

# We are All Fragments of the Divine

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

THE Sanskrit word *sādhana* implies “leading straight to a goal, guiding well, furthering; effective, efficient, productive of; accomplishment, performance”. (Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*). It is usually translated as spiritual practice. However, the so-called modern mind has made of it a veritable supermarket. Not only are there many practices on offer, most of which involve some kind of payment, but there is also a subtle “competition” between them, as if a particular teacher whose “spiritual brand” was more famous would perhaps attract more followers.

One of the most bizarre features of the modern world is to see so-called gurus and spiritual teachers building an enormous publicity machine around them. Contrast this with a life of utter self-effacement lived by Sri Ramana Maharshi, for example, and you will realize the difference between spiritual integrity and sham.

Besides what was described above, some people tend to view spiritual practices as if they were commodities for their pleasure and satisfaction. For example, there may be those who enrol in

a meditation course, do not achieve results in the short term, and proceed to search for another practice. This may be one reason why J. Krishnamurti said that no practices can lead one to Truth. Another question that also arises, given that Krishnaji used to meditate when he was a young man, is what kind of mind do we bring to a spiritual practice?

If a superficial mind approaches meditation, then it becomes just an exercise in self-delusion. Perhaps the noblest example of the right attitude in this regard was given by the Buddha. It only took him one meeting with a beggar on the roadside to build in him an unmovable determination to find the truth about suffering.

Carlos Castañeda’s teacher, Don Juan Matus, had this to say about travelling on a path: “For me there is only the travelling on paths that have heart, on any path that may have heart, and the only worthwhile challenge is to traverse its full length — and there I travel looking, looking breathlessly.” (Carlos Castañeda, *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*)

A genuine spiritual path has to involve

---

**Mr Pedro Oliveira** is Education Coordinator for the TS in Australia, former International Secretary, and later Head of the Editorial Office at Adyar.

## We are All Fragments of the Divine

our whole being — our heart — which means that it can never be unrelated to our daily life and its many relationships. It is precisely this that Rule 20 of Mabel Collins' *Light on the Path* points to: a practical and holistic approach to spiritual practice. Rule 17 of the same book encourages us to seek out the way, implying that it remains undiscovered in the midst of a life governed by self-centredness. This involves the paradox of getting out of oneself and at the same time looking at oneself objectively. Rule 20 presents us with a practical itinerary for doing so, involving openness of mind, plunging into the mysterious depths of our own being, and discovering the life beyond individuality. Equally important for us is to understand “those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side” with us. It is a discovery that knows no end.

The Oxford Dictionary gives as the meaning of the word “fragment”: a small part broken off or separated from something; an isolated or incomplete part of something. It is only when we look at ourselves intelligently that we discover that our sense of self is incomplete, for such a sense amounts to isolation, separation from others. As fragments we fail to know the truth of our being. When that truth is found there are no others, only the One Self, Atman, indivisible consciousness. But to pretend that we have reached that state is only a form of dangerous illusion.

The “way” suggested in *Light on the Path* is truly to be found in one's living, in how we approach daily contacts, rela-

tionships, and choices. The implication is that the way is a perception transformed by other-centredness, by welcoming others into our existence and not by shutting them out. As Radha Burnier once said: “Universal brotherhood is a mind without barriers.” What such a mind sees is the very truth that all life is one. To live a spiritual life can be seen as carefully building a vessel into which the newness of life can be poured. That means have no demands, no expectations, no projections. If the right work is done, the blessedness will come. But it cannot come at all into a consciousness in which the illusion of self is still alive.

H. P. Blavatsky's (HPB) *The Voice of the Silence* (Fragment III, v.273) illustrates the fact that the struggle against the sense of self is not for the faint-hearted:

The fearless warrior, his precious life-blood oozing from his wide and gaping wounds, will still attack the foe, drive him from out his stronghold, vanquish him, ere he himself expires. Act then, all ye who fail and suffer, act like him; and from the stronghold of your Soul, chase all your foes away — ambition, anger, hatred, e'en to the shadow of desire — when even you have failed. . . .

Then, from fragments we become an integral part of humanity, of the wholeness of life. Such realization has depths that cannot be fully fathomed. It transforms the world. Every great spiritual Teacher has inundated human consciousness with powerful streams of wisdom, compassion, love, and forgiveness.

## We are All Fragments of the Divine

According to the Occult teachings, humanity would not be here if it was not for them. But there is a limit to what they can do under the reign of Karma. We must do our part too.

Let us try and consider the contents of Rule 20 of *Light on the Path* carefully:

Seek it not by any one road. To each temperament there is one road which seems the most desirable. But the way is not found by devotion alone, by religious contemplation alone, by ardent progress, by self-sacrificing labour, by studious observation of life. None alone can take the disciple more than one step onward.

