

Selections from
Thus Have I Heard
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THE PERFECT LISTENER

We frequently come across in Buddhistic texts the opening affirmation “Thus Have I Heard.” And yet the Master Gautama in more than one place deprecates blind acceptance of any teaching by anyone, including his devoted Bhikkhus. Thus, to give but one example: Journeying in Kosala, at Kesaputta, a suburb of the Kalama Nobles, He was asked by the Kalamas and very unequivocally the Master said:—

“Now, O Kalamas, do not ye go by hearsay, nor by what is handed down by others, nor by what people say, nor by what is stated on the authority of your traditional teachings. Do not go by reasoning, nor by inferring, nor by argument as to method, nor from reflection on and approval of an opinion, nor out of respect, thinking a recluse must be deferred to. But, Kalamas, when you know of yourselves: ‘These teachings are not good: they are blameworthy: they are condemned by the wise: these teachings, when followed out and put in practice, conduce to loss and suffering’—then reject them.”

Every true teacher and sage has advocated strong search, fearless inquiry and condemned blind belief. And yet uniformly we come across the instruction, in one form or another, that he who desires to learn must listen. This patient and attentive hearing precedes practice. In the Pythagorean School, Akoustikoi or Hearers were allowed after a period to become Asketai, Practitioners; this is but an echo of the Indian Shravakas and Shramanas.

In the *Bhagavad-Gita* Arjuna is the ideal Shravaka or Listener. The Master Krishna in the Discourse on Wisdom, the Supreme Secret, once known, which had been lost, advises His Devotee and Friend to seek this Secret Wisdom by service, by strong search and questions, and by humility which implies the correct way of listening; and then Arjuna is promised that the Wise Seers of the Essence of things or *Tattvas* will “communicate” the Supreme Knowledge to him (*Gita*, IV. 34). Previously, in the second lecture, Krishna hints to Arjuna that the Esoteric Philosophy He is endeavoring to teach is higher and nobler than that which is to be found in the *Vedas* (II. 45) and again in the Fifteenth Discourse the *Vedas* are compared to leaves on the magnificent Tree of Wisdom (XV. 1)—leaves which fall and flutter away, while new and fresh ones come to birth. Once again Krishna warns Arjuna and suggests a right attitude in listening; he has learnt lessons, he is about to hear new teachings (II. 52). Proceeding with His instruction Krishna comes to the end of His preaching and says: “Thus have I made known unto thee this knowledge which is a mystery more secret than secrecy itself; ponder it fully in thy mind; act as seemeth best unto thee” (XVIII. 63). Thus Arjuna is called upon to make his own decision before accepting the instructions and acting them out. The Disciple’s answer is also unequivocal: “My delusion is destroyed, I am collected once more; I am free from doubt,

firm, and will act according to thy bidding” (XVIII. 73). This is not blind following. The mind and heart of Arjuna assent because they have assimilated the teachings of the eighteen lectures. Arjuna’s duty as a Shravaka is accomplished. He is ready for fighting his own lower animal nature and is sure that he will triumph.

During this month Hindus will celebrate the Natal Day of Krishna—the orthodox in their own ritualistic way, the mystics in theirs—contemplation on the Light of all lights which Krishna is and which burns at the core of the Heart. There are many in the Occident who are students of the philosophy of the *Gita* and there are a few who are the intelligent Devotees who sense the value of the teachings of One who opened the Kali Yuga, 5000 years ago. But perhaps this year a few may like to contemplate on the perfect Shravaka, the patient, humble and resolute Listener, Arjuna, in his attitude to catch the Wisdom of Krishna amidst the din of the battlefield. The blowing of the conches, the loud orders of the captains to their regiments, the neighing of the horses and roarings of the elephants—nothing was allowed to interfere; Arjuna intent on the instructions of Krishna heard all, reflecting hour by hour on what he heard, assimilating what he understood and thus getting ready for divine action.

What Arjuna *saw* when his chariot stood between the two armies made him despondent; what he *heard* energized and inspired him to proceed to victory in the greatest of all wars.

Let us cultivate the power to hear.

