



KNOWLEDGE AND NEGLIGENCE

Fix thy Soul's gate upon the Star whose ray thou art, the flaming Star that shines within the lightless depths of ever-being, the boundless fields of the Unknown.

The Voice of the Silence

Every human being is endowed with a mind which is a focussing mirror for concentrated thought and cognition. Every being in the seven kingdoms of nature is sentient at some level of intrinsic and potential intelligence and apperception. Human beings, as self-conscious monads, are capable of deliberate reflection, of making every item in the external world an object of intense thought, and also pondering upon themselves in relation to other selves. If all beings participate in an expanding universe of mind, in degrees of awareness which are heightened by the plastic power of self-consciousness, what is the basis of the ubiquitous distinction between knower and known, subject and object? If there is to be an intelligible universe of multiple manifestation arising from a single source but only partly related to it, there must also be an array of minds capable of focussing the light of universal awareness in varying degrees in relation to fields of cognition that are partly governed by the porosity of material vestures – the physical body, the astral form, the subtler veils that belong to every being and which are more distinctly differentiated at the human level. Consciousness in a world of heterogeneous objects differentiated through a variety of vestures must necessarily involve the ever-changing contrast between the knower and the known. It takes a long series of meditations to discern the unmodified unity behind the multiplicity of objects. To understand this ethically is even more difficult. It means using the persistent distinction between subject and object as the foothold for recovering a sense of unity in the realm of relativities and contrasts.

Ethically, the thinking individual encounters the need to put oneself into the position of another person, who is both an active knower and a moral agent. Given the initial difficulty of apprehending the contrast of subject and object, how can one comprehend the mystical teaching of Shankaracharya which seems to suggest that the knower is an illusion? If the knower is an illusion, what sense is to be made of knowing? If a person sees the illusion of separateness, what meaning may be assigned to percepts, concepts and the very act of cognition? Such questions merely start the protracted process of enquiry into the knower, the known and knowing. A person who has passed through a preliminary period of earnest questioning may reach a point where he or she may meditate upon the ancient teaching concerning the *Atman* and the *Atmajnani*. The *Atman*, the one source of all light, life and energy, is itself the pristine reflection of the attributeless reality of the Divine Ground, *Brahman*. The *Atman* is the light in every atom and the Logos overbrooding every human being. It is the fully incarnated deity in the *Atmajnani*, the self-governed Sage, the initiator into *Atmavidya*, the wisdom of the *Atman*.

How can the ordinary human being make use of a recondite teaching about what seems far beyond everyday experience and ordinary modes of thinking? The kernel of Shankaracharya's teaching is that in reality there is no above and beyond, there is no near and far. *Atmavidya* is itself dimensionless like the *Atman*. The *Atman* is without axes in either physical or conceptual space. The *Atman* is omnipresent, homogeneous and impenetrable. If the light of the *Atman* is hidden in the heart of every human being, its radiance is reflected in all human longings. One must love the *Atman* if one hopes to focus upon the light of the *Atman* and if one aspires to unite completely with the *Atman*. True meditation is self-sustaining to some degree. For the Sage it is utterly uninterrupted at all times because he is ever established in that exalted state of meditation. He merely assumes a mayavic form for the sake of serving a self-chosen mission of mercy in the sphere of cyclic time. If every human being daily comes closer to the *Atman* in deep sleep, everyone is essentially capable of that *Atmic* awareness which transcends the polarity of known and unknown, knower and knowing. Human beings live ostensibly in a world of fugitive time, fragmented space and differentiated objects. Time is differentiated in terms of seconds and minutes, days and months, for the sake of availing oneself of cyclic rhythms and linear succession. Space is differentiated by place and relationship, and this helps one to locate oneself and one's role in a world of shifting boundaries and continuous reconstruction.

