting, loving and at peace. You will feel connected to your own inner goodness, to the source of goodness in the universe and the goodness in other people. You will be stable and calm when things are going well and when things go badly. You will not need to blame or criticise anyone or anything.

You will love yourself - which means looking after your physical needs, eating the right food, taking exercise. You will spend time alone, being creative, meditating or enjoying silence, happy with your own company, and happy in the company

peace is more natural than stress. And it knows when we violate our own truth through our weaknesses, compulsions and being influenced by others. Our conscience 'bites', we become prisoners of our own conscience. I said earlier that God does not withdraw His power, but we can prevent ourselves from taking the power of goodness from God, and finding strength in our own goodness if we are not true to ourselves. If we deceive ourselves, if we forget who we really are, if we take quick fixes of energy by criticising others, by giving in to greediness or easy options, our energy will leak away. If we abuse ourselves or anyone else in any way we will not have a clear conscience. It will play on our minds. And when we go to our Soul Room there will not be peace, but punishment. Self inflicted punishment, the punishment of a troubled mind.

To maintain this state of self esteem you will need to be very cautious about what causes leakages to your inner strength. Power will seep away if you are not true to yourself.

of others. You will know your limitations and draw clear boundaries with confidence and calmness when it comes to work and commitments.

To maintain this state of self esteem you will need to be very cautious about what causes leakages to your inner strength. Power will seep away if you are not true to yourself. We all have an internal barometer which will indicate to us when we are off track. Deep within the soul, in the silent Soul Room of our being, is our conscience. It is our inner wisdom, the part of us that knows really that love is a more natural state of being than hate, that

It is a paradox of spirituality, that real self esteem comes when we in fact go beyond our 'self'. If we transcend ourselves, if we no longer have any selfish or wilful desires we can become an instrument of God's will. Then our purpose in life becomes very clear. And it is only when we have a clear purpose that we can have true self esteem. When we go beyond our 'selves' then we find the soul, then our life's purpose is quite simply to learn to love and to bring peace on earth, in whatever way we can. This may be through composing a symphony or baking cakes. It does not really matter.

SEVEN WAYS TO DEFINE SELF ESTEEM

- 1 Self-esteem is how we think about ourselves, the regard in which we hold our actions, our talents, our skills
- 2 Self-esteem is not boasting or bragging; instead, it is an honest assessment of our successes and the internal strengths that brought us those victories.
- 3 Self-esteem, or a lack of it, permeates our work and our personal lives. It is wherever we leave our mark, whenever we try and fail, and then have the courage to try again.
- 4 Self-esteem is the conviction that you are competent to cope with life's challenges and are worthy of happiness.
- 6 Self-esteem is the way you talk to yourself about yourself, how you feel about yourself and the extent to which you think and feel you can cope with the situation in front of you.
- 7 Self-esteem is the knowledge and awareness of your own intrinsic uniqueness, beauty and value.



FROM MT. EVEREST TO MT. ABU

(VIA OXFORD)

One Soul's Journey from Upward to Inward Begins

Mountaineer Alan Hobson recalls his sojourn at the Global Retreat Centre, beginning with some memories of Everest.

"2.35 a.m., May 23 1997 - I don't know what's happening to me. I can't seem to keep up. Amid the wild gusts of wind and spindrift snow, by the eerie light of the moon I see my climbing partner and his Nepalese Sherpas disappearing from sight. For a second, they ghost into view. A moment later....they vanish.

What's going on? Where did they go? Did they fall?

Why can't I get enough air? I feel like I'm suffocating. Every breath is a battle.

I look at my altimeter. It reads 27,600 feet. Camp 4 is a long way below me. If I fall here, I'm history. I'll slide all the way into the South Col and maybe 4,000 feet down the Lhotse face too. Everest, in all its massiveness, towers before me. It is black.

...I feel alone and very, very afraid."
(Excerpted from *The Triumph of Tenacity* by Alan Hobson)

July 3, 1998, a little over a year later, the horror of that terrible moment on Everest is behind me. Today, I find myself sitting comfortably in the back of an English taxi as it winds its way speedily through the lush British countryside just south of Oxford. Everest has come and gone, as has the summit - which I had been fortunate enough to reach some seven hours after my moment of terror. Thanks to a fresh tank of oxygen that replaced my spent one, and lots of will-power, I had finally stood in the rarefied air at 29,028 feet on my third expedition to the mountain and after a lifetime of preparation.

Since my summit day, however, my life has changed inexorably. What had been a relentless upward drive of fund-raising, physical training and organizational logistics prior to the expedition has become an endless stream of corporate speaking presentations, public appearances,

hotel rooms, taxi cabs and aircraft flights. I find myself changing cities faster than some people change their underwear and criss-crossing North America like a human ping-pong ball. I have lost count at several hundred the number of times I have packed, unpacked and re-packed my bags since returning from the mountain. Some of the flight attendants know me on a first name basis, as do many of the airport customs officials. I no longer own a car, as I'm never in town long enough to need one and, until recently, during some months it would have been cheaper for me to book a hotel room in my home city than to even rent an apartment for a month. Essentially, I have no fixed address - except an aircraft seat and a hotel room, and they, of course, keep changing.