ELEMENTS AND GODS

Worship the Gods and the Gods will yield Thee grace.

Men of modern science know only a very little about what they themselves have called the correlation of forces. The imponderables of the invisible cosmos are substantial and produce results. Some of these effects have come under the notice of the great physicists, but even they do not suspect that these correlations of forces are effects and occur according to a law which the ancient Seers have called the Law of Transmutation among Forces. The imponderables are the basis of the old Greek and the older Aryan classification of the material elements into Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Æther. The visible counterparts of the invisible great Elements are effects of the working of intelligent forces called Elementals, which are described as the nerves of Nature. The Hindu Puranas speak of *Devatas* and *Devas*—Godlings or Elementals and *Devas* or Gods presiding over them.

Still more obscure is the working of the imponderables in the mental and moral spheres of our being. The Law of Transmutation among Forces causes remarkable changes in a man’s character and circumstances, quite beyond us at present. But all the same these play a real part in the precipitation of human destiny, of the individual or of nations.

Man lives not only on the surface of the Earth, nourished by Water, but affects and is affected by the atmosphere and by heat; similarly his emotions, his thoughts and his volitions also

affect and are affected by the subtler aspects of the great elements and the correlations of their forces. A man's thought, colliding with another man's thought, may cause a gale or a zephyr or a tranquil light and a brightness of the air. A woman's anger or jealousy produces detrimental emotional reactions in more than one human being. A child's laughter may save an empire or avert a world war; also, its screams may draw forth howls of mobs. All these instances may sound exaggerated as expressed, but a thoughtful examination of them will reveal a profound, a stupendous, underlying truth.

Our personal make-up is intimately connected with the Elements of the ancients—Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Æther. It is through these that the embodied Spirit works, identifying itself with the material aspect of Nature, which Krishna calls his lower nature— *aparaprakriti* (*Gita*, VII. 4); dominated and guided by the constituents of this lower nature, it becomes the lower man.

But Krishna has a higher nature—*paraprakriti* (VII. 5); it constitutes in man the Thinker and the Knower. This higher man is the controller of the lower wandering mind, the drifting, prowling heart and the exploited will, swayed by the notion of the false egotistic "I" and its lethal tendency to the dire heresy of separateness. This higher nature is the Light or the Wisdom of Krishna. While the lower nature is enveloped by *avidya*—ignorance—creating illusion which degenerates into delusion, the higher is energized by *Vidya*—Knowledge—creating Wisdom and rising to Compassion.

Because of his attraction and response to the outer darkness of the rigid material universe, man overlooks the Light side of the higher nature of the universe. Therefore he fails to benefit from "the sweet smell in the earth," from the living "taste (*rasa*) in water," from "the brilliance in the fire," from "the sound in Æther." The two Natures, Light and Darkness, conjointly working according to Law, benefit each other and the Supreme Spirit of which they are manifestations.

Man has been taught to live independently, and so, in the struggle for existence, he has competed against his fellows and become selfish and violent. Has not the time come for man to learn that living need not be a struggle? And also that Liberty can be possessed only by the man of Love, that Freedom and Hatred cannot live together? Nature is the Great Totalitarian State, very unlike that which Stalin is trying to create; also it is the Mighty Commonwealth whose riches are for the enjoyment of all, for there are no foes to fear; all are friends to be loved; further it is the True Welfare State in which all men and women, children and adolescents flourish, as flourish also in their own right the animals, the vegetation, the coal, the oil, the minerals. Many are the bodies of Gods which nourish us and, nourishing each other, all obtain the highest felicity. (*Gita*, III. 11) The *Gita* promises us the enjoyment of our wishes (III. 12) if we observe the Law of Interdependence. He who practices the law of selfish independence exploits Nature and earns for himself the epithet of "thief" (III. 12). The World is One and the Universe is a Plenum—the grains of dust are akin to the myriad stars of the firmament; and man cannot live or evolve without either. How true it is that

"Back of the Bread is the Flour
And back of the Flour is the Mill,
Back of the Mill is the Sun and the Shower
And the Wind and the Father's Will."