CHAPTER SIX

The Essence of Religion

IN THE preceding chapter, we sketched the main outlines of the Surat Shabd Yoga and briefly examined its outstanding features. We saw how it posits that God, when He projected himself into manifestation, took form as the Word, *Naam, Shabd, Udgit, Kalma, Saut or Sraosha,* and that these terms refer not to abstract concepts of Divine Will or Reason but to something more; a spiritual stream of celestial harmony radiant with effulgence. This stream is at the center of all creation, bringing into being its various planes, vitalizing and sustaining them. He, who under the guidance of one who has himself mastered the Way, can contact this current within, can transcend the physical world and steadily rise above all planes of relativity and, when he becomes one with It, reach back into Its very source thus escaping from the realms of limitation to that of Infinite Consciousness and Absolute Being.

To indicate that these teachings are not restricted to any one people or any one age but have a universal applicability, every important aspect was briefly illustrated from the sayings of mystics drawn from various religious traditions: Indian, Islamic and Christian. However, these sayings are only by way of illustrative references. If the tenets of the Surat Shabd Yoga are indeed universal, if they really point to absolute truth and are based not on dogma but on "facts," albeit of a supra-physical nature, but facts which can be verified by anyone

who is ready to undergo the discipline demanded for their study, then the inquiring seeker would surely assert that these tenets should, in some form or the other, be at the heart of all great religions, and he would desire a more systematic demonstration of this than has been possible in the foregoing account of the Surat Shabd Yoga. A comprehensive and detailed treatment of this subject is beyond the scope of this book, and at best we can only suggest some fruitful lines of enquiry, which those desiring to go further may pursue. Besides, it is a recurrent theme of all great Masters, that though their teachings are universal in nature and may be verified from the extensive scriptural literature* of the world, yet to confine oneself merely to learned interpretation is to miss completely the true import of their teachings. All that the seeker needs to do is to ascertain from past records that what he is being told is the most ancient of truths, so that he may take up the discipline required with full faith and without reservation. Final verification must be a matter of direct and first-hand inner experience and not one of bookish learning, which, when carried beyond its proper limit and made an end in itself, defeats its purpose and becomes a serious distraction from the goal.

I. Ancient Religious Thought: Indian, Chinese and Iranian

Hinduism

The Hindu religion is a vast ocean of religious thought, springing as it does from the earliest times, long before the dawn of history, and comprises in its multi-colored texture shade after shade, an endless variety of design and pattern as it grew in the human mind; from animism to Nature wor-

*For more details, the reader is invited to the book *Naam or Word* by the same author.

ship, from powers of Nature in the abstract to personified and concretized natural forms, from gods and goddesses to the one Supreme God, first personal, and then impersonal; from form to formless. The Hindu Pantheon offers a view of a vast and mighty host to the curious inquirer who pierces into the mists of the hoary past.

Heliolatry, the worship of *Helios* or the Sun, was a common practice with the people of the world. Sol or Sun has ever been an object of great veneration for man and has been adored and worshiped all the world over from time immemorial. The ancient Greeks and the Romans built temples to Apollo or Phoebus as they termed the Sun-god in their own time. In all their temples, the image or representation of the Sun-god occupied an important place in their hierarchy. There is a famous Sun-temple in Konark, in South India, and in the historic town of Mooltan or the land of the Sun, in the North. In addition, *Jog-maya* or *Jot-maya* temples dot the whole Indian subcontinent.

The ancient Greeks also spoke of *Shabd*. It is written of Socrates that he heard within him a peculiar sound which pulled him irresistibly into higher spiritual realms. Pythagoras also talked of Shabd, for he described God as "Supreme Music of the nature of Harmonies." God was to him, "Absolute Truth, clothed in light." When he commanded an eagle to fly down to him and a bear to stop ravaging Apulia, the wondering multitude inquired of him the source from where such powers came to him. He replied that he owed it all to the "Science of Light."

Again, in the Greek language we have the mystical word *Logos*. It comes from the root *lego* which means to speak and from it we have the common terms, monologue, dialogue, prologue, epilogue and so on. The Logos means and stands for the "Word" or "Reason." The term *Logos* also occurs in both Hebrew and Christian philosophy and theology and is used,

in its mystic sense, by the Hellenistic and Neo-platonist philosophers. The Christians use it to denote the second person of the Trinity.

The ancients in the West inherited this concept from their ancestors who, thousands of years before the Christian era, had come to acquire a great love and adoration for *Surya* which they regarded as the be-all and the end-all of all human endeavors in their search for the mighty power of God, and as a visible representation to this earth. They carried this notion along with them wherever they went, Eastward or Westward, and composed hymns and chanted psalms in praise of the glorious orb, the source of all life on this solar planet. Those who settled in Iran (Persia) and came subsequently to be known as Parsees, still worship the great deity in yet another form—fire—which they keep burning all the time in their temples as symbolic of the sacred flame that burnt in the human heart and always sprang heavenward. Ratu Zoroaster, the Iranian prophet of life and light, sang in loving and living faith of the greatness of the God of Light and taught the people to do so.

Agni or fire was a hidden secret with the gods, who guarded this mysterious power very jealously. It was, as the Greek legend goes, stolen by Prometheus and given to man, for which Jupiter, the father god, bound him to eternal torture. In Chapter VI of the Chhandogya Upanishad, it is said to be "the prime element whose creation made possible that of other elements, water, earth," etc.

The second branch of the Aryans which turned eastward into the Indo-Gangetic plain also referred lovingly to *Aditya;* and we have hymns in the Vedas addressed to *Hiranyagarbha, Savitar* and *Usha,* all of which stand for the One life-sustaining power, the Sun. The worshipful Masters of the Vedic age were, one and all, admirers of the purifying and healing attributes of the Sun-god, and so no wonder that we see many

hymns in the Vedic literature deifying the sun. In Book X, 121, we find:

In the beginning rose Hiranyagarbha, born as the only lord of all created beings;
He fixed and holdeth up this earth and heaven;
What god shall we adore with our oblation? . . .
What time the mighty water came, containing the Universal germ, producing Agni,
Thence sprang the God's One Spirit into being:
What god shall we adore with our oblation?

In another hymn, he is referred to as "the self-radiant wise Aditya."

In Book I, 113, we have a hymn to Dawn and in it occur, inter alia, the following lines:

This light is come, amid all lights the fairest; born is the brilliant, far-extending brightness.
Night, sent away for Savitar's uprising, hath yielded up a birthplace, for the morning . . .
Arise! the breath, the life, again hath reached us: darkness hath passed away, and light approacheth.
She for the sun hath left a path to travel; we have arrived where men prolong existence.

All this could be taken on the literal plane as little more than Nature-worship, an adoration of the sun, understandable among a people dependent upon agriculture for their existence. But ancient Indian literature has an elusive quality. It seems to teach us at one level, and when we have adjusted ourselves to it, it suddenly shifts us to another. He who can follow its subtleties finds in it a richness rarely to be met elsewhere. There is multiplicity of meanings, ranging from the physical to the cosmic and the spiritual, and from the literal to the symbolic and esoteric, which challenge us at multiple

levels of experience and offer us worthwhile rewards. Thus, when we begin studying these frequent references to the sun, we begin to see that the "sun" referred to is not always the center of our physical Universe, which we initially took it to be. Thus, in the Isha Upanishad, we are told:

The door of the True One is covered with a golden disk.
Open that, O Pushan, that we may see the nature of the True One.

After recounting such statements, when we read of Brahman or the Supreme One, as being *Jyotisvat,* full of light, and *Prakashvat,* endowed with splendor, we begin to discover in such terms an esoteric significance we earlier overlooked. This comes to a head when we read the *Gayatri,* the tenth mantra of the sixteenth sutra in the third mandala of the Rig Veda:

Muttering the sacred syllable "Aum" rise above the three regions,
And turn thy attention to the All-Absorbing Sun within.
Accepting its influence be thou absorbed in the Sun,
And it shall in its own likeness make thee All-Luminous.

This mantra is considered the most sacred, the *mool mantra* among the Vedic texts, and is taught for recitation among Hindus from an early age. Here, the inner spiritual meaning of the "Sun" becomes abundantly clear. The object of veneration is not that which provides us with light in the outside world but it is a principle that transcends the three planes of existence, the physical, the astral and the causal, and is the source of inner illumination. This principle is referred to as *Aum,* a term whose three letters suggest the three phases of

human experience: "A" referring to the waking state (*jagrat*), "U" the dream state (*swapna*) and "M" the deep sleep state (*sushupti*). The ultimate reality includes all three planes, and the three phases of human experience, yet goes beyond them. The silence that follows each recitation of the word *Aum* suggests the state of Turiya or Absolute Being, which is the indescribable source and end of everything. It is the Brahman, the All-transcending One, whose prime attribute is effulgence, but who is in himself even beyond this effulgence. Hence the mantra in its original Rig Veda form has another line added to it, which is given out only to sanyasins and chosen disciples—*Paro Raj-asal Savad Aum*: He who transcends the effulgence is this Aum.

The Gayatri not only clarifies the routine implications of the references to the sun, abundant in the Vedas, but it also highlights another recurring theme in Hindu thought. Its wide imagery and popularity bring us to the question of mantras and their place in Indian religious practice. The mantras or verbal formulae in Sanskrit verse or prose are classified into two types: those that are meant simply for recitation and need not be understood, and those that are divine invocations, whose import must be known in order to enable the devotee to keep his attention focused on the divine object. The various mantras each have their individual benefits. There are those whose mastery or *siddhi* gives one contact with magical powers of a lower order (*tamsic*); there are others that bestow strength and courage and power (*rajsic*); and finally those whose sole object is spiritual upliftment (*satvic*). Among the last, as we have already seen, the Gayatri is the most venerated.