How can one make use of a metaphysical teaching that is typically realized only in a few moments of dreamless sleep every night? The only way this can become continually relevant is by a conscious exercise of contemplation. We need to enter repeatedly into that state of consciousness which transcends the polarities and pairs of opposites, the fluctuating contrasts of light and shade. Since this is far from easy, the opportunity must be taken to do something in this direction on a regular basis, to concentrate the mind on a central truth, to see it from the standpoint of one's own immediate needs but also to grasp it philosophically and impersonally. To look at an idea independently of one's personal standpoint requires effort; to see it from the standpoint of many other people is even more difficult. Nonetheless, it is vital to sustain the effort, to increase continuity by recognizing and overcoming discontinuities. So as long as there is discontinuity in consciousness, the mind will be captive to the sharp distinction between the knower and the known and knowing, will reinforce rather than transcend the sense of separateness. Self-correction is the basis of science and philosophy, but such correction is usually confined to the level of perception or awareness at which the error is identified and the subsequent correction is applied.

Through daily meditation one has a firm basis for self-study, for scrutinizing one's sets of thoughts, behaviour patterns and modes of cognition in terms of discontinuity and continuity. If one is truly trying to maintain continuity, then one is most concerned to examine why one loses it. By persisting in self-study on a regular basis, one may come to see clearly the causes of recurring patterns of deviation, forgetfulness and irresponsibility. At some point of intensive enquiry, one isolates the root causes of sporadic effort, shallow resolve and diffused desire. Shankaracharya teaches that the chief cause of bondage is captivity to a false identity which has no basis in reality but is merely like a photograph one mistakes for oneself. The true Self cannot be known until one can consciously live in and through other beings. Every person does this to a limited extent. Otherwise, there would be no possibility of communication, no extension of empathy, no growth in understanding. Yet human beings are not sufficiently motivated to strengthen the innate capacity for transcendence of the false self. Scattering of consciousness arises through mistaken identification with the persona, with name and form, likes and dislikes, borrowed opinions and ill-digested insights, with everything that is like excess luggage which cannot be carried by the immortal soul at the moment of death when the lower vestures are discarded. For the immortal soul – the *Atman* in its pristine ray – there is no illusion of separateness, no tension

through duality, no captivity to the conceptualization of particulars.

The *Atman* dwells within, free from attachment and beyond all action. A man must separate this *Atman* from every object of experience, as a stalk of grass is separated from its enveloping sheath. Then he must dissolve into the *Atman* all those appearances which make up the world of name and form. He is indeed a free soul who can remain thus absorbed in the *Atman* alone.

The persistent asking of the question "Who am I?" raises a person beyond the boundaries of the personality. The lower mind is typically trapped in the realm of external differentiation, of comparison and contrast. It is fragmented through the fleeting succession of states of consciousness which produces the illusion of time. It is delusively dependent through its polarization between past and future, regrets and anticipations, fears and fantasies. Through deep meditation it is indeed possible to silence the lower mind and initiate a state of true calm. It is essential to release the serene awareness of the higher mind, which is inherently capable of abstraction, universalization and thinking through particulars (*dianoia*). By repeated and regular efforts in meditation and self-scrutiny, one could correct the more glaring discontinuities. One might make it a daily practice to prepare before sleep by reflecting upon the *Anahata*, the deathless vibration in the secret heart, the ceaseless pulsation of the AUM. This could be fused with a true feeling of compassion for all beings, as evoked by *The Voice of the Silence* in its poignant lament:

Alas, alas, that all men should possess Alaya, be one with the Great Soul, and that possessing it, Alaya should so little avail them! Behold how like the moon, reflected in the tranquil waves, Alaya is reflected by the small and by the great, is mirrored in the tiniest atoms, yet fails to reach the heart of all. Alas, that so few men should profit by the gift, the priceless boon of learning truth, the right perception of existing things, the knowledge of the non-existent!

All rays of light emanate from a single source. Once one has abstracted from habitual identification with a name and a form and assumed the mental posture of an individual ray of light, one may experience the effulgence of the Atman. Self-knowledge will spontaneously arise through active contemplation, which will be food for the soul. If one found that despite proper preparation at night, one still woke up with no lucid recollection in the mind, intense self-questioning is needed. Who is the 'I' that entered *sushupti* and what is the 'I' that cannot remember? One has to make daily experiments with truth. All of this is valuable and valid as a process of knowing, though it is only the partial awareness of a partly self-conscious being of dim reflections of a deeper realm. Nothing learnt is ever lost by the immortal soul. It is important to see the painful process of progressive knowing as constructive and continuous. It is helpful to lose the thralldom and tension of effort by devotedly meditating upon the invisible form of the Guru, the *Atmajnani* in whom the knower, knowing and the known are all one. This is uplifting because it elevates one's level of consciousness to meditate on the Self as incarnated in a fully self-conscious Sage, who is outside time and yet in contact with the temporal, who is beyond visible space yet omnipresent, and always accessible on subtler planes of manifestation.