While many in the West may hold this lifestyle up as a utopia of excitement and achievement, too

much of a good thing is a bad thing. In experiencing fame, I have, in fact, lost a fortune. I have lost touch with my home, my family, my friends and myself. My life is almost completely out of balance. A speaking and adventure business that I had once driven with my own personal passion and desire to positively affect the world now drives me - hard. I have become the victim of my own ambition. It is a lonely and fragmented existence.

Welcome to what the Brahma Kumaris call 'body consciousness'. I am perhaps the quintessential example of it. I have taken the Olympic motto of 'Swifter, Higher, Stronger' and raised the physical bar so high I can no longer (or so I thought until my trip to Oxford) raise it any higher.

As they say, however, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." Enter Valerie Simonson. I had met Valerie at one of my book signings a few months before my trip to the U.K. When she told me she taught something called 'open eye meditation' I was intrigued. As I am, like most people, curious, I wondered what the heck that meant. She taught me - and so much more. You see, she is a 'BK' herself - a Brahma Kumaris.

I had come to Oxford, to the Global Retreat Centre of the BKs, on Valerie's suggestion. I was in search of something - something I had lost. It meant more to me to find it again than to climb any mountain and I was willing to travel halfway around the world to regain it. It wasn't an achievement, an accolade or applause. Nor was it money. It was something far more valuable. The mountain I sought to scale on my 'expedition' to England was an invisible, elusive and silent one. I came in search of peace - precious, priceless, personal peace.

When the cab driver turned down a quiet country lane surrounded by neatly manicured lawns, the sweet smell of fresh flowers, the sound of singing birds and the sight of a sprawling English mansion where none other than Queen Victoria herself had once spent a night or two, I was certain, as I had been that frightening night high on Everest, that

something was wrong.

"Are you sure this is the place?" I inquired of the driver.

"Rightee oh sir," the cabby quipped confidently in a crisp British accent. "This be the place mate. Come 'ere all the time."

I paid the driver, got out and stared wide-eyed at the building before me. It looked more like a five-star hotel than a 'retreat' centre.

Hesitantly, I opened the front

Here, however, the wind did not rip to the foundation of your soul to stimulate self-discovery. Here, the sweet sound of silence gently settled your mind.

door. A kind-faced young woman in a white robe smiled warmly at me from behind a desk and said in a restful voice, "Good afternoon. You must be Alan from Canada. Welcome to Oxford."

No hotel clerk in my 10 years of professional speaking worldwide had ever greeted me by my first name. That was my first clue that there was something very different about this 'hotel'.

Habitually, I fumbled for my credit card so I could check in.

"Oh you won't be needing that," the woman said, trying to hide a giggle. "Everything here is supplied free of charge. This will be your home for the next few days. Make yourself at home Alan. You're in 'Sweetness'."

"I beg your pardon?" I said.

"That's right, up the stairs to the third floor, turn left and 'Sweetness' is on your right."

"Sweetness," I thought, "must be another one of these white-robed women. Maybe they didn't use their real names here. Maybe this was some kind of a cult."

Wrong again.

"May I have my room key?" I asked.

"Oh we don't use room keys here," she replied without the slightest sign of being ruffled. "We're all family here. All we ask is that you

remove your shoes before you go into your room."

"This is a bit different," I thought. "If these guys are on the level, there must be a catch."

'Sweetness,' it turns out, was the name of my room. 'Gentleness' was the room across the hall and 'Purity' and 'Truth' were down the way. And, there was no catch. My room was spotlessly clean, as was the entire building. There was a drinking fountain across the hall that spouted purified water and there was no smoking, drinking and carousing allowed in 'the house'. No one told you that or even posted a sign, however. They didn't need to. You just sensed it - like you sensed Something Else there too.

Over the next four days, I was introduced to a world unlike any other I'd experienced. Here, everything was given to me freely - literally. I was housed in a palace, fed delicious, nutritious and filling vegetarian meals three times a day and nourished on an intellectual and spiritual level. I attended a 'Self-Managing Leadership Retreat' seminar, mornings and afternoons, that would have been the envy of many self-improvement seminars I have either attended or seen presented as part of some of the most elite (and expensive) professional management training and business schools in the world.

This one, however, was different. Here, I joined almost 100 people from Argentina to Australia and from Turkey to Thailand, some 23 countries, in a journey, not only to greater personal enlightenment and global understanding, but to a depth of personal self-awareness approached only by my experiences on Everest. Here, however, the wind did not rip to the foundation of your soul to stimulate self-discovery. Here, the sweet sound of silence gently settled your mind. The effect was more uplifting than any peak. Within hours, I settled into the rhythm of the retreat.

"Here, you will take a journey unlike any other," announced a man named Neville as he welcomed us all on the first night of our four day stay.

“At the root of our problems in the world today is a flawed paradigm. The BKs aim to change the way the world thinks. You’ll be glad to hear it isn’t brainwashing, however. And you’ll be even happier to hear it works.”

