

Salvation and Yogic Pratyahara

- excerpted from the teachings of Eugene Halliday – Towards the Whole Being

Why do we need saving and from what? We live in a world which continually distracts us from our own **essential self**, a world which carries us outwards, away from our own spiritual essence, away from the divine presence which dwells within us.

Our **five special sense organs** are turned outwards into the material world, so that their action, although it gives us some information about the physical facts of that world, does not help us to see ourselves as we are in **essence**, in the depths of our being. "The world is too much with us", says Wordsworth, "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers". At some time we need to be rescued from the world and returned to our deepest spiritual centre, from which springs forth the vitalising power that life is a joyous affirmation.

Any experiences which carry us away from our innermost vital centre and fixate us in the things and events of the external material world, any experiences which trap us into identification with the merely physical and outer aspects of our being, these are the enemy from whom we need to be saved. An "off-centre" person is at the mercy of external events and cannot be **truly happy**. To be centred in one's innermost spiritual essence is to be saved. Salvation is just this being rescued from the outer world's forces and events and restored to one's true relation with the divine centre of one's being. CP127-8

Let us think clearly about this. We have two directions in which we can focus our attention. We can look **inside** ourselves and see what is taking place in our **thoughts, feelings and will**, thus becoming conscious of the ideas which pass through our mind, aware of our feelings, our likings and dislikings, and what our will is trying to achieve. We can also look **outside** our physical body and focus our attention on the things we see in the external material world.

When we look at external material things, these stimulate our sense-organs, our eyes, our ears and so on. The impressions received by these sense organs are stored up in the brain and become centres of interest for us. Gradually we furnish our mind with images of things of the outer world. The more our interest is in external things, the more our energy is used to perceive them and to relate to them. We see them, and we act on them according to whether we find them productive of pleasure or pain.

But all our activities use up energy. We are creatures, that is, beings of limited bodies, limited sense organs, and limited amounts of energy. If we use our energy in one direction, we are taking energy away from other directions in which we might use it. To engage our attention with the things of the external world is to take energy away from inner psychological processes.

That to which we give our attention dominates our consciousness.

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When the outer material world batters on the doors of our sense organs we tend to be drawn out of our innermost self wherein dwells the Spirit of God(the Atman). We tend to forget our inwardness, our essentiality, from which springs our free spirit. And in forgetting we fall into slavery to the external world's stimuli. We become machines, and act like machines. We react to every stimulus of the outer world as if we were utterly devoid of freedom. We lose our essential humanness. At the lowest level of our degenerative fall we become as free as stones. We roll down the mountain of time and strike haphazardly against each other as we roll. In our strikings we become convinced materialists. We lose all belief in free will. We think ourselves ruled absolutely by senseless laws of matter, and so make no effort to lift ourselves out of our degenerative condition.

Yet all the while within us is the hidden divinity that confers upon mankind the most marvellous of all gifts, the gift of divine grace, the gift of **free will**. To exercise this will we have to leave our external mechanical self-image and return to that mysterious centre of our being wherein dwells our God-given free-will. "His worship is perfect freedom". Without this we cannot know real bliss.

To enter the innermost depths of our being, where dwells our freedom, we must penetrate through all the hiddennesses of our painful experience-records. We must face ourselves as we really are, not as we would like to seem to be, knowing that we are not.

It is a hard and narrow path that we have to tread to penetrate into the hidden mystery of our self-being. To tread this path we must love God, our original source, and fellow path-treaders as our own self. It is a path trodden only by those who **love the whole of Reality, and love its parts as of that whole**. It is error to love the whole and not the parts. It is equally error to think that we can love parts without loving the whole that generates them.

We talk of the Narrow Path that leads into eternal life, and the Broadway Way that leads to destruction. Why should the path to eternal life be called "narrow"? Because in order to attain eternal life as an individual we must **integrate all parts of our being**. To "integrate" means that we are to gather all our parts, our thinkings, our feelings, and our willings.

We live in a wide, wide world that momentarily acts upon us and tends to draw our attention out of ourselves and to scatter our energies among that wide world's things and events. We have sense organs, eyes, ears, etc. Touching we do with our skin surface, tasting with our tongue, smelling with our nose. Without thinking about other sense that we might have, like the sense of heat and cold etc., we have quite enough to handle with what we call our five special senses.

With our special sense organs, we can focus on things in such a way that we become highly conscious of the stimuli we receive from them. If we focus on one particular sense, say that of sight, in the act of focussing we concentrate energy in the particular organ (the eye) by which we receive stimuli from light. This concentration of energy on one sense organ tends to withdraw energy from our other senses. If we try to look sharply at the form of some object, we tend at that moment to forget to hear, touch, taste and smell it. We find in practice that concentration on one particular object causes us to lose focus on others. It is not easy to give full attention at the same moment to several people all talking at once. We tend to listen more to the ones in whom we are most interested.

This focussing of one sense-organ onto some particular thing is one form of narrowing down our attention. Is this the kind of thing we have to do to put our feet on the narrow way that leads to Eternal Life?

The material objects that we see in the world come into existence, persist for a time, then are broken, or wear away, and finally cease to exist. If therefore we narrow our attention down onto such things, which must at some time cease to be, we are not leading ourselves into Eternal Life, but into a life that by definition is merely temporal.

Time for us is a way we have of experiencing things one after another. We say that we experience things in Time **serially** or **sequentially**. As long as we confine ourselves to the things and events of Time we are focussing on things that must at some time cease to be. We call such things "vain", meaning that they must finally vanish. "Vanity" means "coming to nothing", like straw or the husks of things blown away by the wind when winnowing. This is why we are given an image of a man with a winnowing fan in his hand. "Fan" and "Vain" and "Vanity" are closely related words.

It is natural to be healthy and beautiful rather than ill and ugly. But there is a fact which we all have to face, the fact of the march of Time. Time ages things.

To be continued...

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