One is only partly awake when asking questions about the true Self; one is more awake when one actively meditates and even more awake when one ardently seeks the Knower of the *Atman*. The *Atmajnani* is in a steady state of *turiya*, continuous spiritual wakefulness. Total wakefulness is only possible on the plane of the *Atman*, wherein no distinctions made by the mind have any meaning. It is a pure, primordial state of consciousness which is incommunicable. It can neither be described nor characterized but it is approached to some extent when emptying out, when negating and questioning. It is the miniature light in the eyes of every human being. To kindle the small spark of light into the blazing fire of divine wisdom is the task of many lifetimes. The *yogin* is fully consumed, says Shankaracharya, in

the fire of true knowledge. The important thing for each and every person is to make an honest effort to keep moving towards an ideal state of inward freedom. One must grasp all available opportunities for greater knowing, for deeper self-knowledge, profounder knowledge of the Self and pure selflessness.

The feeling of responsibility is the first step towards selflessness. All spiritual Teachers promulgate what everyone already knows at some level – that everything adds up, that nothing is lost, that no one can evade anything. The homilies and proverbs of all traditions only point to the accumulated wisdom of humanity. The half-asleep individual has lost the key and does not know how to use the heritage of universal truth. Great Teachers descend amidst humanity so that a second birth is possible for the disciples who are ready. This profound awakening of spiritual consciousness takes place among many at critical thresholds in human evolution. The karma of the whole of humanity for the duration of an epoch is nobly assumed by one of the Brotherhood of Sages, who comes into the world and becomes responsible for the progress of humanity during a cycle of awakening. The Bodhisattva elevates the idea of responsibility to its greatest height. What does it mean to be responsible for an age and to be responsible for the whole of humanity? This is an awesome and staggering conception. How can it be even sensed by those who refuse to recognize their errors and the future consequences to be faced?

In general, an awareness of individual responsibility is the mark of a *Manasa*, a thinking being and moral agent. Though one cannot put everything right in this life and all the people one has affected are no longer around or alive, still some things can be rectified right now. It is possible to clean up one's copybook significantly without any clues to the complex mathematics of the cosmos. It is a waste of energy to fret and fume over the past, which is already part of our present make-up. Every cell of one's being carries the imprint of every thought, feeling, emotion, word and deed that one emanated in this life. At least, one can be responsible in relation to what one can see. At the present point of history the sense of responsibility has been enormously heightened for the whole of humanity. Never before have there been so many millions of human beings in search of divine wisdom, the science of self-regeneration. *The Voice of the Silence* instructs the disciple: "Look not behind or thou art lost." It is an exercise in futility to look behind because what has receded will recur. Instead of idle regret, it is possible to use the gospel of gratitude to transmute every precipitation of Karma into an avenue for fundamental growth through courageous self-correction.

Gratitude is no longer a threatening term, even in the United States. Many people everywhere respond to the beauty of reverence as it is truly innate to the human soul. Miseducation may foster mental presumption but it cannot extinguish the immortal spark of devotion. In all human beings there are natural feelings and intuitions which can be awakened and quickened. It would indeed be wrong to think that purely by penitence one could wipe out the consequences of past irresponsibility. This is a costly failure to understand the law of ethical causation. If one already has wronged others wilfully or thoughtlessly, feelings of remorse or empathy cannot erase past debts. This untenable doctrine of moral evasion did much harm over two thousand years. It was a travesty of true religion, an arbitrary breach of natural harmony. The irresponsible dogma of vicarious atonement traduced the exalted ethical teaching of Jesus. He taught that the Divine is not mocked: as ye sow, so shall ye reap. This is a central tenet in the teachings of all Initiates, and the erosion of the idea of responsibility is everywhere the consequence of priestcraft and ceremonialism. There are myriad ways in which people run away from the mature acceptance of full responsibility for past misdeeds. The Aquarian sees that true responsibility begins in the realm of thought and must include every thought. Surely one can appreciate the profound integrity of the teaching that every thought connects each human being with every other. The intuitive recognition of universal interdependence and of human solidarity is the basis of an ever-expanding conception of moral

responsibility, renewed and refined through successive lives of earthly probation by a galaxy of immortal souls in a vast pilgrimage of self-discovery reaching towards universal self-consciousness.