The mode of mantras, since time immemorial, stresses the spiritual importance of Sound. If the chanting of certain verbal formulae brings magical potential or assists spiritual advancement, then there must be latent in Sound itself an

esoteric power. This is why Vak Devi, the goddess of speech, was held in high esteem. Each word has its unique character and place, but of all words *Aum* is the most sacred. We have already examined some of its symbolic meanings. To these we may add still others. It is not only a term that connotes the qualities of the Absolute Brahman, but one that also denotes Brahman Himself. In the Rig Veda, we have:

Prajapati vai idam agref aseet
Tasya vag dvitya aseet,
Vag vai parmam Brahma.

("In the beginning was Prajapati, the Brahman, with whom was the Word and the Word was verily the Supreme Brahman.") This text remarkably parallels the opening of the Gospel according to St. John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Thus *Aum* becomes Brahman as manifesting Itself in the Word, and in the Taittriya Upanishad, It is referred to as the "Sheath of Brahman," as something which takes Its life from Brahman and contains Him. This aspect is made even clearer in the Sam Veda:

Brahman is at once Shabd and Ashabd both,
And Brahman alone vibrates in space.

In other words, the Absolute One is not only inner effulgence but also beyond it, as suggested in the Gayatri. He is with the Word, the Shabd or *Aum*, yet beyond It. Both Sound and Light are in fact referred to as His prime manifestations. The Gayatri recommends that while concentrating on the Divine Word *Aum*, we fix our attention upon the inner Sun, while in the Chhandogya Upanishad, we are told that *Naad*, or the divine music, springs from the Universal Sun (of Brahmand), a secret that was given by Angris Rishi to

Krishna, the darling son of Devki (III:17-6 and 93). It was this mystic insight to be found in the *srutis,* the scriptures revealed through inner hearing, that led to the development of what came to be called the *Sphota-vada* or the philosophy of the Word. The teachers of this path preached that the Absolute was Wordless, imageless, indescribable and unconditioned. When He came into manifestation, He projected Himself as the *Sphota* or the Word, radiant with Light and vibrating with indescribable Music. The seeker wishing to transcend the relative plane to the Eternal and Unchanging must contact the Sphota or the Word Power through which he can rise to the Brahman who is beyond Shabd or Sphota. The Path of God-realization is certainly not easy. It is difficult to have access to, difficult to cognize, difficult to abide by and difficult to cross; yet it is the only possible Way, for one who is true to his Guru and His cause.

Such indeed are the truths that were taught and practiced by the forest sages of ancient India. But how much of them has survived since then? For the most part we find rituals such as the blowing of conches, ringing of bells, waving of lights, and the worship of the sun. These bear testimony to the mysteries within, but how few are conscious of their real significance? In spite of Lord Krishna's powerful and lasting influence which brought the best of the Vedantic teachings to the heart of the common man, religion in India as elsewhere has tended to degenerate into mere caste and ceremony. The light and music outside are worshiped, but the flaming and sounding Word within, toward which they point, goes unheeded; "the light crieth in the darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not."

Buddhism

The teachings of Buddha represent in many ways a reaction against the religious traditions, some distorted, of the

Vedas, and yet they confirm many of the basic tenets that we have already examined. The life of Buddha himself has become a legend embodying in a vivid and striking way, man's need to turn from the phenomenal, outer world, to the noumenal, inner one. With his royal lineage and with everything that could make life happy at home, Buddha's going out of the palace into the wilderness as a mendicant in quest of Truth was an unprecedented sacrifice. It indeed was a heroic endeavor on his part to wander for six long years, and to resort to all sorts of austerities and physical sufferings, reducing himself to a bare skeleton, and this compels deep and abiding admiration and adoration. But neither the life of luxury at home nor of tapas in the jungles could help him solve the problem of the misery, distress, sickness and death, which he had witnessed as the common lot of man's life in the physical world. It was a momentous decision of his to forsake the ascetic life as he had done the one of luxury before. Seated under the Bodhi tree in Gaya, in calm contemplation, he gave himself up to the divine influence that operates of itself and by itself when one resigns his self completely to the holiest and the highest in Nature, when suddenly there flashed upon his inward eye the much sought solution to the most baffling problem of life, in a seriated chain of cause and effect: (1) the undeniable fact of suffering, (2) the cause of suffering, (3) the possibility of removing suffering, and lastly, (4) the path that leads to freedom from suffering. This was the Path of the Golden Mean, between self-indulgence and self-mortification, both of which were equally painful and unprofitable in the search after truth. Hence it was given the name of the Middle Path, consisting of righteousness in the eightfold aspects of life, which have already been described in the earlier part of this book.

This, in brief, was the purport of the Master's first sermon at Sarnath, delivered to the first five *Bhikkus*. The simple and

direct teachings, free from sophistications of the priestly order —the Brahmins—who had made rites and rituals as the be-all and end-all of man's salvation, had a tremendous influence on the people as a whole. No wonder then that the new faith had a large number of converts from the ruling chiefs down to the laymen, who eagerly took to the yellow robe.

This is the outer aspect as in all other religions of the world before and after Buddha's time, and it worked well with the masses, for it gave them a clear perspective of life and life's way. The intricate Vedic problems, the Vedic Pantheon and the Vedic mode of worship were bypassed in a single sweep, and the people were asked to evolve and elevate their conduct and everything else would follow of itself. This was, in a way, the strict observance of yamas and niyamas that go to make for Sadachar (right conduct), the first and foremost step in the right direction.

It does not mean that Buddha denied the existence either of God, or of the steps leading up to Him on the spiritual path. A mere public non-affirmation of something of higher value and vital interest far ahead of his time and which the common man was not yet prepared and ready to accept does not mean the negation of the same. The higher Path was of course left for the chosen few and kept for the elect, who were worthy of the mystical teaching relating to transcendental hearing, as we read in the *Surangama Sutra,* wherein are described the spiritual experiences of the highest *Bodhisatvas* and *Mahasatvas* and great *Arhats,* like Maha Kasyapa, Sariputra, Samant Bhadra, Metaluniputra, Maudgalyana, Akshobya, Vejuria, Maitreya, Mahasthema-Prapta and others. All of them in their accounts testify, in one form or another, to the purple-golden brightness, the infinitude of pure mind-essence, the transcendental perception, the transcendental and intrinsic hearing experienced by the inner mind, leading to the indescribable and mysterious Sound of Dharma

like the roar of a lion or the beating of drums; the penetrating power of the element of fire, making the intuitive insight luminously clear and enabling them to view all the Deva realms and finally the Buddha-land of Immovability, laying bare to the core the very heart of balanced and rhythmic ethereal vibrations. They also speak of the "Supreme, wonderful and perfect Samadhi of Transcendental Consciousness" called the "Diamond Samadhi," that is attainable by means of "Intrinsic Hearing," when the mind, freed from mental contaminations, loses itself into the "Divine Stream."

After listening to the various personages, Manjusri, the prince of Dharma, laid great stress on attaining "the supreme purity of mind-essence and its intrinsic brightness shining spontaneously in all directions," and exhorted the Great Assembly "to reverse the outward perception of hearing and to listen inwardly to the perfectly unified and intrinsic Sound of the mind-essence." He then summed up the subject in the following memorable words:

> This is the only way to Nirvana, and it has been followed by all the Tathagatas of the past. Moreover, it is for all the Bodhisatvas and Mahasatvas of the present and for all in the future if they are to hope for perfect enlightenment. Not only did Avalokiteswara attain perfect enlightenment in long ages past by this Golden Way, but in the present, I also, am one of them . . . I bear testimony that the means employed by Avalokiteswara is the most expedient means for all.*

Again, the contemplators in the Hinayana school of Buddhism were also called *Shravaks* which means "hearers," i.e., hearers of the inner Sound-principle.

But after the passing away of the Lord, the secret teachings given by him to the chosen few gradually disappeared, and

* For a fuller account in this connection, see the section "Evidence from Various Religions" in *Naam or Word* by the same author.

Buddhism like all other religions after having served the great need of the hour, now remains just a collection of dogmas and beliefs and offers little solace to the seekers after Truth, which comes only from a Truth-realized soul, a real saint with spiritual attainment and inner experience of the Reality.

Taoism

Turning to China, we find the best in Buddhist thought passing into the religious traditions of the Chinese. But along with this, we may note the message taught on his own by Lao Tze, the father of Chinese Mysticism (*Hsuanchiao*) or Taoism. The term *Tao* meaning "road" or way, denotes the hidden "principle of the universe."

Lao Tze speaks of Tao as "Absolute Tao" which is the "Essence" and "Quintessence" (the spiritual truth) quite apart from and yet immanent in its manifestations. Just as Indian mystics had distinguished between the *Aum* that we chant and the *Aum* that is the Indescribable, Inexpressible, Wordless Word, so too Lao Tze tells us:

The Tao that can be told of
Is not the Absolute Tao;
The names that can be given
Are not Absolute Names.

Of the character of Tao, it is further said:

Tao is all-pervading
And Its use is inexhaustible!
Fathomless!
Like the fountainhead of all things.

Again:

The Great Tao flows everywhere,
(Like a flood) It may go left or right.
The myriad things derive their life from It,
And It does not deny them.

And again:

The Tao never does,
Yet through It everything is done.

In Book II, dealing with the application of Tao, is given the Principle of Reversion:

Reversion is the action of Tao,
Gentleness is the function of Tao,
The things of this world come from Being,
And Being comes from Non-Being.

Tao is the source of all knowledge:

Without stepping outside one's door,
One knows what is happening in the world.
Without looking out of one's window,
One can see the Tao of Heaven.
The further one possesses knowledge,
The less one knows.
Therefore the sage knows without running about,
Understands without seeing,
Accomplishes without doing.

