

YOGA FOR YELLOWBELLIES

Third Lecture

Dear Children,

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

1. You will remember that last week our study of Yoga had led us to the Fathers of the Church. We saw that their philosophy and science, in following an independent route, had brought us to the famous exclamation of Tertullian: 'certum est quia ineptum!'¹ How right the Church has been to deny the authority of Reason!

2. We are almost tempted to enquire for a moment what the Church means by 'faith.' St. Paul tells us that faith is 'the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things unseen.' I do not think, then, that we are to imagine this word faith to mean what that lecherous gross-bellied boor, Martin Luther, maintained. The faith of which he speaks is anything but a substance, and as for evidence, it is nothing but the power, as the schoolboy said, of believing that which we know to be untrue. To have any sensible meaning at all, faith must mean experience, and that view is in exact accord with the conclusion to which we were led in my last lecture. Nothing is any use to us unless it be a certainty unshakeable by criticism of any kind, and there is only one thing in the universe which complies with these conditions: the direct experience of spiritual truth. Here, and here only, do we find a position in which the great religious minds of all times and all climes coincide. It is necessarily above dogma, because dogma consists of a collection of intellectual statements, each of which, and also its contradictory, can easily be disputed and overthrown.

3. You are probably aware that in the Society of Jesus the postulants are trained to debate on all these highly controversial subjects. They put up a young man to prove any startling blasphemy that happens to occur to them. And the more shocked the young man is, the better the training for his

mind, and the better service will he give to the Society in the end; but only if his mind has been completely disabused of its confidence in its own rightness, or even in the possibility of being right.

4. The rationalist, in his shallow fashion, always contends that this training is the abnegation of mental freedom. On the contrary, it is the only way to obtain that freedom. In the same Society the training in obedience is based on a similar principle. The priest has to do what his Superior orders him – 'perinde ac cadaver.'² Protestants always represent that this is the most outrageous and indefensible tyranny. 'The poor devil,' they say, 'is bludgeoned into having no will of his own.' That is pure nonsense. By abnegating his will through the practice of holy obedience his will has become enormously strong, so strong that none of his natural instincts, desires, or habits can intrude. He has freed his will of all these inhibitions. He is a perfect function of the machinery of the Order. In the General of the Society is concentrated the power of all those separate wills, just as in the human body every cell should be completely devoted in its particular quality to the concentrated will of the organism.

5. In other words, the Society of Jesus has created a perfect imitation of the skeleton of the original creation, living man. It has complied with the divinely instituted order of things, and that is why we see that the body, which was never numerically important, has yet been one of the greatest influences in the development of Europe. It has not always worked perfectly, but that has not been the fault of the system; and, even as it is, its record has been extraordinary. And one of the most remarkable things about it is that its greatest and most important achievements have been in the domain of science and philosophy. It has done nothing in religion; or, rather, where it has meddled with religion it has only done harm. What a mistake! And why? For the simple reason that it was in a position to take no notice of religion; all these matters were decided for it by the Pope, or by the Councils of the Church, and the Society was therefore able to

1 "It is certain because it is absurd."

2 "Just as a body" - that is, having no will of one's own.

free itself from the perplexities of religion, in exactly the same way as the novice obtains complete freedom from his moral responsibilities by sinking his personal phantasies in the will of the Superior.

6. I should like to mention here that the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius are in their essence really admirable Yoga practices. They have, it is true, a tinge of magical technique, and they have been devised to serve a dogmatic end. That was, however, necessary, and it was good magic too, at that, because the original will of the Founder was to produce a war engine as a counterblast to the Reformation. He was very wise to devise a plan, irrespective of its abstract merits as philosophy, which would most efficiently serve that single purpose. The only trouble has been that this purpose was not sufficiently cosmic in scope to resist internal forces. Having attained the higher planes by practice of these exercises, they found that the original purpose of the Society was not really adequate to their powers; they were, so to speak, over-engined. They stupidly invaded the spiritual sphere of the other authorities whom they were founded to support, and thus we see them actually quarrelling with the Pope, while failing signally to obtain possession of the Papacy. Being thus thwarted in their endeavours, and confused in their purpose, they redoubled the ardour of their exercises; and it is one of the characteristics of all spiritual exercises, if honestly and efficiently performed, that they constantly lead you on to higher planes, where all dogmatic considerations, all intellectual concepts, are invalid. Hence, we found that it is not altogether surprising that the General of the Order and his immediate circle have been supposed to be atheists. If that were true, it would only show that they have been corrupted by their preoccupation with the practical politics of the world, which it is impossible to conduct on any but an atheistic basis; it is brainless hypocrisy to pretend otherwise, and should be restricted to the exclusive use of the Foreign Office.

It would, perhaps, be more sensible to suppose that the heads of the Order have really attained the greatest heights of spiritual knowledge and

freedom, and it is quite possible that the best term to describe their attitude would be either Pantheistic or Gnostic.