When we identify ourselves with only one perspective our view tends to become lopsided. Dissent was stifled in Europe for eleven centuries by the brutal domination of the Roman Catholic theology over secular learning and it took the cruel and inhumane sacrifice of Giordano Bruno's life for free thought to dawn in Europe. The above-mentioned Rule also shows that the way to the infinite light cannot be a mere "technique", something that we simply apply in the hope of making progress. As mentioned in *The Voice of the Silence*, Fragment II, v. 114:

The seeds of Wisdom cannot sprout and grow in airless space. To live and reap experience the mind needs breadth and depth and points to draw it towards the Diamond Soul. Seek not those points in Māyā's realm; but soar beyond illusions, search the eternal and the changeless SAT mistrusting fancy's false suggestions.

These are wise instructions indeed, for they show that although experiences come to all of us it is only the mind that has "breadth and depth" that can transform experiences into real learning instead of getting enmeshed in them. The wise mind receives every experience as a teacher instead of an agent of satisfaction or suffering. For the immature mind experiences are always a struggle between the "like and doesn't like", implying that the self or the ego-sense acts like an unwise, self-appointed judge of whatever life brings to us. The tragedy is that this mechanism of unawareness may go on for many lives until the blows of Karma shatter it. Returning to Rule 20:

All steps are necessary to make up the ladder. The vices of men become steps in the ladder, one by one, as they are surmounted. The virtues of man are steps indeed, necessary — not by any means to be dispensed with. Yet, though they create a fair atmosphere and a happy future, they are useless if they stand alone. The whole nature of man must be used wisely by the one who desires to enter the way.

The Christian tradition provides stunning examples of saints who had a distinctly immoral past. St. Augustine, for example, included the following in his *Confessions*: "As a youth I prayed, 'Give me chastity and continence, but not right now'". (Wikiquote) In spite of their moral weakness such saints seemed to have the capacity to thread the path by overcoming them. However, overcoming vices and practising virtues, according to *Light on*

## We are All Fragments of the Divine

*the Path*, is not sufficient. Only wisdom can properly deal with weaknesses and make of virtue a stepping-stone towards self-transformation, and not a road to self-righteousness. Rule 20 continues:

Each man is to himself absolutely the way, the truth, and the life. But he is only so when he grasps his whole individuality firmly, and, by the force of his awakened spiritual will, recognizes this individuality as not himself, but that thing which he has with pain created for his own use, and by means of which he purposes, as his growth slowly develops his intelligence, to reach to the life beyond individuality. When he knows that for this his wonderful complex separated life exists, then, indeed, and then only, he is upon the way.

The word “individual” comes from the Latin *individuus*, “indivisible”. For Carl Gustav Jung, we are not truly individuals yet as our lives are heavily influenced by what he called the “collective unconscious”. The resurgence of racism in different parts of the world today corroborates his view. The road to individuality, according to Jung, is not an easy one, as it involves confronting and integrating our shadow side, those aspects of ourselves we refuse to look at, like anger, ill will, and the tendency to dominate.

Rule 20 makes the remarkable statement that the sense of individuality was created by ourselves so that, in the course of our evolution, we may reach the life beyond individuality. In other words, the sense of individuality is not an end in itself but a scaffolding to help us reach

that truly undivided life that lies beyond *manas*, our potent cognitive principle, the centre of awareness and intellectual activity. In Theosophy that life beyond the individuality is *buddhi*, an unmediated understanding that the entire existence is one, a life-transforming realization that “to work for oneself is to work for disappointment.” And that is the beginning of the way.

Seek it by plunging into the mysterious and glorious depths of your own inmost being. Seek it by testing all experience, by utilizing the senses in order to understand the growth and meaning of individuality, and the beauty and obscurity of those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side with you, and form the race to which you belong. Seek it by study of the laws of being, the laws of Nature, the laws of the supernatural: and seek it by making the profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within. Steadily, as you watch and worship, its light will grow stronger. Then you may know you have found the beginning of the way. And when you have found the end its light will suddenly become the infinite light.

In its final part Rule 20 describes the depths that can be entered into by someone who underwent the right preparation. Here the spiritual practice acquires a dimension of profound discovery, of what a human being is meant to be when he or she leaves behind a worldly mind, completely dominated by self-centredness. Consciousness has become extraordinarily sensitive, purified from

## We are All Fragments of the Divine

the dross of selfishness and pride, ready to understand all that lives and approaching every relationship as the nearness to the sacred. The teaching contained in this Rule does not come from an ordinary mind. It comes from a consciousness that has reached the *svarūpa* of life — which is life in its essential nature, divine, sacred, one, eternal.

