

Bringing Heaven to Earth

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The great sages of every tradition tell us unanimously that at the very core of the human personality, in the very depths of our consciousness, lies a divine spark that nothing can extinguish. Not all the mistakes we have committed, not all the problems we may have brought upon ourselves and others, can extinguish this spark. Nothing can. It is, as Meister Eckhart says, an uncreated light – the essential core of divinity present in every creature.

If you can remember this every day in moments when you're inclined to look down upon yourself, this reminder will restore your faith and inspire you to put all your efforts into releasing this beautiful image from the mirror of possibility into your everyday life. In Western mysticism, discovering this divine core of personality is considered superhuman – rising above the ordinary human level to a plane far, far higher. But the point of view of Yoga Science is just as accurate: we are simply incomplete now; our task is to become complete. Our natural condition is love—anger, hatred, animosity are unnatural. Our natural condition is to be a saint; anything less is a masquerade.

This sounds like Polyanna, but the sages are not denying our negative side. They are well aware of the many serious flaws in all human character. But it is refreshing and practical to remember that before original sin came original innocence. The core of our personality is original goodness. It is covered by our unconscious faulty concepts, but the covering can be removed. That mental software can be changed. And when it is, the essential goodness of our nature is revealed.

That's why instead of giving all your attention to what you did twenty-five years ago, give it to what you are doing now.

In the present moment, the emphasis is much more positive and practical. We are not wicked; sometimes we just make mistakes. We can be ignorant – sometimes a bit slow to learn, but still not wicked. If you fail a course in school, your teacher is not going to give you a W for wicked and send you to perdition. A good teacher just says, "You haven't learned yet. You haven't done your homework. If you do your homework and learn, you will get a good grade." Once we get a passing grade in life, we don't have to go through the agony of repeating the same mistakes over and over. We have graduated – we have learned.

Then the burden of the past falls away, just as when we wake up from a dream. It is as though all those mistakes have been cast into the depths of the sea. Afterwards, we don't ask ourselves, "Why did I do those foolish things? Why did I not do better?" The person who made those mistakes is no longer the same. We have changed: the mask of our old personality has been taken off, revealing who we truly are.

Then all the energy of our full personality – all the vitality that used to flow towards selfishness and insecurity flows freely in new, creative channels. If you look back, you can see the old dry creek bed of past conditioning and say, "Yes, there must have been a river there once"; you can see the sand and pebbles. But there is no water coming. It's all flowing towards the source now: health, happiness, love, wisdom, compassion, all the energy of a strong, new nature.

When all is said and done, this is the glory of the human being: not technological marvels, not in creating the greatest economy in the history of the world, but the capacity to remove everything that hides this imprisoned splendor in our consciousness.

This is not theory. This is not metaphysics. Ordinary women and men in every great tradition have turned all their resources inwards to make this supreme discovery. When one of these great pioneers, the 13th century German mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg, was asked how she did it, she replied simply, "My mirror is pure and I am His reflection." That is a precious clue—for you and I can do the same.

The Bhagavad Gita uses the same image. Just as we cannot see our face in a mirror that is covered with dust, the Gita says, we cannot see the divine face in our consciousness because the dust from past conditioning has settled on it. In order to see the Lord within us, we have simply to cleanse our consciousness of the dust and grime that cover it.

In your home, you probably clean your mirror often. Suppose you looked while you were putting on makeup or shaving and you couldn't see your face. Wouldn't you wipe the mirror clean? Similarly, the Gita says, all you have to do to see your real beauty is to extinguish self-will, fill your mind with peace and your heart with love, and spend your time working for the benefit of all.

This is something everyone can do. Of course, it is far from easy, but just as an artist perfects a painting with little strokes, or a sculptor creates a sculpture with delicate touches from amorphous stone, you

and I, little by little, can make our lives a work of art.

How can we do this? In a famous passage, the third-century mystic Plotinus asks, “What then is our course?” “We must shut our eyes and awaken another way of seeing, which everyone has, but few use.” That’s a perfect description of meditation.

“Then,” Plotinus continues, “withdraw into yourself and look” – look into the mirror of your heart. “And if you don’t yet find yourself beautiful, then, just as someone making a beautiful painting adds a small brushstroke here and another there, until a lovely face emerges, so you too must do the same to bring light to all that is dark. Make your every action glow with beauty, and never cease working on your artwork until the divine Light shines through you, and you see complete Perfection enthroned within you.”

For perfecting a great work of art, it’s not enough to meditate regularly; we must also carry through in daily behavior. In all our relationships, instead of competing, we try to complete those around us. Instead of trying to get our own way, we try to serve the needs of the other person. Instead of always pursuing personal satisfactions, we gradually give more and more of our time to the welfare of the whole. And as we do this, we – and those we live and work with – gradually see a beautiful face emerge.

This is the purpose of meditation. The mantra provides us the model of Perfection – the magic mirror that shows us our true face. Our daily meditation practice is our internal instrument for turning our life into a beautiful work of art.

When we meditate on the mantra with one-pointed attention and an open heart, we glimpse a reflection of our own true Self. The wonderful potential latent in us begins to shine, as a possibility we can not only imagine but long for and begin to live by.

Then, after your seated meditation practice, when you step out into the workaday world, the power of the mantra goes with you. Gradually it becomes part of you, assimilated into your character and consciousness. In the stress and challenges of the day, the mantra inspires you become patience, compassion, wisdom, courage, fearlessness and love.

More than that, the mantra becomes your best friend. When you get caught up in the heat of the moment, the mantra comes to you and tugs at the sleeve of your mind: “An instrument of peace, remember? As a mother protects her only child?”

Remember, this original goodness is within you, and it is within everyone else as well. The way to reveal the divinity in ourselves is to keep our eyes focused on it in those around us, treating everyone with respect, kindness, and compassion.

“Bring light to all that is dark,” Plotinus says. There are dark corners of consciousness where light has never penetrated—corners where negative emotions try to hide. That is why a person who has revealed the splendor within shines like a lamp in the dark—lighting the paths of others, throwing light on life. We don’t have to have a sticker on the back of our car saying “I am a lamp.” Our life – every word we say, every act we do – communicates this divine radiance to everybody.

When you live like this, the mantra gradually ceases to be a word. It becomes a window, a “magic casement” opening out onto the luminous world of the Supreme Reality. Then, very simply, we see ourselves as we are. We see for ourselves who lives in our heart, and in the hearts of everyone around us. Complete in ourselves, we need nothing from anyone else, nothing from the world, nothing from life but the next opportunity to give. Then, our lives will bring great joy and contentment.