

On the Mystification of 'Self' in Neo-Eastern Cults of Meditation

Mystification is the principal semantic tool of the would-be leader; demystification, of the man who wants to be his own master... It is perhaps one of the immutable tragedies of the human condition that while the demystifier influences individuals, the mystifier moves multitudes." Thomas Szasz (1973), *The Second Sin*

Basic Questions

All over the world there exist personality cults of 'spiritual teachers' running quasi-religious 'meditation' groups and communities. Many of these are rooted in Eastern thought and 'spiritual traditions' and make use of exotic Sanskrit or Pali terminology to add a gloss of mystery - and an aura of 'profound' authority - to their teachings. What characterises all these cults, however, is an almost total lack of deep and on-going philosophical QUESTIONING. Indeed, in some meditational groups, not just questioning but even discussion between participants of the concepts and practices they are being taught are banned – either in principle or for the period of a given course or 'retreat'.

In addition – and no less importantly – what is often not discussed is the most basic matter of all, namely the very QUESTIONS to which these 'spiritual' teachings and practices are supposed to offer ANSWERS TO. Instead this is either assumed without question - taken for granted by both teachers and followers - or else reduced to some formulaic expression such as the question 'Who am I?' or the promise of a true 'path' or 'trail' to....(?)

It is also assumed, for example, that everyone participating in such meditational cults or events already 'knows', WITHOUT QUESTION - or even without it being stated – what their meaning, value, significance, purpose and life-value is. Similarly, it is often assumed that everyone already 'understands' the meaning of terms such as 'self-enquiry', 'self-awareness', 'self-realisation', 'self-development' etc.

As a result, no one asks even the most OBVIOUS question of all. This is the question of what all these various Eastern-based meditational practices and the 'spiritual' languages and teachings around them are good for, what their actual value is for the individual or to the world – or even, again, what the QUESTIONS are that should motivate anyone to even begin to 'seek' the sort of 'ANSWERS' that are being offered! In this essay therefore, I define one important dimension of 'mystification' AS this unspoken agreement to offer people ANSWERS in the form of 'spiritual' teachings and meditational practices - whilst at the same time failing to explore or even make explicit:

1. the fundamental questions which these 'answers' are supposed to provide 'answers' TO.
2. The 'WHAT FOR' of these answers: their life benefit and value for the individual and the world.

Along with this failure to ask, explore more deeply, or even just make any explicit reference to the QUESTIONS which different spiritual teachings offer their own particular brand of 'answers' to, goes a no less common failure. This is a failure to question the very LANGUAGE in which the 'answers' – whether in the form of teachings or practices - are presented. This lack of awareness and failure to question the shared language or 'group-speak' of a meditational cult often results in another form of MYSTIFICATION - a use of language which clearly contains many more QUESTIONS than it claims to

‘answer’ – something that is obvious to anyone with even the most elementary education in clear philosophical thinking and the history of philosophy.

The end-result however, is often supposedly ‘philosophical’ teachings presented in a language which is simply philosophical NONSENSE - full of unasked or unanswered questions - or even logical contradictions. Such teachings, particularly of the neo-Eastern variety are really ‘pseudo-philosophies’.

They also tend to reveal a most astonishing, jaw-dropping degree of ignorance of the history of philosophy – Eastern or Western - and of 20th century European philosophy in particular. This ignorance is concealed through the mystical aura attached to terms derived specifically from Eastern languages, which are often placed side by side with their European-language ‘translations’ - as if by doing this the European words or phrases gains some greater ‘mystical’ authority – another form of ‘mystification’. In contrast - as anyone who has studied my own writings on ‘meditation’ and Indian thought knows very well - I have tried to do the very opposite.