Neville went on to explain some history about the BKs, how they had begun in the 1930s in India and since grown to over seventy other countries. He was followed by Sister Jayanti, the director of the ‘BKs in the U.K.’ as I came to call them. After quietly, but glowingly, glancing around the room at my fellow arrivals and me, she declared calmly, “It’s possible to go deep within yourself and find that of highest value. Even within just a few sessions here, I think you’ll be able to taste the sweetness and

the power of this ... If these are new adventures that you experience here, your time will be very worthwhile.”

So it was that a new adventure began for me. It didn’t hurt with every step the way Everest had and it was anything but life threatening. On the contrary - it was life affirming. I soaked it all in - the thought-provoking seminars conducted by a superb presenter called Brian Bacon, the in-depth break-out sessions, even the brief open eye meditation sessions sprinkled lightly throughout the day. The retreat was a unique blend of Western pragmatism and Eastern spirituality; a merging of body, mind and spirit. Here, the objective was

clear; it was not recruit you, ‘convert’ you, extract money from you, or even ‘sell’ you on anything. Here, the goal was to positively affect the world, period.

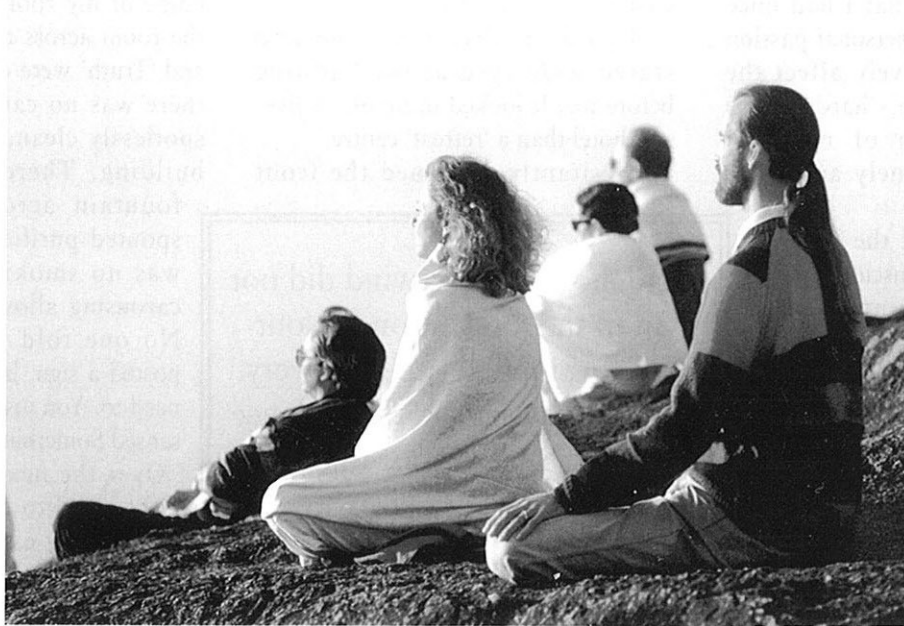
Power is the highest source of spirituality.

While in Oxford, I learned that in India there is another retreat on the top of a mountain. They call it ‘Mt.

Abu’. Every spring, the world gathers there to talk not just about self-improvement, but about global improvement. I’m curious.

On the top of Mt. Abu, I am told, it never snows. I’ve never seen a summit without snow. Then again, I’ve never been to a ‘hotel’ like the one in Oxford either. When the retreat was over, I left infinitely richer, wiser and calmer. I had found what I was looking for.

Since my return to the world of sharks and bandits, fortune and fame, I have renewed hope. I know that in at least one place in the world, the highest principles of human interaction -



I know that in at least one place in the world, the highest principles of human interaction - honesty, integrity, compassion, kindness, purity and truth – still exist.

I was, and still am, somewhat mystified when I look back on my wonderful time in Oxford. In a world in which almost everything costs something, the Brahma Kumaris, now thousands strong worldwide, are as reassuring and refreshing as a breath of fresh air. They bring to our much maligned existence on Earth a return to spirituality and a deep understanding that what goes around really does come around - if we’ll just get back to The Golden Rule.

In the case of the BKs, what goes around is a sense that sense can still be made of this world of ours, that there is still greatness in good and that service to others and to a Higher

honesty, integrity, compassion, kindness, purity and truth - still exist. I also know that every day that goes by, every life traveller who walks through that door, presents their credit card and has it refused, will come to know as I did - that some things in life, although priceless, simply cannot be bought.

How much would you pay for peace of mind?

Now, thanks to the Brahma Kumaris, I not only know where and how to find it any moment of any day anywhere in the world, I also know it’s free.

And I’ve never been so happy to have my credit card refused in my life.

AN EXCEPTIONAL RETREAT



Neville Hodgkinson reflects on life at the Global Retreat Centre and the profound effect of one of many meditation retreats.

Retreat has been serving its readers a rich variety of food for thought since it first appeared in June, 1993, celebrating the opening of the Global Retreat Centre near Oxford. Mike George, the editor, set out clearly in that inaugural issue a challenge that was subsequently to become one of the central themes of the magazine. In an article entitled 'Calming Down', he contrasted the temporary relief from stress provided by holidays on a warm beach under blue skies, with the lasting benefits of being "under the blue skies of right thoughts and attitudes".