The Grand Harmony of Tao, the mysterious secret of the universe, becomes manifest when:

When the mystic virtue becomes clear, far-reaching,
And things revert back (to their source),
Then and then only emerges the Grand Harmony.

Of his own teachings (as of the great sages), he said:

My teachings are very easy to understand and very easy to practice,
But no one can understand them and none can practice them.
In my words there is a principle,

In the affairs of man there is system,
Because they know not these
They also know me not.
Since there are few that know me,
Therefore I am distinguished.
Therefore the sage wears a coarse cloth,
But carries jade within his bosom.

And finally, speaking of the Way to Heaven, he says:

True words are not fine sounding,
Fine-sounding words are not true.
A good man does not argue;
He who argues is not a good man.
The wise one does not know many things;
He who knows many things is not wise.
The sage does not accumulate (for himself).
He lives for other people,
And grows richer in himself;
He gives to other people,
And has greater abundance.
The Tao of Heaven
Blesses, but does not harm.
The way of the sage
Accomplishes, but does not contend.

From the above, it would be clear that Tao is the Way; the Way to Reality, the ineffable and transcendent, the very ground of all existence, the womb from which all life comes into being. It comes only through the cultivation of stillness, or ridding the mind of the mind-stuff, a stillness which but a few can practice, enjoy and radiate to others. The process of approach to inwardness lies through reversion and purification of the spirit by putting the "self" aside. "Bide in silence, and the radiance of the spirit shall come and make its home." It is by the alert watch-and-wait method that the mind becomes

blank and still. It is to such a mind, that Nature yields her secret. *We Wei* or "Creative Quietude," which comprises and connotes at once "supreme activity" and "supreme relaxation," is vitally necessary for the realization of Tao. It is "life lived beyond tension," that acts as a magic spell. Tao works without working and can never be learned and so "a sensible man prefers the inner to the outer eye." The Way to Tao is ever in concord with nature and comes by a drive toward simplicity. It is a way of life to be lived that brings in the all-embracing continuity of Tao.

But now, Taoism without Lao Tze has lost its original deep meaning and has acquired a secondary sense, denoting just the Way of the Universe, or the Way according to which an individual may order his life, and it is difficult to see how far one can by himself come to Tao by ordering his life without a Master-soul to put him on the Path.

Zoroastrianism

What the Hindus refer to as *Aum, Naad, Shabd,* the Buddhists describe as the Lion roar of Dharma, and Lao Tze as Tao, Ratu Zarathustra, the ancient Persian sage, speaks of as *Sraosha,* or that which is heard:

> *I cause to invoke that Divine Sraosha (i.e. the Word) which is the greatest of all divine gifts for spiritual succour.*
>
> Ha 33:35

> *The Creative Verbum;*
> *Assimilating one's unfolding self with*
> *His all-pervading Reality,*
> *The Omniscient, Self-existent Life-giver has framed this mystic Verbum and its melodious rhythm,*
> *With the Divine Order of personal self-sacrifice for the Universe, unto the self-sublimating souls.*

He is that person who, with the Enlightened Superb Mind can give both these (Mystic Verbum and Divine Order) through his gracious mouth unto the mortals.

Ha 29:7

In Gatha Ushtavaiti, Zoroaster proclaims:

Thus I reveal the Word which the Most Unfolded One has taught me,
The Word which is the best for mortals to listen.
Whosoever shall render obedience and steadfast attention unto Me, will attain for one's own self the All-Embracing Whole Being and immortality;
And through the service of the Holy Divine Spirit Will realize Mazda Ahura (Godhead).

Ha 35:8

But today we see only the symbolic fire burning all the time in the Parsi temples and the Parsi households and the chanting of psalms and hymns regardless of the living Sraosha or the Creative Verbum, which the noble Iranian himself had practiced for a number of years on Mt. Alburz and of which he taught the people, as opposed to the worship of the ancient gods of Babylon and Nineveh. Bound however to the fiery symbol of the original Sraosha, it is no wonder that the Parsis are now known as "fire-worshipers."

Thus we see that each saint or sage, in his time, gave to the world what he had himself experienced, in a form that could be easily understood and assimilated by the people in general. Each one of them is worthy of the highest respect for his contribution to the sum total of spiritual knowledge that we have, but a real insight into this knowledge and actual experience of the spiritual truths cannot be had from the past Masters, for they cannot now come down to the physical plane to give a living contact of the holy Word to the people and

establish them in communion with the Holy Spirit, call it by whatever name one may like. This needs the touch of a living Master, who like the past Masters is himself in constant touch with the Word, for all life comes from life as light comes from light.

II. Christianity

Jesus Christ was essentially a man of the East, and his teachings are imbued with oriental mysticism. It is even speculated that he spent many of his early years (on which the Gospels are silent) in India, and learned much from the Yogins and the Buddhist monks, in his travels from place to place. He perhaps even started his teachings right in India and may have had a foretaste of persecution from the Brahminical order and the so-called high class social circles for his catholicity of vision, for he did not believe in class barriers and preached the equality of man.*

His contribution to the religious thought of the world may be seen in the emphasis he laid on the need for Universal love, and the Kingdom of God within man; the two cardinal principles known to the ancients long before, but forgotten and ignored in practice.

> *Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the Prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.*
>
> Matthew 5:17

Let us examine some of the pertinent sayings which reveal that Jesus was conversant with the ancient religious thought and practiced the Path of the Masters of the Audible Life Current, sayings which are often ignored or misconstrued by those studying his teachings today:

* Cf. Nicholas Notovitch, *The Unknown Life of Christ,* Chicago: Indo-American Book Co., 1894.

The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.

MATTHEW 6:22-23

Obviously, "the eye" refers to "the single eye" and the words "if thine eye be single," mean concentrated awareness within at the center between and at the back of the eyes. Again, the words "if thine eye be evil" refer to a state of mental dispersion without, as opposed to concentration within, and the result will certainly be "darkness"—darkness born of ignorance about the true and real values of life, for this is the greatest ill of the soul.

St. Luke then sounds a note of warning when he says:

Take heed therefore, that the light which is within thee be not darkness.

LUKE 2:35

What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light; and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops.

MATTHEW 10:27

Here are the words of advice from Jesus to his elect, the chosen few, viz., to carry to the people openly (in light) the significance of what they heard in "darkness," that is in secret meditation, and to tell of the divine melody that they heard in the ear by means of transcendental hearing.

But hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive.

MATTHEW 13:14

The idea conveyed is of the esoteric nature of the spiritual science which can be experienced in the depths of the soul in

the human laboratory of the body, and cannot be understood on the intellectual level or the level of the senses.

St. Matthew then goes on to explain the matter:

> *For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear; and have not heard them.*
>
> MATTHEW 13:17; LUKE 10:24

In clear and unambiguous words, we have a reference to the inner spiritual experience, a realization of the Kingdom of Light and Harmony, which a real Master like Jesus could make manifest to his disciples.

Like other seers, Jesus gave a mystical experience to his sincere disciples. To the multitude, he always talked in parables, like those of the mustard seed, the fig tree, the ten virgins, etc., with which the Gospels abound.

In a picturesque parable, he explains the sowing of the Word in the hearts of the people, and tells us that the Word sown by the wayside is generally stolen by Satan from the heart; that the Word sown on stony ground takes no roots, endureth for a while and is washed away by the afflictions and persecutions for the Word's sake; that the Word sown among thorns is choked by worldly cares, deceitfulness and lusts of the flesh, and finally, the Word sown on good ground, such as those who hear the Word and receive, brings forth fruit (Mark 4:14-20).

The Path that Jesus taught is one of self-abnegation and of rising above body-consciousness, a process which is tantamount to the experience of death-in-life.

> *Then Jesus said unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*
> *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and*

whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

MATTHEW 16:24-26

It means one has to sacrifice the outer man, consisting of the flesh and the carnal mind, for the sake of the Inner man or soul. In other words, he has to exchange the life of the senses for the life of the spirit.

Again, the love of God is to be made a ruling passion in life:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

MATTHEW 22:37

St. Mark goes further and adds, "and with all thy strength" (Mark 12:30).

This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

MATTHEW 22:37-40; MARK 12:30-31; LUKE 10:27

The principle of love is still further amplified as follows:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.

MATTHEW 5:44

And why all this?—in order to gain perfection in the likeness of God:

Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

MATTHEW 5:48

In St. Luke, Chapter Three, we are told that "the Word of

God came to John son of Zacharias in the wilderness," and John while preaching the baptism of repentance for remission of sins, told the wondering crowd, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh . . . he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire" (Luke 3:2-3, 16).

We have to mark carefully the words "baptize by the Holy Ghost" and "fire," for one refers to the heavenly music (the Holy Word) and the other is symbolic of the heavenly Light, and these are the twin principles of Sound and Light, the Primal manifestations of Godhead, or God's Power behind the entire creation.

The way to the Kingdom of God can be opened unto him who knows how to "ask" for it, how to "seek" it out and how to "knock" at the gate. In these three simple words, St. Matthew in Chapter Seven and St. Luke in Chapter Eleven have summed up what the aspirant has to do. Unfortunately, we do not yet know where the gate to be knocked at lies. Guru Nanak also emphatically declares:

O ye blind, ye know not the gate.

About this gate, St. Matthew tells us:

> *Enter ye in at the strait gate . . . Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*
>
> MATTHEW 7:13-14

It is essentially a path of conversion, for no one can enter into the Kingdom of God unless he is converted and becomes as a little child (Matthew 18:3), i.e., leaves off his vanities, becomes meek, pure, simple and innocent like a little child. St. Luke elaborates on this theme in Chapter 18:15-17, for when the disciples rebuked them that had brought infants along, Jesus called them unto him and said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such

(like-minded) is the Kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

In St. John, Chapter One, we come to an elaborate exposition of the teachings of Christ. He begins his gospel with the memorable words, the intrinsic significance of which few have cared to grasp:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.
In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.
And the Light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . .
That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.
He was in the world and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. . . .
And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.