It is true that in my books and writing and on my sites on ‘The New Yoga of Awareness’ and ‘The Awareness Principle’ I ALSO present many meditational practices that take the form of techniques: a ‘HOW TO’. But a close reading of my writings will reveal that I ONLY do this on the basis of first of all asking again the most fundamental WHAT questions – hence the many essays of mine which ask “What is ‘Yoga’?”, “What is ‘Tantra’?”, “What is ‘Prana’”, “What is Advaita?” “What is ‘Meditation’?” “What is ‘Body’?”, “What are ‘Soul’ and ‘Spirit’?”, “What is ‘Consciousness’?”, etc. This is because, while I am in no way lacking in what can indeed be called mystical experiences, the basic aim of my teachings is also to DEMYSTIFY the languages of Eastern and neo-Eastern teachers and teachings. I do so by critically QUESTIONING their most basic terms, vocabularies and phraseology - not just as a mere ‘academic’ or ‘intellectual’ exercise but in order to arrive at:

1. a totally new understanding of the ESSENCE of these terms and vocabularies
2. a totally new EXPERIENCE of this essence, and
3. a clear understanding of the LIFE MEANING AND RELEVANCE of such experiences for the individual, the world, and everyday human relationships.

For example, in my writings I have long questioned what is meant by the simple word ‘body’? Is a ‘body’ something we simply feel or are ‘aware of’ - or could it be that all “bodies” are in essence bodies OF awareness – and feeling awareness in particular? If so in what way does it make sense and how does it help us to speak of one or more ‘subtle bodies’, or to speak of specific bodily organs (such as ‘the heart’) as EITHER ‘physical’ OR something we call ‘spiritual’, ‘astral’ or ‘etheric’? Could it not be that to speak in the traditional way of bodies as being either ‘physical’ or ‘spiritual’, ‘gross’ or ‘subtle’, ‘astral’, ‘etheric’ or ‘causal’ is just to MYSTIFY and complicate the fundamental ESSENCE of bodyhood in a way that prevents us from coming to a new experiencing of this essence – experiencing the truth that “the body IS an awareness” (Castandeda)?

That is why, for me, it is truly sad to see so many American or ethnically European teachers seeking to cosmetically ‘adorn’ themselves with the clothing and ‘authority’ of esoteric or Eastern ‘philosophical’ terms, vocabularies and languages. It is particularly sad because in fact many of the least-known but greatest EASTERN philosophers – J.L. Mehta for example – have looked to 20th century EUROPEAN thought (in particular that of Martin Heidegger) to find the still un-thought KEYS

to understanding their OWN Asian and East-Asian philosophical traditions and languages. The situation gets even Sadder when we come across 'neo-Eastern' or even ethnic Eastern teachers who use words such as 'consciousness', 'spirit', 'soul', 'mind', 'ego', 'meditation', 'subject', 'object' etc. – yet without even recognising that ALL these words are words of EUROPEAN origin with a specific history in EUROPEAN thought and languages - and a meaning which cannot be arbitrarily SEPARATED from that history and those languages. Only confusion, contradiction and mystification can arise out of such ignorance – for example in all talk of transcending what is called 'the ego' - and instead achieving a true experience of something called the true Self, 'I' or 'I AM'. Yet what is actually meant by the term 'ego' - which is itself not an Eastern but a LATIN word, and one which simply means 'I' – is never itself clearly spelled out: another example of mystification.

But let us return to the question of un-asked or even un-thought yet BASIC questions. It took over 2,000 years of EUROPEAN philosophical history for a 20th century thinker (Martin Heidegger) to formulate and explore at a deeper level than ever before - and that at a most critical juncture of European history - what are, undeniably, the two MOST fundamental philosophical questions of all:

1. Why is there anything AT ALL (including 'consciousness') and not NOTHING?
2. What does it essentially MEAN for anything AT ALL to 'be' or 'exist' (including any type of 'Self' or 'I' which can say 'I AM')?

That is why questions such as 'Who am I?' or terms such as 'I AM' OR 'I-AM CONSCIOUSNESS' no longer even BEGIN to 'answer' basic questions but instead completely BY-PASS the most basic questions of all – those questions which ask about the fundamental nature of 'being', 'is'-ness or 'am'-ness itself ('as such').

Heidegger does not go on to deliver us with a set of final and authoritative 'answers' but instead opens up a 'Pandora's box' of further QUESTIONS. These are questions which - only AS questions - can lead us ever-deeper into an EXPERIENCE of WHAT IT IS they question. That is because any philosophical 'answer' or meditative 'HOW TO' is only as deep as our meditative QUESTIONING of the 'WHAT' that it can lead us into a living EXPERIENCE of.