The method was meditation, and the result was transformation in the quality of our thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviour. This would require "some short but regular vacations to the heart of your own consciousness, allowing you to see who you really are and how things are working 'in there'."

Facilitation of such a journey has been the goal of the Global Retreat Centre itself, and over the past five years, tens of thousands have passed through its doors and taken benefit in very practical ways. Events at which living skills such as positive thinking and stress management are shared have been particularly popular. There have also been many retreats allowing specialised groups such as prison workers, educationalists, psychologists and health workers to come together in a supportive environment

and discuss better ways of meeting their specific professional goals as well as personal needs.

Meditation has remained crucial to the centre's work of re-emerging the positive in us. Most participants remark on how the atmosphere of peace, so strong as to be almost tangible, helps them to experience the essence of spirituality - an exchange of peace, love and happiness.

Along with that re-kindling of the light of higher consciousness, senior teachers emphasise the importance of identifying and letting go of self-denying or destructive thought patterns, and of learning how to resist the external pressures that sustain such wasteful habits.

At a recent meditation retreat attended by guests from many countries, Dadi (elder sister) Janki, one of the administrative heads of the Brahma Kumaris, declared, "I will not conduct my life seeing the world, but in such a way that the world can see how life should be lived. With truth, cleanliness, simplicity, and selfless feelings, and the courage and determination to maintain these qualities, the journey of life becomes very comfortable," she said. "Never listen to the negative things others say. Then, the negative atmosphere of the world will not affect you. Learn the method to go beyond it. You won't feel good becoming confused, nervous, or losing hope. Always stay happy and share your happiness with others so they too are uplifted."

Is it working? Having lived at the retreat centre myself for the past four years, the answer is a resounding "yes"! The resident volunteers who cook, clean and otherwise maintain the life of the centre have seen progress in becoming such examples. The clear mirror offered by such an environment, through which everyday happenings relentlessly show us our defects, aids us in this. The results are sometimes painful, often hilarious; but there is deep happiness at feeling we are gradually becoming more real and true.

More importantly, when retreat participants share their experiences, they are increasingly speaking of the strength they have received to become and remain true to themselves in their own daily lives. Here are some comments made at the close of a recent meditation retreat attended by guests from many different countries. The guests had taken particular inspiration from a challenge by Dadi Janki to leave behind thoughts of weakness, and make the mental leap into recognising that pure, positive feelings are only a determined thought away.

"Every minute has felt like a gift. I was really impressed by the sweetness of the people I met here, and you can also feel the determination behind this, the power. This is more than all books, all lectures, all conferences - meeting people who have been living through this process, and who express it, and

who show what their life has become, and how they keep going.”

“I feel very happy and fulfilled. I really experienced peace, which is lacking in the way we live in the cities. What impressed me most was the feeling of seeing other people as soul to soul, not as role to role. That really means a lot to me. I am going to leave full of positive things - and I'll try to leave all the rest behind me, in the river!”

“I feel very honoured to be here. We have experienced a wonderful feeling of peace and quiet, and the warmth of people from all different places. I'm going to try to get rid of the negative, bit by bit - it's not all gone, but I'll drop it on my way. I'm going to continue to work this out, with meditation. It is a beginning.”

“I really didn't know what to expect when I came here. After the first couple of hours inside this place, I learned so much. I've been sorting out in my head what I need to change in my life. I do need to change some things. I know I have a lot of things I need to throw away.”

“I've learned a lot. I know there are many things I'd like to change in myself. And I'm open, that I will leave them behind and start a new life. You have put some light into my life.”

“When we first had a talk about why we were here, I mentioned that I really needed some time for contemplation and getting in touch with my source. I welcomed the opportunity of the free time to do that. I'm going to try to introduce that into my (supposedly) busy schedule. It's wonderful to know that there is an oasis of love and hospitality that I can come to when I need to get my energies recharged.”

“Being here has helped me to become a little more conscious.”

“The surroundings are so beautiful, but the whole atmosphere, and the people here, are beautiful and wonderful too. I have been doing meditation for the last few years, and didn't get anywhere. I have been going through so much stress and

anxiety recently. I knew in my heart that my thinking was not right, my behaviour was not right, my attitude was not right, towards my problem, towards my life. Now I have to grasp properly and act on what I have learned in the last three days. In fact I have grasped it, and I have to act on it now, otherwise for me there is no point in being here. I have decided that I am definitely going to change my life, from today. I must change it, to achieve what I want in my life now.

We needed to strengthen our own ability to respond to challenges at work and in the home by tapping the natural source of peace, beauty and power that lies within each of us.

The method is of spirituality, of mental peace and happiness, and of sharing one's experience with others and the happiness and love with others also. I need this very badly.”

“I am very happy to have been here. I am taking a lot with me, that I have to process when I go back. I want more information, and more contact. It was a very beautiful experience for me.”