In the above statement of St. John, there cannot be any doubts about the nature of the Word. It is clearly the light and life of the world, the Creative Life-principle in which we live, move, and have our being. It is the Spirit of God, the very essence of the soul but now lost in the mighty swirl of the world and all that is worldly. It is only the contact with the Spirit that shows the way back to God and thus is the true religion. This contact is termed variously as the second birth, the resurrection, or the coming into life again. Addressing Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, Jesus said:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born

again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God . . . .
(Mark the word "see.")
Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God . . . . (Mark the word "enter.")
Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again.

JOHN 3:3, 5, 7

Jesus compares the one born of the spirit with the wind which "bloweth where it listeth, for thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell where it cometh, and whither it goeth" (John 3:8).

Elsewhere, he speaks of the holy Word as the "living water," the water that springs up into "everlasting life" (John 4:10, 14).

Jesus speaks of himself as the "bread of life," the "living bread" come down from heaven; and asks his disciples to eat "the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood," for without these, "ye have no life in you" (John 6).

These in brief are the essential teachings of Christ, the Master Christian, but not of institutional Christianity. Most of the Christian doctrines were formulated not by Jesus but by St. Paul, who turned Christ into the sacrificial lamb to atone for the sins of the world, and around this central idea, as borrowed from Judaism and the cults flourishing around the Mediterranean at that time, there has grown a mass of ritual and ceremony.

The tenets of Christ remain as excellent moral precepts and doubtlessly point the way to the inner realization, but cannot in themselves put the seeker on the Path of realization, for they now lack the living impulse and the pulsating touch of the teacher, who having completed the job assigned to him in his own time, cannot now initiate and lead the people and

make Truth real to them by bringing them face to face with Reality. Of all the mystical teachings of Christ, we now find but the symbolic lighting of candles in the churches and the ceremonial ringing of the big bell at the time of service. Few, if any, know the real significance behind these rituals, which are the outward representations of the twin principles of Light and Sound, or the primordial manifestations of the Godhead, responsible for all that exists in the Universe, seen and unseen. Some of the great church dignitaries, when asked, say that the bell is pulled simply to call men to prayer, and that to speak of God as the Father of Lights (James 1:17), is but a figurative form of speech to denote his greatest gifts (of the lights of reason and intellect). With hardly any experience of the inner truths, they take the words literally and try to explain things theoretically.

Jesus himself in no ambiguous words declared:

> I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD: *he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*
>
> JOHN 8:12

To speak of oneself as the "light of life" can have no reference to the light of the sun, even though the solar light may in the physical world be a source of life-giving energy. In Matthew 13:14, Jesus goes on to clarify the position and warns against literal interpretation of his words, when he draws the distinction between "hearing" and "understanding" and between "seeing" and "perception." It is only the awakened souls, the Masters of Truth, in living touch with the Reality, who hold the key to the Kingdom of the Spirit and can draw forth an individual, now completely lost in the life of the senses, and rediscover for him the great heritage of All-life and All-light, for then it is said that, "The eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be un-

stopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and then the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isaiah 35:5-6).

How few of us really comprehend and appreciate the inner significance of the words of Jesus. We are content only with the ethical side of his teachings, which of course was a necessary accompaniment to the spiritual. The ethical tenets have been widely propagated and have even been assiduously kept alive, for they mark a great advance indeed in the moral scales of human values since the days of Moses. But by themselves, they fail to account for declarations like those about the "Day of Judgment," or "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," or "God is Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth." If such sayings were to be taken in their literal sense, it would be to reduce them to meaninglessness. The "Day of Judgment" has failed to come, in spite of the prophecy of its proximity, and either Christ was speaking in ignorance or we have failed to comprehend his real meaning. There is behind whatever he said always an inner meaning that is clear to those who have had the same mystic experiences, but baffle those who attempt to interpret it in terms of intellect or even intuition.

Not having direct inner perception (not to be confounded with philosophic speculation or intuitive insight), we attempt to interpret the significance of the teachings left to us in terms of our own limited experience. What was meant as a metaphor we take as literal, and the supersentient descriptions we reduce to metaphors. We easily forget that when Jesus said that he was "the light of the world," the "Son of God," and one who would not leave or forsake his disciples even unto the ends of the world, he spoke not in his mortal capacity, but like all other great Masters, as one who had merged with the Word and become one with It. Forgetting this, instead of following him on the spiritual path he showed, we think of him as a

scapegoat for bearing our sins and as a means of evading the inner spiritual challenge.

III. Islam

As the name indicates, Islam is the religion of peace and good will for all who believe in the Prophet and follow his behests. Every religion that comes into being fulfills the purpose of God, the need of the hour, and fills a gap in the religious history of man. Prophet Mohammed too came at a time and in a place which was stinking with rank superstition, idolatry, social degradation and moral bankruptcy of the virile Arab race, debased as their brethren, the Jews, and other races had sometimes been. Both Arabs and Jews are Semitic in origin and are the descendants of Abraham: the one from Ishmael, banished eastward, and the other from his brother Isaac, who remained in the general area of Palestine. The rough and sturdy Bedouin tribes of the desert, owing allegiance to none but Mammon and Bacchus, were steeped in utter ignorance and given over heart and soul to warring against one another. It was to save such people that Mohammed, a deeply religious shepherd-boy, was chosen by the most High as His Elect, to carry out the fiat of the most Merciful among His creatures. The call to the Ministry of God came to him only after he had practiced intense spiritual discipline for several years in the rough and barren cave—Ghar-i-Hira—in the suburbs of Mecca.

He started his mission in the true spirit of humility, not to work wonders and offer miracles, which he always decried and desisted from, but as a simple preacher of God's words, a common man like anyone else. His message was essentially that of One God, for he emphatically declared:

> *There is no God but God and Allah is His Name.*
> *Mohammed is but His messenger, or message-bearer.*

On this fundamental basis of monotheism, he built his sys-

tem of ethical teachings and democratic brotherhood. This was, indeed, the need of the time, and he admirably fulfilled it. To the barbarous, crude and intellectually semi-developed race, he could hardly offer metaphysical postulates for their consideration, specially when even his simple teachings evoked derision and ridicule from the people, and fierce vilification, leading in time to open hostility, that forced him and his followers to flee to Medina for safety. It was in the year 622 A.D. when the band of the faithful migrated from Mecca, and was followed by a period of hard struggle for the newly born faith, for the preservation and propagation of which, the Prophet had to unsheath the sword in self-defense. The process of consolidation took about a hundred years of relentless fighting, during which was carved a mighty empire from East to West, the Indian Ocean on the one hand and the Atlantic Ocean on the other.

The Koran or the Islamic Bible is a great wonder and an outstanding miracle that surpassed everything else of that period. It has one hundred and forty-four Suras or chapters, each with verses varying from two hundred and eighty-six to six, the number of verses going down in a descending order. It is in an elegant and polished Arabic and was revealed in parts to the unlettered Prophet when in moments of intense meditation, by Gabriel the Archangel of God, whose voice, originating in the reverberation of bells, would gradually assume sound, shape and form.

The simple teachings of the Koran center around *Allah* (God), His *Makhluq* or the created world, *Insan* (Man) and *Qiamat* or the doomsday. Since Allah is real and basically good, so is everything else created by Him. As all life is individual, so everyone is to render an account for his deeds in life, for he who wanders from the path has to bear the full responsibility for his deviation in the after-life, on the day of reckoning or *qiamat*.

The Path of peace and righteousness for Man is defined as one dedicated to (i) Allah or God; (ii) *Namaz* or prayer, which is enjoined at least five times a day whether standing, sitting, kneeling or lying down (to signify constant remembrance), and which may be performed anywhere by just spreading the prayer-carpet (*Sajadah*) and facing Mecca, the one common center of adoration for the faithful; (iii) *Zakaat* or charity of one-fourth of one's effect's once a year, for the poor and the needy, so that all may share jointly as members of the same human family; (iv) *Roza* or fast, during the month of Ramazan, so that the faithful may know what hunger is and learn to alleviate the sufferings of the hungry and also develop spiritual discipline, love of God, and compassion for their brethren, and lastly (v) *Haj* or performance of pilgrimage to Mecca, the Jerusalem of the faithful, at least once in one's lifetime, in simple sheet clothing, similar for all, thus making the rich and the poor alike, at least for the time being.

These in brief are the social teachings of Islam, designed for the betterment of the Arabic society. But there is in the Koran not much mention of the spiritual practices of the Prophet himself, which transformed a simple camel-driver into a Prophet-preacher and a statesman of high order. This once again brings into bold relief the ancient formula that there is some knowledge, by knowing which all else becomes known, that brings about complete identification with the heart of the Universe in a state of *maraqba* or meditation. We are told by the Master-saints that the practice in the solitary *Ghar-i-Hira* (cave of Hira), was no other than that of *Shughal-i-Nasiri,* or the Sound that works as an open sesame to the Kingdom of Allah.

Sheikh Mohd. Akram Sabri tells us that the Prophet practiced communion with *Awaz-i-mustqim* for fifteen years before he started receiving messages from God. We also learn that

the Prophet accomplished *Shaqul-qamar,* i.e., he broke the moon in twain astride a milk-white charger *barq,* which figuratively and literally means lightning. These are clear indications of the inner spiritual experiences of those who travel the Path of the Sound Current and who know that they have to cross the star and the moon in their spiritual journey. Today, we see the symbolic representations of this in the star and the crescent moon on Muslim banners, Muslim coinage and postage stamps, etc. Again, the appearance of the moon on the *Id* days is always hailed with rejoicing and acclamation, and everywhere the people of the Mohammedan religion anxiously wait and watch from the housetops to see the dawning of the new moon on the horizon, little knowing the inner meaning that it conveys. Bound to the Book, they are rightly called the *Kitabis* or the people of the Book. Mohammed may be the last in the chain of the Prophets who have come, but the Koran enjoins one to seek some mediator for contact with God.