7. These considerations should be of the greatest use to us now that we come to discuss in more detail the results of the Yoga practices. There is, it is true, a general similarity between the ecstatic outbursts of the great mystics all over the world. Comparisons have often been drawn by students of the subject. I will only detain you with one example: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.' What is this injunction? It is a generalisation of St. Augustine's 'Love, and do what thou wilt.'³ But in 'The Book of the Law', lest the hearer should be deluded into a spasm of antinomianism,⁴ there is a further explanation: 'Love is the law, love under will.'

8. However, the point is that it is no use discussing the results of Yoga, whether that Yoga be the type recommended by Lao-Tze, or Patanjali, or St. Ignatius Loyola, because for our first postulate we have: that these subjects are incapable of discussion. To argue about them only causes us to fall into the pit of Because, and there to perish with the dogs of Reason. The only use, therefore, of describing our experiences is to enable students to get some sort of idea of the sort of thing that is going to happen to them when they attain success in the practices of Yoga. We have David saying in the Psalms: 'I hate thoughts, but Thy law do I love.' We have St. Paul saying: 'The carnal mind is enmity against God.' One might almost say that the essence of St. Paul's Epistles is a struggle against mind: 'We war not against flesh and blood' – you know the rest – I can't be bothered to quote it all – Eph. vi. 12.⁵

3 St. Augustine of Hippo, 354 – 430 CE. The actual quote in Latin is "*dilige et quod vis fac.*"

4 Antinomianism: the doctrine or belief that the Gospel frees Christians from required obedience to any law, whether scriptural, civil, or moral, and that salvation is attained solely through faith and the gift of divine grace.

5 "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (KJV)

9. It is St. Paul, I think, who describes Satan, which is his name for the enemy, owing to his ignorance of the history of the world, as the Prince of the Power of the Air; that is, of the Ruach, of the intellect; and we must never forget that what operated the conversion of St. Paul was the Vision on the road to Damascus. It is particularly significant that he disappeared into the Desert of Arabia for three years before coming forward as the Apostle to the Gentiles. St. Paul was a learned Rabbi; he was the favourite pupil of the best expositor of the Hebrew Law, and in the single moment of his Vision all his arguments were shattered at a single stroke!

10. We are not told that St. Paul said anything at the time, but went quietly on his journey. That is the great lesson: not to discuss the results. Those of you who possess a copy of 'The Equinox of the Gods' may have been very much surprised at the extraordinary injunction in the Comment: the prohibition of all discussion of the Book. I myself did not fully understand that injunction; I do so now.

11. Let us now deal with a few of the phenomena which occur during the practices of Pratyahara.

Very early during my retirement in Kandy, I had been trying to concentrate by slanting my eyes towards the tip of my nose. This, by the way, is not a good practice; one is liable to strain the eyes. But what happened was that I woke up in the night; my hand touched a nose; I immediately concluded that some one was in the room. Not at all; I only thought so because my nose had passed away from the region of my observation by the practice of concentrating upon it.

12. The same sort of thing occurs with adequate concentration on any object. It is connected, curiously enough, with the phenomena of invisibility. When your mind has gone so deeply into itself that it is unconscious of itself and its surroundings, one of the most ordinary results is that the body becomes invisible to other people. I do not think that it would make any difference for a photograph, though I have no evidence for saying this; but it has happened to me on

innumerable occasions. It was an almost daily occurrence when I was in Sicily.

13. A party of us used to go down to a very beautiful bay of sand, whence jutted fantastically-shaped islets of rock; it is rimmed by cliffs encrusted with jewels of marine life. The way was over a bare hillside; except for a few hundred yards of vineyard there was no cover – nay, not for a rabbit. But it often happened that one of the party would turn to speak to me, and fail to see me. I have often known this to happen when I was dictating; my chair was apparently empty.

Incidentally, this faculty, which I think is exercised, as a rule, unconsciously, may become an actual magical power.

14. It happened to me on one occasion that a very large number of excited people were looking for me with no friendly intentions; but I had a feeling of lightness, of ghostliness, as if I were a shadow moving soundlessly about the street; and in actual fact none of the people who were looking for me gave the slightest indication that they were aware of my presence.

There is a curious parallel to this incident in one of the Gospels where we read that 'they picked up stones to stone him, but he, passing through the midst of them, went his way.'⁶

15. There is another side to this business of Pratyahara, one that may be described as completely contradictory against what we have been talking about.

If you concentrate your attention upon one portion of the body with the idea of investigating it, that is, I suppose, allowing the mind to move within very small limits, the whole of your consciousness becomes concentrated in that small part. I used to practise this a good deal in my retirement by Lake Pasquaney. I would usually take a finger or a toe, and identify my whole consciousness with the small movements which I allowed it to make. It would be futile to go into much detail about this experience. I can only say that until you acquire the power you

6 Well, almost right. See the story of the people of the synagogue vs Jesus in Luke iv., 29-30.

have no idea of the sheer wonder and delight of that endlessly quivering orgasm.