“I felt a little empty, then refreshed and renewed. Now I feel like making my own effort again.”

“I was here for my first retreat in July this year. I left this house at that time completely filled with peace and happiness. I was invited again very suddenly, and when I came here, after one day I felt completely confused. I was a bit sad. I didn't know why I was here, what was the purpose.

Then we were taught about relationships, and not having expectations of others, but instead, of becoming active in giving to others. I think coming to this house could be a sort of relationship, and I had the expectation that coming back would automatically make me feel exactly the same as I had done the last time. But I have to play an active part for that. After I realised that, my stay here became very different, and now I am filled with happiness and quiet peace again.”

Were these responses typical? The answer is no: this group was exceptional in their consistently clear sense of not just having had a refreshing stay, but of feeling filled with the hope that they were taking away with them new strategies for a better life. Or perhaps it was an exceptional amount of exposure to Dadi Janki, one of the most experienced and convincing teachers, that produced such a result.

In his 'Calming Down' article, Mike George diagnosed one cause of our ills as an invasion of this planet by a race of highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art 'things', which we have invited into our homes as well as offices and factories. They seemed like a boon at first but gradually produced such an explosive pace of change that most of us couldn't keep up. He was referring to the computers and television screens that deal in mountains of information, across vast distances, at lightning speed, yet often seem to rob us of time rather than save it for us.

The solution, he wrote, was not to throw the machines out, but to cease being enslaved, ruled, influenced or impressed by them. Instead, we needed to strengthen our own ability to respond to challenges at work and in the home by tapping the natural source of peace, beauty and power that lies within each of us, beneath the surfaces on which we have become accustomed to live.

Five years on, with software complexity increasing, the Millennium Bug looming, and the Internet threatening to bring even bigger changes in our lives, that warning seems more timely and urgent than ever.

The Global Retreat Centre has a part to play in countering this and other threats to our peace of mind, which of course do not come from the 'things' themselves, but from the way we lose ourselves in them. On several different levels, a stay at the centre helps restore human values and strengths to their rightful place in our lives.

Neville Hodgkinson is a journalist and author of *Will to be Well* and *Aids - The Failure of Contemporary Science*.

Soul and Matter

Ken O'Donnell rediscovers the essential difference between the physical body and the non-physical spirit.

Stepping into the dimension of the spirit is a very subtle process, mainly because the mind is locked into a vision of reality that excludes eternity. Matter, the senses and things of immediate interest so dominate my thoughts that the very nature of existence becomes distorted. I see the world not as it is but as I am.

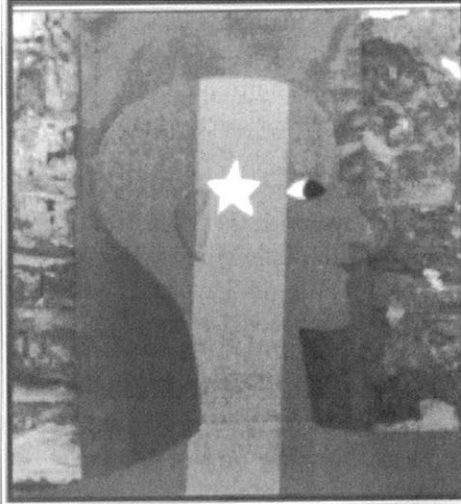
My life revolves within narrow limits, distinctions and desires as I play the game of labelling myself and others on the basis of purely physical characteristics. I divide the world according to sex, race, creed, nation, age and social status and put everyone into his or her little box. Because of such division there is conflict in and around me as I seek to defend the territory thus established - whether it be a role, a job, a position in society, the family name or a nation. "May no-one encroach upon my territory" is an unspoken sign planted in my heart. Taking off the glasses of what can be termed body-consciousness, through which I see and judge the world around, calls for some effort. To experience the soul or self in its true light requires a detailed understanding of the terms and processes used. But the very act of taking such a step opens up a whole new perspective of seeing and reacting to the world around me.

With insight into the true nature of things, the very same life that I am leading in terms of work, family and leisure, becomes the spring-board for my own transformation. Letting go of the consciousness of the limits of this physical body and experiencing the inner self or soul is the essence of Raja Yoga.

Disorder and tension on an individual and, consequently, social level are the result of ignorance of the



*When I look in a mirror,
I don't see my reflection
but that of my body.
The soul looks through
the windows of the eyes.*



self and the world around. The mind stays without rest, running, jumping and churning aimlessly, lashed by waves of feelings and emotions. Like a spider caught in its own web, I become entangled in nets, which are the consequences of my own

ignorance of the fundamentals of life.

In life many happenings cannot be explained solely in material terms. At certain points of crisis or inspiration, there are deep emotional and spiritual experiences, which separate me from the world around. I retreat at such times, into myself, into religious or philosophical books, into rituals or symbols, in order to understand them. I am subject to a perpetual commentary on life around me from my own thoughts, feelings and deductions.