Apart from these references, we have the incontrovertible testimony of the Muslim mystics or *Sufis,* who have, in unmistakable words, spoken highly of the saving life-line as *Kalam-i-Qadim, Bang-i-Ilahi, Nida-i-Asmani, Saut-i-Sarmad,* all signifying the Abstract Sound (*Ism-i-Azam*), the one creative life-principle in all nature—the *Kalma,* which created fourteen *Tabaqs* or Regions. To this class of mystics belong Shamas Tabrez, Maulana Rumi, Hafiz Shirazi, Abdul Razaq Kashi, Inayat Khan, Baba Farid, Bulleh Shah, Shah Niaz, Hazrat Abdul Qadar, Hazrat Mian Mir, Hazrat Bahu, Hazrat Nizamud-din and many others, who all practiced *Sultan-ul-Azkar* (the highest Sound Principle). The *Fukra-i-Kamil,* travelers in the domain of *Marfat,* or true wisdom, bypass both *Shariat* and *Tariqat,* the paths of scripture, as well as *Hadis* or tradition.

Hazrat Inayat Khan in his book *The Mysticism of Sound*

speaks of the creation as the "Music of God," and tells us that *Saut-i-Sarmad* is the intoxicating vintage from the Garden of God.

All space, he says, is filled with Saut-i-Sarmad or the Abstract Sound. The vibrations of this Sound are too fine to be either audible or visible to the material ears or eyes, since it is even difficult for the eyes to see the form or color of the ether vibrations on the external plane. It was Saut-i-Sarmad, which Mohammed heard in the cave of Hira, when he became lost in his ideal. The Koran refers to it as *Kun-feu-kun*—Be and all became. Moses heard this very Sound on Koh-i-Toor or Mount Sinai, when in communion with God. The same Word was audible to Christ when absorbed in his heavenly Father in the wilderness. Siva heard the same *Anhad-Naad* in the Himalayas. The flute of Krishna is allegorically symbolic of the same Sound. This Sound is the source of all revelation to the Masters to whom it is revealed from within and, therefore, they know and teach the one and the same Truth for it is in this abstract reality that all the blessed ones of God unite.

This Sound of the Abstract is always going on within, around and about man. Those who are able to hear it and meditate on it are relieved from all worries, anxieties, sorrows, fears and diseases, and the soul is freed from the captivity of the senses and the physical body, and becomes part of the All-pervading Consciousness.

This Sound develops through and into ten different aspects, because of Its manifestation through the different tubes of the body (*Nadis*), and sounds like thunder, the roaring of the sea, the jingling of bells, the buzzing of bees, the twittering of sparrows, the vina, the flute, the sound of *Shankha* (conch) are heard, until It finally becomes *Hu*, the most sacred of all sounds, be they from man, bird, beast or thing.

In one of his addresses, Abdu'l-Baha said:

> We must thank God that he has created for us both material blessings and spiritual bestowals. He has given us material gifts and spiritual graces; outer sight to view the light of the sun and inner vision by which we may perceive the Glory of God. He has designed the outer ear to enjoy the melodies of sound, and the inner hearing wherewith we may hear the Voice of our Creator.

In the *Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah,* a mystic saint of Persia, we have:

> *O Son of dust! hearken unto the mystic voice calling from the realm of the Invisible . . . up from thy prison, ascend unto the glorious meadows above and from thy mortal cage wing thy flight unto the paradise of the Placeless.*

Many other Sufi mystics have sung likewise:

> *From the heavenly turret, God bids thee home,*
> *Alas! thou listeneth not to the divine call,*
> *None knows the mansion of the Beloved,*
> *But sure enough the chiming of the bells comes from there.*
>
> KHWAJA HAFIZ

> *Rising above the horizon, hearken to the melody divine,*
> *The prophet would attend to It as to any other task.*
>
> MAULANA RUMI

> *O God, lead me to the place from where flows the ineffable Kalma without words.*
>
> SHAH NIAZ

> *All repeat the Kalma by word of mouth,*
> *A rare soul may do it with the tongue of thought,*

He who communes with it mentally,
He can hardly describe it in words.

HAZRAT BAHU

In *Tazkra-i-Ghausia* (p. 332), Amir Khusro, a great mystic poet and a scholar of repute, has given an account of the ten types of sounds that one hears within, and he beautifully concludes with the following lines:

Such indeed is the Heavenly Orchestra, O Khusro,
It is in these ten melodies that a yogin gets absorbed.
With senses stilled and the mind at rest, so saith Khusro;
With the flourish of the limitless blast within,
All the lusts of the flesh and the deadly sins fly off,
The Master too has a wonderful world of His own,
And Khusro is now deeply engrossed within his self.

From the above, it is abundantly clear that the inner spiritual experience of the Sound Current is within the reach of an individual provided there is a competent Master who is capable of imparting his own life-impulse, and who can bring the consciousness in man to the center of his being and then into contact with the Light and Sound of God by opening the inner eye and by unsealing the inner ear.

Traces of these may now be found in the *Qawalis* or the outer music, and the raqs or dances with jingling anklets in which some of the Muslims engage to produce *Wajd,* a state of forgetfulness, as a means to the higher inner way.

IV. Sikhism

Sikhism is the youngest of the world religions, tracing its origin from Guru Nanak, the first of the succession of ten great Gurus. Like other faiths, it assumed the character of a

distinct religion only in subsequent times. Its Masters never claimed any novelty for their teachings. In fact, they laid great emphasis upon them as being the truths taught from time immemorial. To underline the universality of the spiritual message, Guru Arjan Dev (the fifth Guru), when compiling the *Sri Adi Granth,* the holy scripture of the Sikhs, drew the hymns and devotional pieces from the mystical writings of saints of all castes and creeds, including Kabir the Muslim weaver, Dhanna the *jat,* Ravi Das the cobbler and Sadna the butcher, etc.

The Sikh scriptures occupy a unique position in religious history. They represent not only the first deliberate attempt to present the oneness of all religions, but are composed in a language that is still alive and not a thing of the past. Hence they have lost none of their pristine freshness and have not been wholly buried under the debris of theological interpretation. Being mainly in the form of devotional lyrics, their appeal is not merely expositional. They speak of the whole man, singing of his problems, his weaknesses, the vanity of the world and the eternity of the Absolute, beckoning him on to greater and ever greater effort, toward his divine home. The language they employ lends itself to condensation—conjunctions being freely dispensed with—thus enabling its poetic and musical elements to be used with great effect. A searching philosophy and profound metaphysic are implicit in every statement, yet their writings speak directly to men's hearts in the language that they use, whose meanings are inexhaustible and which leave an imprint on all.

Moreover, the Sikh faith springing from the teachings not of one, but of a succession of great Masters, covers almost every major aspect of man's spiritual quest. If Buddha emphasized the need for moderation and non-attachment, Christ for love, the Sikh teachings succeed in stressing all facets. Besides, being of comparatively recent origin, the records of the per-

sonal lives of the ten great Gurus have been preserved, and we know much of their travels and actions. Nothing in a like manner is known of the Master-souls who gave to Hinduism its Upanishads. They speak as distant voices, reaching out to us from the remote past of mythology. The inner path is a practical one, and man needs not only philosophy but the demonstration of some life that illustrates it. Whether we read of the humility of Nanak as he passed on foot from place to place, bearing the spiritual torch, or of Gobind Singh, the last of the ten Gurus, riding from one end of the country to the other, organizing his followers into a brotherhood that could meet force with force and successfully resist the threat of physical extermination posed by the fanatical emperor Aurangzeb, we realize again and again that the life of God is inner perfection, a mode of being, a self-fulfillment, not to be confused with intellectual philosophy or metaphysical conundrums. He who had won this spiritual liberation could not be touched or tarnished by outer action, for he had made God's Will his own and did nothing of himself. And so, while leading his warriors to war against the Moguls, Guru Gobind Singh could yet sing:

Sach Kahun, sun leyo sabhay
Jin prem kiyo, tin he Prabh payo.

Verily, verily I say unto you
They that loved, found the Lord.

To attempt to outline the mystical message of the great Sikh Gurus would be to repeat most of what we have already said in the preceding chapter. For the teachings of Nanak and of Kabir (his contemporary), represent the final development of the mysticism of inner seeing and hearing into the Path of the Surat Shabd Yoga. Both great Masters—one the first of the line of Sikh Gurus and the second a weaver of Varanasi (formerly Benares), were indefatigable in emphasizing the

inefficacy of outer ritual, intellectual sophistication and yogic austerities:

Sant mata kuchh aur hai Chhado chaturai

The path of the Masters is distinct;
Let go thy intellectual subtleties.

KABIR

One cannot comprehend Him through reason, even if one reasoned for ages;
One cannot achieve inner peace by outward silence, not though one sat dumb for ages;
One cannot buy contentment with all the riches of the world, nor reach Him with all mental ingenuity.

NANAK

Both saints decried caste distinctions, and they were alike in stressing the unity of all life, the oneness of the spirit that sustained everything, and both declared repeatedly that the highest and most feasible way to at-one-ment with God lay through the path of *Naam* or *Shabd.* Indeed, no other scriptures are so insistent on the all-pervasiveness of the Word as are those of the Sikhs or the writings of Kabir, a selection of which, as has already been mentioned, was included by Guru Arjan Dev in the Sri Adi Granth. The inner light—*antar jot* —and the inner music—*panch shabd,* or the five-melodied Word, whose music is limitless (*anhad bani*), are a recurring theme in nearly all of the compositions contained in the Granth Sahib.