16. If I remember rightly, this practice and its result were one of the principal factors which enabled me afterwards to attain what is called the Trance of Wonder, which pertains to the Grade of a Master of the Temple, and is a sort of complete understanding of the organism of the universe, and an ecstatic adoration of its marvel.

This Trance is very much higher than the Beatific Vision, for always in the latter it is the heart – the Phren⁷ – which is involved; in the former it is the Nous, the divine intelligence of man, whereas the heart is only the centre of the intellectual and moral faculties.

17. But, so long as you are occupying yourself with the physical, your results will only be on that plane; and the principal effect of these concentrations on small parts of the body is the understanding, or rather the appreciation, of sensuous pleasure. This, however, is infinitely refined, exquisitely intense. It is often possible to acquire a technique by which the skilled artist can produce this pleasure in another person. Map out, say, three square inches of skin anywhere, and it is possible by extreme gentle touches to excite in the patient all the possible sensations of pleasure of which that person is capable. I know that this is a very extraordinary claim, but it is a very easy one to substantiate. The only thing I am afraid of is that experts may be carried away by the rewards, instead of getting the real value of the lesson, which is that the gross pleasures of the senses are absolutely worthless.

This practice, so far as it is useful to all, should be regarded as the first step towards emancipation from the thrall of the bodily desires, of the sensations self-destructive, of the thirst for pleasure.

18. I think this is a good opportunity to make a little digression in favour of Mahasatipatthana. This practice was recommended by the Buddha in very special terms, and it is the only one of which he speaks so highly. He told his disciples

that if they only stuck to it, sooner or later they would reach full attainment. The practice consists of an analysis of the universe in terms of consciousness. You begin by taking some very simple and regular bodily exercise, such as the movement of the body in walking, or the movements of the lungs in breathing. You keep on noting what happens: 'I am breathing out; I am breathing in; I am holding my breath,' as the case may be. Quite without warning, one is appalled by the shock of the discovery that what you have been thinking is not true. You have no right to say: 'I am breathing in.' All that you really know is that there is a breathing in.

19. You therefore change your note, and you say: 'There is a breathing in; there is a breathing out,' and so on. And very soon, if you practise assiduously, you get another shock. You have no right to say that there is a breathing. All you know is that there is a sensation of that kind. Again you change your conception of your observation, and one day make the discovery that the sensation has disappeared. All you know is that there is perception of a sensation of breathing in or breathing out. Continue, and that is once more discovered to be an illusion. What you find is that there is a tendency to perceive a sensation of the natural phenomena.

20. The former stages are easy to assimilate intellectually; one assents to them immediately that one discovers them, but with regard to the 'tendency,' this is not the case, at least it was not so for my own part. It took me a long while before I understood what was meant by 'tendency.' To help you to realise this I should like to find a good illustration. For instance, a clock does nothing at all but offer indications of the time. It is so constructed that this is all we can know about it. We can argue about whether the time is correct, and that means nothing at all, unless, for example, we know whether the clock is controlled electrically from an astronomical station where the astronomer happens to be sane, and in what part of the world the clock is, and so on.

21. I remember once when I was in Teng-Yueh, just inside the Chinese frontier in Yunnan. The

⁷ In Greek, "phren" means "brain" or "mind". Many ancient Greeks believed that the heart was our thinking center.

hour of noon was always telegraphed to the Consulate from Peking. This was a splendid idea, because electricity is practically instantaneous. The unfortunate thing was, if it *was* unfortunate, which I doubt, that the messages had to be relayed at a place called Yung Chang. The operators there had the good sense to smoke opium most of the time, so occasionally a batch of telegrams would arrive, a dozen or so in a bunch, stating that it was noon at Peking on various dates! So all the gross phenomena, all these sensations and perceptions, are illusion. All that one could really say was that there was a tendency on the part of some lunatic in Peking to tell the people at Teng-Yueh what o'clock it was.

22. But even this Fourth Skandha⁸ is not final. With practice, it also appears as an illusion, and one remains with nothing but the bare consciousness of the existence of such a tendency.

I cannot tell you very much about this, because I have not worked it out very thoroughly myself, but I very much doubt whether 'consciousness' has any meaning at all, as a translation of the word Vinnanam.⁹ I think that a better translation would be 'experience,' used in the sense in which we have been using it hitherto, as the direct reality behind and beyond all remark.

23. I hope you will appreciate how difficult it is to give a reasoned description, however tentative, of these phenomena, still less to classify them properly. They have a curious trick of running one into the other. This, I believe, is one of the reasons why it has been impossible to find any really satisfactory literature about Yoga at all. The more advanced one's progress, the less one knows, and the more one understands. The effect is simply additional evidence of what I have been saying all this time: that it is very little use discussing things; what is needed is continuous devotion to the practice.

Love is the law, love under will.

⁸ Skandhas (Sanskrit) are "aggregates" in English. In Buddhist thought they are the five functions or aspects that constitute the human being. The Buddha teaches that nothing among them is really "I" or "mine".

⁹ "Vinnana-khandha", the "aggregate of consciousness", is one of the five Buddhist Skandhas.