These faculties of thinking and forming ideas, desiring and deciding (and all the different aspects, which constitute my individual personality) are non-physical, and yet real. Indeed, anything perceptible to me comes from two sources: what is detected by the physical senses and what arises from impressions recorded on these subtle faculties. The things that I can see, taste, hear, smell and feel, as well as the body itself, are formed of matter. But the subtle faculties of mind, intellect and personality are manifestations of what is called consciousness.

Consciousness is another word for soul or spirit. The soul is a subtle entity that cannot be measured by any physical process or instrumentation. The non-material part of each one of us exists, and is in fact the true self or what we simply call I. This I or soul, is perceptible only at the level of mind and intellect.

ATOM AND ATMA

Throughout history, scientists have built up knowledge of the laws of the physical universe on the foundation of atomic theory. The atom is seen to be a point source of energy, and different energy levels and vibrations between

neighbouring atoms give the appearance of form, colour and heat. Atomic theory appeared originally in Greece and in India.

The English word *atom* came from the Latin *atomus*, which means *the twinkling of an eye* and the Greek *atomos* meaning indivisible. The Greek word probably derives from the Hindi *atma*, which means *self* or *soul* and refers to the conscious energy of the human as being an indivisible and indestructible point of non-physical light.

It has been established that the entire material world I see around me as a variety of forms and colors, light and heat, is formed of these point-sources of physical energy. The most beautiful scene in nature is merely a pattern of energy waves and vibrations.

The sense organs select the vibrations and relay a message to the mind where all images are formed. The eyes see some of these patterns as light forms and colours, the nose receives odours, tastes and sensations are detected and transmitted to the mind. The human body is also a complex pattern of physical energies. Atoms come together to form the organic structures and inorganic minerals which perform the body's chemical interactions, thus forming the basis of the hormonal and nervous control of the body. What I see as old or young, ugly or beautiful, male or female, is also the effect of these differing levels of physical energies. However marvellous a machine the body may be, it is the presence of the soul which makes it function.

One of the basic differences between souls and atoms is that while souls can exercise choice of their movements, where to go and when to go somewhere, atoms cannot obviously exercise such choice. In a way you could say that a soul is a point-source of spiritual energy that has awareness of its own existence. Atoms do not.

DEFINITIONS

The word *atma* has three specific meanings - *I, the living being* and *the dweller*. Within this one word we get an insight into different aspects of the self: *I, the living being, am the dweller* within this physical body. The answer to the question, "Who am I?"

If every physical part of the body is an instrument, who or what is it that is using it?

becomes clear. I am the soul, the living and intelligent inner being. I inhabit and give life to the body. The body is the means through which I, the soul, express myself and experience the world around me. Instead of answering the question as to my identity by giving the name of the body, the job designation, nationality or gender, the real inner self can simply say, "I am the soul; I have a body."

THE SOUL IS NEITHER MALE NOR FEMALE

As an energy, the soul has within itself qualities that are both masculine and feminine. Though the soul is certainly affected by the gender of its body in the form of conditioning and social influences, those aspects are relatively superficial. The real self has no gender. The ancient Egyptians were strongly aware of this deep truth, as shown in the following excerpt of a conversation in the Egyptian Book of the Dead between Isis and her son Horus:

Horus: How are souls born, male or female?

Isis: Souls, my son Horus, are all equal in nature...

There are none among them either men or women; this distinction only exists between bodies, and not between incorporeal beings...

SYNONYMS FOR SOUL

The following words are essentially synonyms for the word *soul*:

Spirit - Being - Consciousness - Inner self - Anima/animus - Life energy - Essence - I

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'I' AND 'MY'

The two most common words in most languages are probably *I* and *my*. Our personal worlds almost revolve exclusively around them. I have to understand their deeper implications if I want to redesign my limits.

I normally use the word *my* to refer to all the things that are not me - my hand, my face, my leg or even my brain, my mind, my personality and so on. The next time I catch myself saying *my soul*, I could perhaps remember that I can't really say *my soul* if I am the soul.

The difference between *I* and *my* is the same as that between the soul and the body. The example of a knife illustrates this. I can use it to cut a tomato or to stab someone. The knife neither decides nor experiences, but can be washed easily under the tap. Now look at the fingers which held the knife. They neither decide nor experience the actions. They too can be washed under the tap. It's easy to realise that the knife is an instrument, but it is more difficult to realise that the fingers are instruments too, and not only the fingers but also the arms. The legs are instruments for walking, the eyes for seeing, the ears for hearing, the mouth for speaking, breathing and tasting, the heart for pumping blood and oxygen around the body, and so on. Even the brain is like a computer used to express all thought, word and action programs through the body and to experience the results. If every physical part of the body is an instrument, who or what is it that is using it?

Very simply it is *I, the self, the soul*. The soul uses the word *I* for itself and the word *my* when referring to the body; my hand, my mouth, my brain, and so on. I am different from my body.

Through the consciousness of *my*, I have spread myself far and wide -

not only with regard to the body and inner faculties, but in relation to possessions and relationships: - my house, my car, my son and so on.

With time, all of these things, which I try to hold to myself, slip through my fingers. I realise their temporary nature and, for want of available alternatives, I try to clutch onto them even more and so develop attachments and dependencies. While this identification persists, my innate qualities (i.e. what's really mine), are out of reach. When I assume my true identity as a spiritual being, then I also immediately have access to the love, peace, happiness and power that are part of me.