The Jap Ji by Guru Nanak, which figures as a prologue to the Granth Sahib, may serve to illustrate the spiritual riches embedded in the Sikh scriptures. It is a wonderful lyrical composition, remarkable for its poetic beauty, and even more

for the divine heights it reaches. It opens by dwelling on the nature of the Absolute Reality as distinct from the phenomenal:

There is one Reality, the Unmanifest Manifested;
Ever-existent, He is Naam (Conscious Spirit);
The Creator pervading all;
Without fear, without enmity;
The Timeless, the Unborn and the Self-existent,
Complete within Itself.

PROLOGUE

This Reality is beyond human reason and comprehension:

One cannot comprehend Him through reason, even if one reasoned for ages.

STANZA I

And yet, It may be reached, and the path leading to It is single:

There is a Way, O Nanak: to make His Will our own,
His Will which is already wrought in our existence.

STANZA I

It is not something outside of us, but within; it is a part of our being, our very essence, and all that is needed is to attune ourselves to It, for to be attuned to It is to be freed from the bondage of the ego and therefore of maya:

All exist under His Will,
And nothing stands outside,
One attuned with His Will, O Nanak, is wholly freed from ego.

STANZA II

How may one attune oneself to the divine Will? The answer is hinted at in the very opening itself:

Through the favor of His true servant the Guru,
He may be realized.

This subject is taken up in Stanza XVI in greater detail:

The saint (the Word-personified) is acceptable at
His Court and is the chief elect therein;
The saint adorns the threshold of God and is honored
even by kings;
The saint lives by and meditates on the One Word.

The gift of the true Master is a gift of *Naam,* in which he himself is an adept. This Word is the manifestation of God's Will and Command and is at the heart of all His creations:

With one Word of His, this vast creation blossomed
into being,
And a thousand streams of life sprang into existence.

STANZA XVI

The way to at-one-ment with God's Will is through attunement with the Word:

By communion with the Word one becomes the
abode of all virtues;
By communion with the Word, one becomes a
Sheikh, a Pir and a true spiritual king;
By communion with the Word, the spiritually blind
find their way to Realization;
By communion with the Word, one crosses beyond
the Limitless Ocean of illusionary matter;
O Nanak! His devotees live in perpetual ecstasy,
for the Word washes away all sin and sorrow.

STANZA XI

Hence it is that Nanak declares:

Exalted is the Lord, and exalted His abode;
More exalted still His Holy Word.

STANZA XXIV

Having outlined the nature of the Absolute and the way leading to mergence with It, Nanak goes on to tell us of what is required to successfully pursue the journey. It is not necessary, he implies, to turn an outward sanyasin; what one must do is to be a sanyasin in spirit, dispensing with external forms, and instead to inculcate the inner virtues:

Let contentment be your ear-rings;
Endeavor for the Divine and respect for the Higher Self be your wallet;
And constant meditation on Him your ashes;
Let preparedness for death be your cloak,
And your body be like unto a chaste virgin;
Let your Master's teachings be your supporting staff.
The highest Religion is to rise to Universal Brotherhood,
Aye, to consider all creatures your equals.
Conquer your mind, for victory over self is victory over the world.
Hail, Hail, to Him alone,
The Primal, Pure, Eternal, Immortal and Immutable in all ages.

STANZA XXVIII

Finally, in the closing sections of the Jap Ji, Guru Nanak gives us a bird's-eye view of the spirit's pilgrimage. The first realm to be transcended is the plane of *Dharm Khand*—the Realm of Action, or the world of good and evil deeds as we

know it. Next comes *Gyan Khand* or the Realm of Knowledge, the first of the inner heavens, full of gods and demi-gods:

Countless its elements, air, water and fire,
And countless Krishnas and Sivas,
And countless the Brahmas fashioning various creations of countless forms and countless hues.
Countless the Fields of Action, countless the golden mountains . . .
Countless the sources of creation, countless the harmonies, countless those that listen unto them.
And countless the devotees of the Word,
Endless and unending, O Nanak! this Realm.

STANZA XXXV

If knowledge is the reigning virtue of this region, ecstasy is that of the next, which is *Sarm Khand,* the Realm of Bliss. This plane is beyond description and whoever tries to describe it must repent his folly. Herein at last, the soul is freed from its mental adjuncts and finally comes into its own:

Herein the mind, reason and understanding are etherealized, the self comes to its own, and develops the penetration of the gods and the sages.

STANZA XXXVI

But "higher still" stands *Karm Khand,* the Realm of Grace—grace earned through right action and meditation.

Here the Word is all in all, and nothing else prevails,
Here dwell the bravest of the brave, the conquerors of the mind, imbued with the love Divine . . .
All hearts filled with God, they live beyond the reach of death and of delusion.

STANZA XXXVII

This is the realm where the soul finally escapes the coils of relativity; the bonds of time, death and change, no longer affect it. But though it dwells in the constant presence of the Lord, it may move still further to merge into His Formless State:

Sach Khand, or the Realm of Truth, is the seat of the Formless One,
Here He creates all creations, rejoicing in creating.
Here are many regions, heavenly systems and universes,
To count which were to count the countless.
Here, out of the Formless,
The heavenly plateaux and all else come into form,
All destined to move according to His Will.
He who is blessed with this vision, rejoices in its contemplation.
But, O Nanak, such is its beauty that to try to describe it is to attempt the impossible.

STANZA XXXVII

The world shall go on along the rails of good and evil deeds, caught in the limits of Karma, but:

Those who have communed with the Word, their toils shall end,
And their faces shall flame with glory.
Not only shall they have salvation,
O Nanak, but many more shall find freedom with them.

FINALE

Such was the lofty message not only of Guru Nanak, but also of his successors. Their word blazed like a summer fire

through the plains of the Punjab, sweeping away all the false distinctions of caste that a decadent Brahminism had created. At a time when religious bigotry between the Hindus and the ruling Muslims was growing, it demonstrated the unity of all true religions, purifying Hinduism of its servility to outer ritual and setting up before Islam the higher inner ideal it was forgetting in outer names and forms. It is no accident that the Sufi tradition and the Sikh religious movement should have flowered at the same time. Indeed, history at many points, suggests an active cooperation between the two. Some of the Sikh Gurus, especially Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh, and their followers like Bhai Nand Lal, were masters of Persian and have left some exquisite compositions in that language. Guru Nanak is said to have journeyed to Mecca and, like his successors, had many Muslim disciples, while Sufi mystics like Hazrat Mian Mir were on intimate terms with Guru Arjan. Both the Sufi and the Sikh Masters were not tied to dogma, and taught the lesson of universal brotherhood. They acted and reacted upon each other, and it is significant that the Surat Shabd Yoga, or the Yoga of the Sound Current, should find equal stress in the writings of the greatest Sufis and in the Sikh scriptures, a fact summed up by Inayat Khan in the passage already quoted from his book *The Mysticism of Sound.*

But the teachings of all great Masters tend to trail off into institutions after they leave this world. Those of the Sikh Gurus have been no exception to the rule. While they still exercise a profoundly uplifting influence upon the masses, they no longer impel them to mystic efforts as they once must have done. That which once sought to transcend all religious divisions has itself become a religion. That which sought to castigate caste and caste-emphasis has gradually developed a certain caste-consciousness. That which sought to break through all outer forms and ritual has cultivated a form and ritual

of its own. At every religious ceremony, people hear verses chanted, singing of the glories within:

All knowledge and meditation sprang from Dhun (the Sound Principle),
But what That is, defies definition.

GURU NANAK

The true Bani (Word) is given by the Guru,
And is reverberating in the Sukhmana.

GURU ARJAN

The Unstruck Music is heard through the Grace of a Godman,
But few there be who commune with it.

GURU NANAK

Perfect is the Anhad Bani (Limitless Song),
And Its key is with the Saints.

GURU ARJAN

And yet these verses are chanted without heeding or understanding the deep spiritual meaning hidden in them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Some Modern Movements

THE first impact of science on the West seems to have been to undermine religion. Christianity, having developed into a complex and rigid institution with a dogmatic framework, was in no position to adjust itself to the demands made by the new knowledge available from science. The result was unavoidable; a head-on collision between the two, which left religion shaken, and science firmly entrenched. However, as we have already suggested in an earlier chapter, the physical sciences by themselves cannot explain life completely or even adequately. When the outer sciences have had their say, certain unknown problems of being remain to baffle and trouble the mind of man. The last century has seen the emergence of many a movement that has sought, in some way or other, to point toward an inner life, that science at least to a degree tended to discount. Modern India has been the birthplace of many religious movements, but for the most part they have been by way of a revival of what the ancients already knew, be it the Vedantism of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, or Ramana Maharshi or, as we have already examined in some detail, the various Indian yogic systems. However, it may be fruitful to glance at some of the movements prevalent in the West, movements that often converge on Eastern traditions and are affected by them.