This applies also to what is called 'pure awareness', the self' and 'self-enquiry'. For if our 'true' self is understood as identical with 'awareness' or 'pure awareness' (consciousness 'as such' or 'in itself') it cannot - IN PRINCIPLE – be anything that is 'ours', something belonging to a self. Nor can it be the OBJECT of any form of conscious 'observation' or 'enquiry' – even or PARTICULARLY if this be called 'self-enquiry'.

Therefore simply to speak of 'Self-enquiry' or 'Self-observation' – no matter how 'conscious' - immediately implies a DUALITY between an observing or enquiring 'self', 'I' or 'consciousness' and an observed self, 'I', or consciousness – in this way contradicting what is seen as the most basic goal of such 'self-enquiry' – an experience of the singularity, identity and non-duality of Self and Consciousness.

The error maintained by quasi-Eastern philosophies of 'self-enquiry' is that they simply reproduce the false but centuries-old WESTERN notion of consciousness as the PROPERTY OR ACTIVITY of an observing 'ego' or 'I' – a so-called 'subject' of consciousness facing and perceiving a world of 'objects'. Together with this old-fashioned subject-object DUALISM - goes the identification of an

‘observing’, ‘enquiring’ or ‘witnessing’ SUBJECT of consciousness (the ‘I’, which = ‘ego’) with the very ‘being’ of the individual.

In contrast, what I call ‘The Awareness Principle’ totally REJECTS the notion of both ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of consciousness. Instead, it understands consciousness in its universal nature (‘pure awareness’) as a subjectivity or consciousness WITHOUT any form of proprietary ‘subject’ or ‘being’, just as it also understands ALL so-called ‘objects’ as SENTIENT - as consciousnesses in themselves.

A reminder of the basic PHILOSOPHICAL LOGIC of ‘The Awareness Principle’:

1. We can only know of any thing or being, subject or object, self, ego or I, through a ‘prior’ or ‘a priori’ AWARENESS of it.
2. This AWARENESS (Consciousness ‘as such’ or ‘in itself’) therefore CANNOT - logically or ‘IN PRINCIPLE’ – be
 - (a) the PROPERTY of any being, subject, self, ego or I that it is aware OF
 - (b) the PRODUCT of any ‘object’ it is aware of (for example the body or brain).
3. AWARENESS cannot also - logically or in principle - be an OBJECT of consciousness for any ‘observing’, ‘witnessing’ or ‘enquiring’ subject or self, ‘ego’ or ‘I’.
4. AWARENESS – ‘subjectivity without a subject’ is, in principle, the sole EXPERIENCER – and not any EXPERIENCED ‘self’ or ‘ego’.

In this context of these Principles of Awareness, the very concept of a ‘self-conscious consciousness’ is also philosophical nonsense. For the very phrase ‘self-consciousness’ or ‘self-awareness’ confuses two fundamentally different and opposing understandings of the relation of ‘consciousness’ to ‘self’:

1. A true understanding that consciousness includes consciousness OF a self or identity.
2. The false idea of a ‘self’ that ‘has’ or possesses consciousness as its private property.

WITHOUT RIGOROUS PHILOSOPHICAL THINKING, PRINCIPLES AND DISTINCTIONS OF THIS SORT, GRAVE DANGERS arise from meditational practices derived from the confused and frequently self-contradictory statements that we find for example, in the teachings of Ramana Maharshi and other pseudo-philosophical teachers and teachings.

We have already seen that Ramana Maharshi’s whole philosophy of ‘self-enquiry’

1. automatically implies a dualism between an enquiring self or ‘I’ and the self or ‘I’ enquired into,
2. that it makes no clear sense of the notion of ‘ego’ (which simply and purely means ‘I’) and
3. that just to speak of ‘consciousness’ AS a ‘self’ is a return to the long out-dated idea of self as a ‘subject’ of consciousness - and of consciousness as something in need of such a ‘subject’.