If I make a list of all the factors which create limits for me, it would probably include things like age, sex, health, family, profession, defects and weaknesses. By claiming ownership of all these through the word *my*, I set the boundaries within which I try to operate my life. Having set up my own fences, whenever sorrow appears, one or the other of these becomes the unwitting scapegoat.

Instead of pointing the finger of blame or complaining, I can adopt a more positive approach. I can be more realistic and accept them not as limiting factors but as instruments through which I can improve my experience of life. This same list can be the spring-board for my transformation and freedom.

I can make full use of the adult state or the energy of youth, as the case may be. I can take advantage of the positive characteristics of my gender while appreciating those of the other. My family and professional life can be experienced on another more elevated level. I can observe in my weaknesses and defects how much I have to learn about myself. The problem is not in the list of factors but in the consciousness I have towards them. It is a question of two words - *I* and *my*.

SOUL - POSITION, FORM AND ATTRIBUTES

The dualities of matter/anti-matter, sentient/insentient, physical/spiritual can be understood easily with the awareness of the mechanism by which

human consciousness operates through the body. The soul has three basic functions to perform: to give and maintain life, to express and experience its own unique life and to receive the rewards or fruits of past actions performed in previous existences.

POSITION

When I look in a mirror, I don't see my reflection but that of my body. The soul is actually looking through the windows of the eyes from some point inside the head. The sentient functions are controlled and monitored through the nervous and hormonal systems from a particular point in the area of the brain housing the thalamus, hypothalamus, pituitary and pineal glands. This region is known as the seat of the soul or the third eye. The connection between the physical and the non-physical is by the medium of thought energy.

When viewed from the front, this region appears to be between and slightly above the line of the eyebrows. Many religions, philosophies and esoteric studies place great importance on the third eye or eye of the mind. The Hindus use a tilak, a dot in red or sandalwood paste in the middle of the forehead. Christians also make the sign of the cross with their thumb in this region. The Muslims also touch that spot in their traditional salute. When anyone of any culture makes a foolish mistake, the person instinctively brings his hand to that spot. After all, it's not the body that makes the mistake, but the thinking being that is operating the body from that particular point. As the brain is the control centre for all of the various processes of the body - metabolism, the nervous, endocrine, immunological and lymphatic systems - it makes sense that the inner person be located somewhere in the brain.

Just as the driver in a car sits behind the wheel with the steering wheel in his hands, the soul sits in a specific point in the centre of the brain near the pineal body. This is important to know for meditation purposes because it is the place to which attention is first directed in the

effort to concentrate the thoughts: I am the soul, a tiny point of conscious light energy centred in the spot between the brows.

Whenever I say: I feel something within me, pointing to the heart, obviously it's not something within the chest. The physical heart is just an incredibly sophisticated pump for blood. It can even be transplanted! Within the real me, the living and thinking being, there is a centre of emotions, moods and feelings.

The sensations that I very obviously feel around the body are due to the total interconnectedness that exists between the soul and the matter that it is inhabiting, For example, when I am afraid of, say, a dog attacking me. The whole system is activated. From the control centre in the middle of the brain, the soul sends messages out all around the body. Adrenaline is liberated to give extra strength to the muscles. The heart starts to pump faster, the breathing becomes shallower and the palms begin to sweat. While it may seem that all the different organs have autonomous sensing and feeling systems, the whole operation is so split-second fast that the co-ordination of sensations and responses by the soul from its own special cockpit in the centre of the brain passes unnoticed. In this way, if I feel something in my heart for or from something or someone, it's really being processed by me, the thinking being, and then reflected in my heart.

FORM

All of the characteristics present in the soul are subtle or non-dimensional in nature - thoughts, feelings, emotions, decision-making power, personality traits and so on. If they are all without size, then it is reasonable to conclude that the conscious energy from which they emerge is also sizeless. For this simple reason it is eternal. Something which has no physical size cannot be destroyed.

As a soul I am neither diffused throughout the whole body nor am I an invisible or ethereal duplicate of the physical body. Even though this subtle form exists, it is the effect of the soul being in the physical form

and not the soul itself. Just as the sun is in one place and yet its light radiates throughout the solar system, the soul is in one place and its energy permeates the whole body.

To express something that exists but has no physical dimensions we can use the word *point*. The soul, therefore, is an infinitesimal point of conscient light. For the sake of having an image to fix our minds on we can say it's starlike in appearance. In deep meditation I can perceive the soul as an infinitesimal point of non-physical light surrounded by an oval-shaped aura.

INNATE QUALITIES OF THE SOUL

Everything I see has what can be called its acquired value and its innate or inherent value. The acquired value is that which it has picked up directly by association throughout its existence. The innate value is what it always is irrespective of its appearances. For example, the acquired value of gold changes with the fluctuations of the market place. Its real or innate value is that it's one of the most beautiful of minerals. It is extremely ductile and malleable and so on. If I were asked about the main qualities present in a harmonious relationship with someone, I could immediately reply love, patience, tolerance, understanding, empathy and so on. How do I know this? Is it purely from experience? Can I remember having really experienced any of these qualities in any relationship fully and constantly. Probably not.