Roscrucianism, Theosophy and "I Am" Activity

Even while Christianity held unquestioned sway in Europe, certain heterodox schools of mysticism flourished in a small

way alongside it, Rosicrucianism being one of the earliest. However, these continued as secret societies which were looked upon with suspicion by the general public. But when institutional Christianity began to suffer at the hands of science, they suddenly acquired an importance that they never had before. Men whose faith in Christianity had been shaken by Darwin and Huxley but who could not accept the mechanistic view of the Universe, turned to these societies in the hope of arriving at a more satisfying explanation of life. Many took to the tenets of Rosicrucianism while others, seeking their inspiration from the East, founded the Theosophical movement. Still others, claiming to be guided by St. Germain, have developed what is called the "I Am" Activity. These movements do not claim to be religions in the traditional sense, even though they have their own codes. They are rather occult societies which share in common a belief that human life is guided and directed by unseen Cosmic Beings or Mystical Brotherhoods. These Beings cannot be met directly in this physical world; they either live in remote mountain fastnesses or work from a plane higher than the earthly one. However, one may, by believing in them and by following a particular discipline, lend oneself to their influence and benefit thereby. Though they all imply, in one way or another, the ultimate unity of life, in practice they seem to touch it at its fringes. The most a disciple may hope to do is to get in direct touch with one of the Cosmic Beings, but that state in which the soul becomes one with the Source of Time and the Timeless, of which the great Masters have spoken, is seldom treated as a practical possibility. Again, since one seeks guidance not from a human being like oneself, who has realized the Infinite, but from visionary beings whom one may never meet, the kind of detailed instruction and step by step guidance in every field of life, which is an essential feature of the Surat Shabd Yoga, is also missing. However, each in its own way seeks to carry

human evolution a step further, and the step taken is certainly not a mean one. Thus, Madam Blavatsky, writing in *The Voice of the Silence,* speaks of a fairly advanced mystic experience when describing the inner Sound:

> *The first is the nightingale's sweet voice chanting a song of parting to its mate. The second comes as a sound of silver cymbals of the Dhyanis awakening the twinkling star. The next is plaint-melodies of the ocean spirit imprisoned in its shell. And this is followed by the chant of Vina. The fifth, like the sound of a bamboo flute shrills in the ears. It changes into a triumphant blast. The last vibrates like the dull rumbling of thunder clouds.*

Christian Science and Subud

The Christian Science movement is yet another heterodox Western movement, but it differs from those that we have already noticed in its shift of emphasis. Though it implies a mystical base, yet in practice it is not very much concerned with it. It seeks to interpret Christ's life in its own light, focusing its attention simply on the miracles performed by him. It argues that God, or the Truth, is good, and that all evil and disease are but a result of losing contact with this Inner Power. He who can be put in touch with it can be cured of all disease, and Christian Science has tended to concentrate its attention on this end. The result has been that it has become more a study of health than one of spiritual evolution, and the line between healing through auto-suggestion and hypnotic suggestion, and healing (as Christian Science claims) through the power of Truth is not always easy to draw. Many have even questioned the nature of the motives of its founder, Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. But of one thing one can be certain: that even if the cures effected by Christian Science spring from a spiritual source, the agents are not its

conscious masters, are not in direct and conscious contact with the higher power, but act as its unconscious instruments.

Though it would be rash to class with Christian Science *Subud* or *Soshiel Bodhi Dharm,* founded by the Indonesian mystic teacher Pak Subeh, which has now become an international movement, yet one may with some justice notice a similar trend. The mystic base in the case of Subud is much more important than in that of Christian Science, yet is often directed toward the same end. It seeks, through following a certain course of exercises called *Latihan,* to put its followers in touch with hidden psychic powers. It does not seem to enhance consciousness directly but enriches it indirectly through increasing one's powers of intuition. Whether one looks at the experiences of Mohammad Raufe or those of John Bennett, one realizes that in the case of Subud, a person may serve as a medium for higher spiritual forces, curing people of diseases, without becoming a conscious co-worker. The result is that instead of progressing to higher and still higher planes of consciousness, until one merges with the Infinite, one tends to cultivate a passive receptivity to psychic powers which may not necessarily be of the higher kind. Many disciples during Latihan reproduce strange animal or bird experiences—a far cry from the Nirvikalp Samadhi or the Sehaj Samadhi spoken of by the greatest mystics.

Spiritism and spiritualism

Last but not the least, we must distinguish spirituality from spiritism and spiritualism, as spirituality is quite different from both of them. Spiritism inculcates a belief in the existence of disembodied spirits apart from matter, which are believed by those who believe in spiritism to haunt either the nether regions as ghosts or evil spirits, or even as angels or good spirits in the lower astral regions. At times, they even become interested in the individual human affairs, and for the fulfillment

of long-cherished but unfulfilled desires, try to seek gratification by all sorts of tricks, and those who dabble in the Black Art claim and profess to exercise power over them through magical incantations. But none of the Master's disciples need bother about them, as no evil influence can come near one who is in communion with the holy Word, for it is said:

The Great Angel of Death is an invincible foe,
But he too fears to come near one in communion with the Word.
He flies far out and away from the chants of the divine Harmony,
Lest he fall a victim to the wrath of the Lord.

Spiritualism goes one step further than spiritism. It is a belief in the survival of the human personality after physical death, and the possibility of communication between the living and the dead. The advocates of spiritualism very often hold seances for getting into communication with so-called spirits. Their modus operandi is by mediumship, for they work through some sort of medium, maybe a planchette for planchette writing, a table for table rapping, or even a human being who is rendered unconscious so that the spirit called may make use of his body and communicate through it. This relationship generally works between just the physical or earth plane and the lowest sub-astral planes known as magnetic fields. The results that follow from such communications are very limited in scope, mostly unreliable and extremely harmful to the medium, who suffers a terrible loss at times by deprivation of his intelligence. The Masters of spirituality, therefore, strongly condemn the practice of spiritualism. Their contact and intercourse with the spiritual regions right to the mansion of the Lord (Sach Khand) are direct and they come and go at their sweet will and pleasure, without any let or hindrance and independent of the subjective process of mediumship.

While their approach is quite normal, natural, direct and constructive, the spiritualist on the other hand works subjectively, indirectly, and mediately through a process which is fraught with dangers and risks both to himself and to the medium. Spiritualism, apart from the knowledge of survival of spirits after death, adds little to our experience and offers nothing of substance in the way of spirituality.

Hypnosis and mesmerism

The above remarks apply equally to hypnosis and mesmerism, in both of which a person with a stronger will power tries to influence those with weaker stamina by means of passes of hand or gestures coupled with a riveted attention on the subject. In certain ailments, like hysteria, etc., some physicians also make use of these processes and are able temporarily to effect cures and alleviate pains and aches for which they are not able to find a proper remedy.

Spirituality, on the contrary, is the science of the soul, and consequently, it deals with all the aspects of the soul, where it resides in the human body, its relationship with the body and with the mind, how it seemingly acts and reacts through and on the senses, its real nature, and how it can be separated from all its finitizing adjuncts. It describes the spiritual journey with its wealth of spiritual planes and sub-planes, the spiritual powers and possibilities and their intrinsic worth. Spirituality discloses what the holy Word is and how to commune with It, tells us that the ultimate goal is Self-realization and God-realization, or the union of the soul with the Oversoul, and teaches how it can be achieved by means of Surat Shabd Yoga or the Path of the Sound Current, as described in the foregoing pages.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

THE foregoing survey, in brief, of the major religions of the world and some of their modern ramifications, makes abundantly clear a general drift toward some common basic assumptions and beliefs: (a) that the physical universe is no more than a small part of a much larger whole; (b) that in like manner, our everyday human existence is only a fragment of the vast and complex pattern of life; (c) that behind the phenomenal, physical and human world, there is an Absolute Reality or a state of Perfect Being, beyond change or destruction, complete within Itself, which is responsible for all that is and yet stands over and above Its own creation; (d) that this Reality, this state of Perfect Being, may be approached by man (under competent guidance) through the agency of the Word, or the Divine stream radiating Light and Harmony, which represent the primal manifestations of the Formless into Form and from whose downward descent all realms and regions came into existence.

If all religious experience tends in the same direction, then why, one asks, is there so much of conflict and controversy in the sphere of religion? Why is it that the devotees of every faith regard theirs as the only true one and all other faiths as false? Why is there dogmatic faith in spiritual monopoly and wherefore the Holy Crusades, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the Spanish Inquisition or the communal riotings in India in 1947? The question is a valid one, and the reasons that must go toward answering it are many and complex.

The first thing that strikes one when taking up the compara-

tive study of religion is its existence on different levels. At the core of every major religion stands the practical, mystical experience of some great sage or a succession of sages. Around this center have accumulated accretions of social codes, customs and ritual. Now the core may be common to the mystics of various ages and countries, but the social context in which it is experienced and conveyed must of necessity vary. The Westerner bares his head as a mark of reverence, while the Oriental covers it. The Hindu, belonging to a land with many rivers and abundant water, bathes before his prayers, while his Muslim counterpart, coming from the deserts of Arabia, is satisfied with a dry bath with sand. The European, living as he does in the colder regions, feels neither of these compulsions. Such differences of custom extend to other spheres as well. Polygamy may be lawful to the Muslim but it is a sin to the Catholic. Idol worship may be quite permissible in Hinduism but is hateful to the Puritan. The fact is that all religious leaders have stressed the need for maintaining high ethical standards, but their ethic has never been of the nature of an absolute. They have taken into account the social conditions obtaining among the people at the times at which they came and have tried to raise them to the highest possible point, aiming not so much at a standardization of outer custom as at inner purity of heart, and good will toward one's human and non-human fellow creatures. Jesus' immediate listeners may have failed to appreciate the truth of his assertion that he had come not to "break" but to "fulfill" the Law, and yet if Moses gave out the precept of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," Christ taught his disciples to love their enemies and to offer their right cheek when the left was slapped. Moses spoke according to the conditions of his time, and Jesus according to his own, so the ethics of Christianity deviated from those of Judaism, even though it is an extension of the older faith.

As a consequence of the factors that came into play in the development of religion as a social institution, we find that each religion creates around itself a distinct pattern of customs, dogmas and ritual. This pattern being distinct in each case, the devotees of every faith must necessarily feel themselves as standing apart from those of other faiths, not only in their dress and manners, but also in their modes of social concepts and attitudes. Yet the lives of all great religious leaders like Jesus and Buddha, reveal that while each of them accepted and extended the code of his own people, they nonetheless never forgot that all men were brothers and treated members of other societies with the same respect and consideration as they displayed to those of their own. Behind the varying outer forms that characterize life they saw pulsating the same Unity of Being, and it was from this level that they regarded all humanity.