If this third idea is not questioned – as it has LONG BEEN in EUROPEAN thought – and because it still seems so important in the minds of neo-Eastern teachers for their students to identify with their so-called ‘true self’ as an ‘I’ or ‘subject’ of consciousness – then of course everything else appears merely as a world of ‘objects’ of consciousness - from which students are instructed to dissociate their consciousness under the guise of ‘meditation’. Such traditional ascetic practices of DISSOCIATION from the body, the intellect, the senses and the world (falsely justified in the old way

as a path to some 'higher' awareness or liberation from 'transmigration') carry serious dangers of aggravating or leading to serious psychological disorders, particularly for students with a history of very real 'this-world' difficulties, and who - like most people - are already unhealthily disconnected to a high degree from their BODILY FEELING AWARENESS.

Awareness or Dissociation?

Hamanjit Singh, in his critique of a particular cult of Vipassana meditation, has this to say about 'dissociative' practices - which, as he points out, have a long and uncritically accepted history in Indian culture and 'spiritual' practices, including those 'yogas' which are supposedly rooted in philosophies of 'Advaita' or 'non-duality':

"As in all spiritual disciplines, the focus is on getting rid of the ego, or self with the small "s", and becoming the All, the Complete, or the Self with the capital "S". In Buddhist terminology, the journey is phrased in other terms, from Ignorance and Attachment to Liberation, but the essence remains the same. Two thousand years of dissociative spiritual practices in India have changed the psyche of its people so deeply that they ... regard any occurrence in the outside world only with as much importance as it interferes with their own life.

The awareness that there are other subjective entities, and the civic responsibility and order this awareness implies, is understandably absent in Indian society. The Indian psyche is already dissociated from the world to some extent. Dissociative practices, which claim to make one the pure observer, are very attractive to the Indian mind, which finds suffering all around and wants an individual, solipsistic ... way to find happiness, howsoever illusory. In modern psychiatry, dissociation is treated as a disorder .. The problem of suffering is quite real. But the solution might be quite different than dissociating from this world."

Many people in the West turn to spiritual GROUPS and COMMUNITIES at times when, as INDIVIDUALS, they feel mentally or emotionally disturbed, vulnerable, isolated or 'depressed'. For such individuals, these groups and communities may provide a comforting sense of 'belonging' – but they are NO SUBSTITUTE for individual social RELATIONSHIPS. Nor are they a substitute for genuinely deep individual counselling and therapy of a sort which encourages individuals to fully feel and affirm their bodily and emotional feelings – and to explore their meaning.

Cults in which forms of silent group 'meditation' are practiced - in which each member seeks to concentrate inwardly on their own 'self' – in fact often restrict or even seek to actively LIMIT the cultivation of individual relationships BETWEEN members of the group. In this way however, they also limit and restrict the cultivation of awareness in its single most important life dimensions – as embodied RELATIONAL awareness.

In such cults, it is teachers who encourage DISSOCIATION from 'body' and 'mind' who are THE MOST DANGEROUS – particularly for people who may be very FRIGHTENED BY THEIR MENTAL OR BODILY STATES OF BEING, but who receive no relational nourishment and no inter-personal help and assistance in overcoming their FEAR of these states and exploring their meaning.

In contrast, my own teachings emphasise that awareness of what we are experiencing ('witnessing awareness') is not just an end in itself - but rather something that can make us feel SAFE ENOUGH to go more deeply into our bodies and emotions – to feel them MORE INTENSELY and not less.

Those teachings also point out that every sensation, thought or feeling IS an awareness. So whilst a 'witnessing' awareness of different sensations, thoughts or emotions is, of course, important - SO ALSO is asking ourselves what a particular sensation, thought or feeling may ITSELF be a direct or indirect AWARENESS OF – what it may be telling us about our lives.

Feelings are something we 'have' or 'experience'. Feeling (verb) is something we do – or rather: feeling and sensing is itself the most BASIC ACTIVITY of what is called 'Pure Awareness'.

That is why, instead of dissociation, CHOOSING to feel whatever we are feeling with our bodies is itself a most powerful act of awareness - and a primary means of life- and self-affirmation. My basic rule of living therefore: use awareness to CHOOSE to feel whatever emotions you are feeling - indeed to feel them MORE and in a more direct way – in and with your body itself.