In that case, where does this urge for rightness come from if not from an innate sense of what is true and good? How can I judge or perceive the level of peace, love or happiness in a projection of these same qualities

that are within me? It's as if they join together as a subtle ruler for measuring what goes on around me, so that necessary internal adjustments can be made according to the situation. If it is good or bad, peaceful or confused, my own innate qualities at least advise me as to what is going on.

To express something that exists but has no physical dimensions we can use the word point. The soul, therefore, is an infinitesimal point of conscient light.

The problem is that they are in a latent state and do not translate very easily into action. Though these qualities are the basis of my ideals, when I'm in a weakened state I am unable to bring them into practice at will, according to the demands of the moment. They need to be empowered.

One of the most immediate benefits of the practice of meditation then, is to improve the functioning of this inner ruler. My innate qualities are just waiting for a chance to manifest themselves. Like a light bulb without current, the possibility of lighting up my qualities exists, but they need to be connected to a source of power. This is exactly what meditation brings.

Innate attributes are properties that are immutable. It's impossible to take the blue out of the sky or sweetness out of honey. Blueness and sweetness are part of the unchanging make-up of sky and honey.

In the same way, in spite of whatever I have become as a human individual, my deep innate attributes are still the same ones that have always existed in me. It's my inner core of qualities that in fact inspires me to seek the ideal in whatever I do. If someone were to ask me a list of qualities that are important in a

relationship between two people, things like respect, honesty, sincerity, openness and so on would automatically spring to mind. Even if I have never experienced them in living memory, I still seek them. The impulse to seek and to dream comes from my own store of innate attributes that is just waiting to be found and brought into practical activity.

The innate qualities of the soul are those that are the most fundamental.

They are so basic that they themselves are the basis of all

virtues and powers.

- * Peace * Truth * Happiness
- * Love * Purity * Power
- * Balance

They are like primary colours, and virtues are secondary. just as green is made of blue and yellow, virtues such as patience, tolerance, courage, sweetness and so on are compounds of these basic qualities. Some examples:

- Patience - peace, love and power
- Courage - power and truth
- Discernment - truth, peace and balance

The objective of Raja Yoga meditation is to empower my own innate attributes so that my behaviour can be naturally virtuous.

Extracted from *Pathways to Higher Consciousness* by Ken O'Donnell, available from Brahma Kumaris Literature.



Clash of Two Cultures

You live in time; we live in space.
You're always on the move; we are always at rest.
Religion is our first love; we revel in metaphysics.
Science is your passion; you revel in physics.
You believe in freedom of speech;
you strive for articulation.
We believe in freedom of silence;
we lapse into meditation.
Self assertiveness is the key to your success;
self abnegation is the secret of our survival.
You're urged every day to want more and more;
we're taught from the cradle to want less and less.
Joie de vivre is your ideal;
conquest of desires is our goal.
In the sunset years of life, you retire to enjoy the
fruits of your labour;
we renounce the world and
prepare ourselves for the hereafter.

HARI DAM

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Each centre is a space in time where the limitless and timeless dimensions of 'inner space' are rediscovered and explored. Each centre is a place where being and doing, sound and silence, articulation and meditation, assertion and abnegation are integrated and balanced. They are places to retire and to repair, where less is more, where all superficial differences disappear, and the uniqueness, value and beauty of each individual is revealed.

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Happiness is.....

Sadly many of us continually postpone our happiness – indefinitely. It's not that we consciously set out to do so, but we keep convincing ourselves, "Someday I'll be happy". We tell ourselves we'll be happy when our bills are paid, when we get out of school, get our first job, a promotion. We convince ourselves life will be better after we get married, have a baby, then another. Then we are frustrated that the kids aren't old enough and we'll be more content when they are. After that we are frustrated that we have teenagers to deal with. We tell ourselves that our life will be complete when our spouse gets his or her act together, when we have a nicer car, are able to go on a nicer vacation, when we retire. The truth is there is no better time to be happy than right now. If not now, when? Alfred D'Souza once said, "For a long time it seemed to me that life was about to begin – real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be gotten through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that these obstacles were my life. This perspective helped me see there is no way to happiness – happiness is the way."

Happiness is not a destination, it is a journey. Happiness is not tomorrow, it is now. Happiness is not a dependency, it is a decision.

Happiness is good for your health

REMEMBERING happy moments in your life can boost your immune system for hours, scientists said today, writes Jo Revell.

The Associates for Research into the Science of Enjoyment — Arise — say two new studies have identified a link between mood changes and the way our body's chemicals respond.

They investigated the production of an antibody-secreting immunoglobulin A, which can protect against respiratory infections. Study groups were asked to recall either a happy event or an occasion when they had felt guilty.

In those recalling happy times, the amount of antibody doubled in 20 minutes. Three hours later, the immunity level was still raised. Traumatic or guilty memories appeared to suppress the immune function.