How does one plunge “into the mysterious and glorious depths” of one’s inmost being? The first step may be by listening to the contents of the personal mind. Each one of them — emotions, thoughts, memories, and reactions — is claiming the attention of the perceiver. And yet, the moment the searchlight of awareness and attention is shone on them they dissolve. This opens the door for experiencing a new depth within oneself. The deeper the experience, the lesser is the feeling of self-importance. And the reverse is equally true: the more shallow the experience, the greater, more pronounced is the feeling of self-importance. When perception matures into spiritual perception there is not an ego to be advertised, protect, or promote.

How does one “test all experience”? By remaining objective, non-identified, alert and sensitive. “Action is only for the purification of the mind” taught Sri Sankarachārya. The practice of *nidkāma karma*, desireless action, cleanses the mind from the impurities created by lifetimes of indulgence in selfishness.

The core of our individuality is *manas*, the mind principle, the coordinating centre for all experiences, and the theatre

for the great evolutionary drama in each human being. HPB said that *manas* is dual in its nature: part of it expresses a strong pull and attraction towards desire — *kama* — and creates what she called the “desire-mind”. Another part yearns for communion with *buddhi*. Desire is not just a recurrent focal point; desire is present in every aspect of the activity of the mind, even at subtle levels. The Buddhist tradition holds that one of the fetters that prevent the disciple to move towards the stage of Arhat is conceit. Extraordinary alertness needs to be exercised towards the very end of the path for desire may lie hidden in every nook and corner of the mind.

On the other hand, the mind is the connecting link between Spirit and matter and thus has vast creative potential. Within the mind lies the power of profound assimilation of experiences as well as of timeless truths. Our individuality grows by understanding and assimilating the truth of every experience but also by responding to the depths of the Wisdom Teaching passed on to us by numerous generations of mystics, adepts, and initiates. In them the individuality blossomed into a fully-grown flower of exquisite beauty, radiating wisdom, compassion, love, and boundless helpfulness.

Next, Rule 20 mentions the need for us to understand “the beauty and obscurity of those other divine fragments which are struggling side by side with you, and form the race to which you belong”. The personal mind tends to react to every contact, as was said before,

## We are All Fragments of the Divine

through a pattern of likes and dislikes. Under dislikes lies hidden indifference, an attitude towards others as if they did not matter. Indifference may lead to callousness which adds much more sombre dimensions to self-centredness in us.

However, the wise teaching contained in the Rule above-mentioned states that all around us are divine fragments, struggling side by side with us. In every person we meet or relate to is a portion of the divine, a fellow pilgrim on the way to the Source, a wayfarer in search of wholeness and peace, a soul seeking its true home in a universe of constant change.

In her weekly morning meditation at the Krotona Institute of Theosophy many years ago, Virginia Hanson, an advanced pilgrim, used to remind us how precious every person we meet is. And she meant every person. The Buddhist tradition mentions that Angulimāla, a bloodthirsty criminal that used to cut off a finger from each one of his victims, on entering the field of consciousness of the Buddha when the latter was asleep, was completely transformed, regenerated, and became a disciple of the Buddha. St Paul, a former persecutor of Christians, became one of the greatest apostles of Christ after a life-transforming encounter on the road to Damascus. We are all fragments of the divine.

The same Rule 20 enjoins: “study of

the laws of being, the laws of Nature, the laws of the supernatural”. Understanding the order which is at work in the universe helps us to find the uncreated order within us. It is said that Pythagoras used to heal people with different kinds of illnesses by playing acoustic instruments near them. He maintained that the essential nature of the soul is harmony, and that the harmony expressed in music could help to restore balance in a diseased body. If we learn to look closely, every life form is an expression of awesome order and beauty.

The teaching concludes with an exhortation for us to make “profound obeisance of the soul to the dim star that burns within”. It implies a faint perception of a much deeper dimension within us. Some mystics suggest that this perception may lead to an “unknowing” — going beyond everything known by the personal mind. The Rule also mentions the words “watch and worship”, indicating that this is not a merely intellectual exercise; it is a preparation to meet the sacred. At this level, whatever is personal has been left behind.

We are told the end of the way is lost in infinite light. And the final secret is revealed: that infinite light is not only our destination. It is who we are. It is also who all those around us are. We were all along fragments of the Divine, now made whole again. ✧

**Errata:** Please note that in Dr Deepa Padhi's article published in the December 2019 issue of *The Theosophist*, p. 14, left column, line 14 from the bottom, the word “Theomorphic” should instead have read as: “The morphic”.