Awareness is the essence and source of all we experience in and as LIFE. That is why any 'spiritual teaching' which SEPARATES 'pure' awareness' from its expression in the LIFE of our minds and bodies - as well as in inter-personal awareness, in bodily and sensory awareness, in economic and political awareness, mental and intellectual awareness, linguistic and philosophical awareness - leads not to the enrichment but to the IMPOVERISHMENT of awareness, and with it of LIFE itself.

The result of group cults in which members are taught to separate higher, trans-personal dimensions of awareness from personal and inter-personal awareness is that they find their most UNIQUELY PERSONAL potentials and capacities of awareness STUNTED rather than prized, cultivated, developed and fulfilled. Yet all this happens in the name of 'SELF' – the dominant 'meme' of Indian thought - but one deprived of its essence.

So in the end, what needs 'enquiry' IS the 'Self' – but a form of enquiry which explores, questions and deconstructs – not just in silent meditation but through deep meditative thinking and dialogue - the MYSTIFICATION of this word 'Self' in Eastern and neo-Eastern meditational practices of 'Self-enquiry'. For this mystification is just a mirror-image of the reduction of Self to a mere exploited commodity or consumer in the West.

It was the great 20th masters of European philosophical and religious thought – Martin Heidegger and Martin Buber in particular – who, each in their own way, recognised the importance of 'self-enquiry' in a very new and very different sense. I follow in their footsteps - recognising that because each of us is truly a uniquely individual portion, expression, embodiment and personification of a Divine-Universal Awareness, it is precisely in the unbounded inner dimensions of our INDIVIDUALITY that both our divinity and the very essence of our 'being' can be found - but only in and through relation with other individuals - NOT by sitting side by side in rows of chairs, enclosed in our own 'cocoon' and - INSTEAD OF COMING FACE TO FACE WITH EACH OTHER – all facing a raised podium or dais of exalted 'spiritual teachers' or 'gurus'.

On Ramana Maharshi and the Question of Language

In the much-revered figure of Ramana Maharshi we find a classic example of an otherwise highly aware individual seeking but failing - even in the 20th century - to free himself from cultural thought-bondage to BODY-, LIFE- AND WORLD-NEGATING DOGMAS inherited from medieval and pre-medieval Hindu 'fundamentalism'. Thus he speaks of the body as something that is 'inert as a log' and 'a source of misery'. This quasi-Buddhist identification of bodily life and experiencing with

misery may be true for the masses of Indian peasants who have been suffering from centuries of feudal exploitation - or for modern workers suffering similar exploitation under capitalism. But does this mean that dissociation/disidentification from both 'body' and 'mind' is the answer? Should we not rather seek to liberate individuals from the global social conditions that make their survival dependent on forms of labour which IMPOVERISH their senses, STRESS their bodies to the point of sickness, and which also DULL THEIR SENSES and which NUMB THEIR MINDS more effectively than any form of dissociative 'meditation' or psychiatric medication – IN THIS WAY diminishing and destroying their sense of self?

Maharshi is also a classic example of a 20th century Eastern spiritual teacher speaking and writing as if stuck in the past. For he makes no mention of and totally ignores all the momentous global and historic changes and events that have occurred in society since the Middle Ages – even events that occurred during his own lifetime. At the same time he seems to be both totally ignorant of and totally uninterested in any of the most profound and radical European philosophical thinkers and teachers of the last three centuries. One need only think of Marx and Nietzsche for a start – let alone those thinkers who lived at the same time as Maharshi himself. For in these thinkers we find more clarity and depth of both worldly knowledge and 'spiritual' awareness than in all the words of a Maharshi – and other Eastern or neo-Eastern teachers like him - put together. The wisdom of these European teachers lies in 'liberating' thinking itself from 'bondage' – rather than absurdly identifying all thinking WITH 'bondage'. Theirs is also a thinking that challenges sick social structures rather than teaching dissociation from the effects of these social structures on the individual. Finally, it is a thinking that seeks to FREE THE INDIVIDUAL – not from thoughts, feeling or their own bodies but from sick social and economic structures and from the belief systems they express and perpetuate.