It is helpful to make a start by recognizing that to become more selfless, one must become more responsible. This is a critical clue for daily self-study. When embarked upon self-therapy, the moment one even begins to blame anyone else, one should see that one is going wrong. The moment one looks for excuses one is off course. The moment one is compulsively peering around or seems too tired to face the truth, one is vainly running away from the Self, from the Wheel of Dharma, from the *Atman* and the *Atmajnanis*. One may crouch and kneel and beg for forgiveness, but the Law can exempt nothing and no one. *Atmajnanis* work in harmony with the *Atman*, and the *Atman* is Karma. Sages dare not still the movement of Karma. The disciple under trial should fundamentally rethink all relationships – to Teachers, to companions, to dependents and to oneself. One will need far more than a few crumbs of self-knowledge garnered carelessly, while holding onto a convenient self-image. One needs a stronger current through a deeper meditation upon the *Atman* and the *Agathon*, the central source of universal good. This will arouse increased wakefulness so that one can recognize seemingly remote connections between causes and consequences. One can come alive as a human being, a moral agent, an immortal soul, as a person who is truly trying to do the best without settling for a smug and shadowy sense of responsibility. One is willing and ready to assume the fullness of responsibility that constitutes the dignity and divinity of being human in a universe ruled by rigid justice. Thus one can strengthen one's clear perception, in others and in oneself, of those graces which are universal among human beings, which are conveyed through authentic gestures of gratitude, reverence and renunciation. Some people have dim memories of other times when they sought to cut corners in ways that might apparently make sense if there is only one life, but which make no sense whatsoever if there are successive incarnations and if every event has a hidden lesson which must be mastered.

To grasp the rudiments of the Philosophy of Perfectibility and to learn the axioms of the Science of Spirituality, one must deepen the sense of the sacred through some daily exemplification of the Religion of Responsibility. Shankara taught that negligence, the inversion of responsibility, is death. Negligence in breathing results in physical death; negligence of the mind leads to atrophy of the power to think. Negligence of the conscience culminates in moral blindness and negligence of the soul obscures intuition and inhibits the creative will. The immortal soul cannot make sufficient use of its instruments to fulfil its purposes on earth. Since negligence works at all levels and is ruinous to oneself, what is the deeper negligence of which Shankaracharya speaks? In terms of the mathematics of the soul, a feeble or a distorted use of opportunities for growth blocks future possibilities over lives. This is the worst kind of negligence. If one has the priceless gift of access to the waters of life-giving wisdom and neglects one's opportunity, one will be propelled backwards in ways that become irreversible. If one comes into the presence of a life-giving source of wisdom, one is hardly expected to be perfect, and one is certainly not immune from mistakes and misconceptions, let alone trials and tribulations. Teachers may even recommend strong medicine at certain times to enable the weak to observe minimums. Any human being who comes any closer to a life-giving source of wisdom must either go up or go down. As Gandhi saw, human nature is such that it must always either soar or sink. What determines this is negligence in relation to what one knows in some measure. This spiritual teaching of Shankara necessarily means that one must make a much better use of the future time available on earth, which will determine, at the moment of death, the outcome of succeeding lives. Each one is already carrying the burden of former lives, especially the last three, and to some extent can explain one's present patterns in terms of entrenched tendencies. If these are so tenacious, it is because they were not begun recently but were

fostered through recurring rationalizations, excuses and reinforcement.