What was possible to the great founders of religions should be possible for those who claim to follow them. But when we look at things as they stand, we find that this possibility of inter-communication, cooperation and understanding between various faiths, has seldom if ever been realized. A mystic like Sri Ramakrishna may practically demonstrate the inner oneness of all religions,* but the rest of us fail to grasp the point. The fact is that every major world religion, after the passing away of its founder, grew into an institution, with a priesthood to manage its affairs: the pundits in India, the *Mullahs* and *Maulvis* in Islam, the pharisees and rabbis in Judaism and the monks and bishops in Christianity. This development made possible the extension of the message of the great founders to numbers they could never have instructed themselves. Buddha personally met and influenced many an indi-

* Sri Ramakrishna, to test the truth that all religions lead to the same spiritual goal, practiced in turn the outer and inner disciplines of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam, and in each case, he found the end reached was the same.

vidual, but what was their number in comparison to the millions that heard the doctrine of Dharma when Ashoka created the various *Sanghas* or orders of Buddhist monks, two centuries after his death? Besides, it enabled the perpetuation of his message down the ages. Buddha has come and gone, Jesus may have been immolated on the cross, but the Sangh and the Church continue and keep alive their teachings in a widespread manner, which could not have been done if no such institutions had been developed.

But, if the institutionalization of the teachings of great spiritual leaders enabled their propagation and perpetuation, it also led to their transformation. The message of Christ or of Buddha as it was first delivered by each of them was one thing, but in the hands of the Church and Sangh that followed, it became another. The great religious leaders were moved and guided by first-hand inner experience and it was this actuality that lay at the heart of their teachings. They saw it as something universal, something latent in every man, and it was toward this that they directed the attention of their disciples, employing ethical advancement as a lever for spiritual progress. When their task, after their passing away, was taken over by rapidly expanding organizations, which grew more complex with time, one could not expect all of their members to have attained the same heights or even to have any glimpses of the inner mystic realms. Little wonder then, that with the growth of the church and the like, the interest in every religion should have tended to shift from the mystical to the ethical, the ritualistic and the doctrinal; in short, from the universal to the particular. Only a rare soul may penetrate through the dark veil within, but for every such being, a million, nay a billion, may discuss problems of ethics, practice outer ceremonies and hold strong opinions on various subjects, opinions not inspired or tested by personal experience, but picked up from the marketplace of life. And so, whereas we

find no rigid framework of ritual or doctrine or outer code in the teachings of Jesus himself—everything being fluid and flexible, in a ready state to be directed to the service of the mystical message—a rigid framework emerged with the growth of the Christian Church. As this variation took place, new barriers arose between the followers of Jesus and those of other faiths, barriers that never existed before.

As though this were not enough, the rise of priestcraft worked in yet another direction. The Church in its phase of growth had, in most cases, to struggle against heavy odds, as everything new usually meets with strong opposition. It could only offer the cross of danger and deprivation, not the rose of prosperity. Those who entered it, entered it for the sake of their convictions, not for love of power. But once the Church had come to be accepted, it began to exercise considerable sway over the people. They offered it gifts and titles and made it the final arbiter, not only in matters spiritual, but in matters temporal as well. Thus began a process by which the priesthood turned from the inner to the outer life, from self-abnegation to temporal power. In order to preserve its position, the Church encouraged the growth of doctrines and traditions, that reinforced its monopoly of authority. To strengthen itself, it created a halo around the altar to which it was in service, and condemned the altars where it had no hand. If the self-styled servants of Jehovah, or those of some other name of deity, were to maintain and extend their position and sway, then it was necessary that all gods of the philistines or of the heathens should be condemned.

These factors that we have considered operate in every field of human activity. The historian is only too well aware of the fate of every new movement, whether of a religious or of a secular character. It arises with a man of vision, undergoes rapid expansion in the hands of those whom his example has directly inspired, and then enters into a process of gradual

senility and decay. The descent from a pulsating vision to a mechanical dogma is not peculiar to religion alone, but nevertheless there are certain features in the case of religion which do not occur elsewhere.

These unique problems stem from the mystical experience at the heart of every great religion. The mystic experience, as we have seen, extends to planes of existence to which normally human beings have no access. Only a handful, nay less than a handful, can claim its mastery in any age. It is an experience unique in character, for it possesses a kind of richness, extensiveness, intensity and beauty that finds no parallel in earthly life. But we on this earthly plane can comprehend its meaning only within the limitations of our own mundane experience. The choice before the mystic, if he wishes to convey to us something of his unique experience (not just ending in silence or in the negative statements of the Vedantist or of St. John of the Cross), is perforce to resort to metaphor and parable.

In Maulana Rumi's Masnavi, we are told:

> *It is not fitting that I tell thee more,*
> *For the stream's bed cannot hold the sea.*

Jesus was quite explicit on the subject when speaking to his closest disciples (to whom he could directly convey first-hand inner experience):

> *Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto those that are without, all things are done in parables.*
>
> ST. MARK

Whereas direct statement tends to be limited by the analyzable qualities of the object, figurative statement suffers no such bar. Poets have described their love for a woman in terms of a rose, a star, a melody, a flame, the moon, etc. The

mystics have used a similar license when speaking of their love for God. But while the listeners to the poet speaking of human love are always aware that he is using metaphors, knowing well what a woman is, those hearing the mystic have no such comparison and often tend to forget that what he is saying is only figurative. So the statements of the man of spiritual vision are often taken literally when they are meant to be only metaphorical, and metaphorically when they are meant to be literal. Thus, when Jesus or Mohammed declared that he was the son or the messiah of God (as all great souls who have merged their will with the Divine Will have said), they were each taken to imply that he was literally the only son of the Almighty. Or again, when Jesus, speaking not in his capacity as a finite individual but in that of the Eternal Divine Principle that he embodied, said, "I shall never leave thee nor forsake thee even to the ends of the world," he was taken literally. So to seek active spiritual guidance from a living teacher after Jesus was no more, became a sign of disbelief and therefore was dubbed a heresy. But when Jesus quite literally spoke of the "single eye" or of God as "Light," he was taken to refer figuratively to integrity of conscience and the light of reason.

Little wonder then that with each statement being thus interpreted, or rather misinterpreted, meanings should emerge which the sage who made them never had in mind, and dogmas and doctrines should be propounded in his name which have little relation to the universal inner experiences which inspired him. So differences of doctrine between one creed and another arose that were never in the contemplation of their founders. Moreover, the inner realms are so vast and varied that no one mystic could ever hope to point to all aspects of the inner panorama. At best he can hint at some part of it and that may not be exactly the same as those parts of which others have spoken, with the result that to the reader

who has himself no direct access to the realms within, there may appear certain discrepancies between the writings of one mystic and another, which in fact do not exist.

Further, not all mystics reach the highest spiritual goal. Only a few succeed in breaking through the veil of inner darkness to the full, and of these, the majority never get beyond the first inner spiritual plane. Of those who do succeed in going further, the greater number never cross the second plane, and so on. Now each of the planes has its own peculiarities and characteristics and, whereas the higher planes contain and maintain the lower ones, the inhabitants of the lower planes are seldom aware of the existence of the higher ones. Each plane, in comparison to the one before it, seems perfection itself, and every mystic who has spoken of his divine experience, has described it as though it were the be-all and the end-all of spiritual progress. The inescapable consequence of this is that we encounter descriptions of the Absolute that, after an allowance for differences of figurative language has been made, fail to agree. Jesus speaks of the Divine in Its paternal aspect, Sri Ramakrishna in Its maternal one. The Sankhya mystics speak of God, Prakriti and Atman as forever separate; Ramanuja as related but never merging into one; while Shankara sees them as of the selfsame essence, their separation being not real but only an illusion. All this means a mass of confusion to the common reader. But should he meet one who has reached the highest realm and is familiar with the experience of each of the inner planes, all contradictions would vanish, for he can demonstrate that though the six blind men made apparently the most contradictory statements about the nature of the elephant, yet they could all be finally reconciled by one who could see the whole elephant.

In this context, the teachings of the Surat Shabd Yoga acquire yet another significance. We have already seen at some length how it represents the quickest, most practical

and the most scientific means to man's spiritual goal. We may now add that by taking him to the highest of the spiritual planes, the point where the Formless comes into Form, it provides him with the best vantage-ground for viewing the vast field of spirituality. That which would confuse and baffle others leaves the adept on this Path unruffled. Contradictions vanish at his touch, and that which once confused and confounded resolves itself, after his exposition, into perfect order. He understands each of the spiritual and quasi-spiritual movements that confront us today. He can at will enter into the inner experience that each can offer, and he is the best fitted to judge their relative merits. He does not condemn or attack; he is not moved by hatred or opposition. Having seen the Highest, his aim is to take his fellow human beings to It in the smoothest, swiftest way. He knows that the life within is not to be confounded with the life without, and preaches his message not as a code but as a science: "Try within," he tells us, "and see for yourself."

The science he teaches is not a new one. It is the most ancient of sciences. But whereas in the past it tended to ally itself to much that was not essential to it, he wishes to preserve it in its pure state and pristine glory. He carries to their logical conclusion the mystic truths embedded in all great scriptures, stressing that if God in His primal form is Light and Music, we must inwardly turn to these, and not to any other means, for reaching back to Him and merging with Him. Where there was chaos he brings order, where there was despair he brings hope, and for each of us, in whatever capacity we may be, he has some comfort, some illumination to offer.

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