One has therefore to cut to the very core of one's *psyche*, and this will need courage and care. That does not mean one should brood over one's shadow, or exaggerate one's personal self. The more one broods, the worse it will get, and the more one talks about it, the more it will lengthen. This is such a potent teaching that anybody who continued in this way even after knowing better would be much worse off. One must always exercise the privilege of speech with care, and never be negligent in the use of sound. Invoking the words of divine wisdom on behalf of the shadowy persona can lead to corruption of consciousness and astral pollution. Past negligence and misuse can be carefully corrected by present observation of compulsive patterns and neglected needs of the soul. There is hope because the immortal soul can always take control of its sluggish vestures, but this cannot be done overnight if there has been a solidification in the vestures through long-standing neglect of meditation and self-study. Be more deliberate, thoughtful and detached; then one will be more relaxed. Let go. Do not try to do everything all at once, but daily do something constructive. Find a balance that is appropriate, and it is wise to aim higher than one's weaknesses would suggest, while also making due allowance for the resistance offered by deeply lodged tendencies. Find out what works as a stimulus to growth and how one's golden moments may be renewed and fused into an active force for good.

Making a sincere start can release the spiritual will, the calm assurance that one is honest, one's perception is clear and one's mind is unclouded. The mists of illusion are dispelled precisely because one has seen through a glass darkly. There is no need to claim that when one sees clearly, one sees everything. Having found that one can see as clearly as possible what it is essential to do, then relax the tension of striving. The *Atman* is without any strain and is felt by the power of calmness. The *Atman* is pure joy, pellucid truth and self-sustaining strength. The pristine quality of pure love is the pathway to self-knowledge. These cannot be aroused at once but they are all latent in oneself. Though the mind has been blunted by negligence in meditation, it still has considerable elasticity and unrecognized resilience. One may discern in the heart the resonance of the *Atman*, even though the heart might have been obscured and wounded by perverted emotions and distorted feelings. Like a wounded soldier, one can still summon the unseen resources of the spirit.

There is a hidden current of continuity that preserves humanity. This is much deeper and more mysterious than the mere instinct of physical survival. The profounder the continuity, the greater the universality. One may learn as much as one can in relation to as much as one knows, in relation to as much as one can use with as much courage and strength as one can summon. With the *Atman* there is nothing to run away from, nothing to run away to. The *Atman* is everywhere. Though its light is ever available, it can only be reached by raising one's consciousness to the universality of the empyrean. When one is seemingly on one's own, one is mostly if unconsciously in contact with the lower forces in nature. When one ardently seeks divine wisdom and meditates upon the *Atmajnani*, one comes into the radius of an invisible fellowship of disciples on the Path of disinterested service to Humanity.

All growth really depends upon the extent of repeated self-correction in all one's patterns of use, misuse, non-use and abuse. The fundamental negligence of which Shankaracharya speaks consists in forgetting the Self in the realm of the non-Self. This is consistently mistaking the non-Self for the Self. The spiritual Teacher is not addressing the lower mind, but is reaching to the silent inner Self. One must see beyond the visible, and what is thought to be invisible is only so in relation to the visible. If selfhood is seen as a series of veils, the more earnestly one unties the mental knots that result in recurring negligence and repeated forgetfulness, the more easily one will unravel the finer threads of subtler

causes. As spiritual wakefulness increases, there will be a distinct replenishment through calmness, contentment and cheerfulness. The *Atman* knows no differentiation or death. Like a vast waveless expanse of water, it is eternally free and indivisible. It is pure consciousness and the Witness of all experiences. Its intrinsic nature is joy, it is beyond form and action, it is the changeless Knower of all that is changeable. It is infinite, impartite and inexhaustible.

Let there be no negligence in your devotion. Negligence in the practice of recollection is death – this has been declared by the seer Sanat Kumara.

For a spiritual seeker, there is no greater evil than negligence in recollection. From it arises delusion. From delusion arises egoism. From egoism comes bondage and from bondage misery.

Through negligence in recollection, a man is distracted from awareness of his divine nature. He who is thus distracted falls – and the fallen always come to ruin. It is very hard for them to rise again...

Control speech by mental effort; control the mind by the faculty of discrimination; control this faculty by the individual will, merge individuality in the infinite absolute *Atman* and reach supreme peace.

[Hermes](#), January 1979

Raghavan Iyer

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