What however, are we to make of an Eastern 'teacher' such as Ramana who – unlike most of his European contemporaries - seems to have nothing of substance at all to say about the real lives and difficulties faced by individuals in the world today and the all-to-real events experienced by them? What right has anyone who has NOTHING AT ALL TO SAY ABOUT TWO WORLD WARS and those who experienced them – to speak of the world as an 'illusion'? For is not all individual experiencing VALID – period? And does not all individual experiencing contain inner dimensions of MEANING – both for the individual and society – of a sort that only deep meditative thinking can explore? If so, then why is there no sign of any search for MEANING in Maharshi's teachings – which end up reducing the entire 'meaning of life' to a negation of individual life and lived experience? I wonder what a Maharshi could possibly say that would have deep life meaning to a Holocaust victim, for example - or to workers in a Chinese 'Apple' computer factories driven to suicide, or to a Palestinian living in the ruins of Gaza today and suffering the death of his or her children? I wonder also what would he have to say today to his own Indian compatriots – now ruled by Hindu fundamentalist politicians who would probably NOT DISAGREE WITH A SINGLE WORD OF HIS – but still continue to wage military war on rebellious Naxalite peasants who only struggling for basic needs such as land, food, water, education and healthcare?

And are we to believe that the entire MEANING of each individual life can be reduced simply to transcending the 'transmigrational' or 'reincarnational' cycle? For even if transcending this cycle is an ultimate goal - can this transcendence be separated from an understanding of each life as a uniquely INDIVIDUAL learning process - one RICH with personal meaning? I think not, for as Martin Buber writes also:

“Every person born into the world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique....If there had been someone like her in the world, there would have been no need for her to be born.”

God IS indeed Consciousness. But the divine ‘trans-individual’ Consciousness which is God IS ALSO what most desires to INDIVIDUALISE itself in and as all beings, to PERSONIFY itself in and as all persons, to WORLD itself in and as all worlds, and to EMBODY itself in and as all bodies. For It only experiences and realises Itself as a ‘Self’ - ‘Its-Self’ – in and through the EXPERIENCE of its own countless individualisations, worlds, personifications – and living EMBODIMENTS. And as Nietzsche wrote in *Also Sprach Zarathustra*:

“There is more sagacity in thy body than in thy best wisdom.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘On the Despisers of the Body’

Please understand my own viewpoint. I have deep respect for Ramana Maharshi as AN EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUAL - even though, reading his writings, I find them so full of philosophically unquestioned terms and language – and even directly contradictory statements - it would need a whole book to show and unravel them. I also see aspects of his teachings as misleading and dogmatic – for if all thinking is seen as ‘bondage’ or as restricting awareness what room is there for patient MEDITATIVE thinking - thinking which arises freely as a gift OF awareness? What room is there also for free and independent thinking, for comparative and critical thinking - QUESTIONING thinking? No room at all in the cults of meditation I am writing of. Yet it is precisely such thinking – meditative, questioning, comparative and critical - that humanity is now and more than ever in need of – and that is and always has been a most rich and powerful source of authentic and awareness-raising dialogue between human beings.

“Questioning is the religiosity of thinking.” Martin Heidegger

MY most important message - and that of Heidegger – is a simple one. It is that before we can even begin to make assertions or counter-assertions ABOUT such things as ‘thinking’, ‘meditation’, ‘mind’, ‘body’, ‘ego’, ‘self’, ‘consciousness’, ‘being’, ‘spirit’, ‘heart’, ‘God’ - or ‘prana’, ‘samsara’, ‘advaita’, ‘guna’, ‘shakti’ etc. we must begin, as Heidegger did, to once again ask a FAR MORE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION. This is the question of what it is we actually mean by ANY of these words or terms - and what it is that constitutes their true essence? The question is a vital one. Why? Because one of the single BIGGEST obstacles to awareness and true insight is the belief that just because a commonly used WORD or TERM exists for something, there necessarily also exists some ‘THING’ which ‘corresponds’ to that word. Yet awareness is no ‘thing’ - and neither is ‘being’. Nor is what we call ‘body’ or ‘mind’, ‘self’ or ‘ego’, ‘matter’ or ‘energy’ any mere ‘thing’. Therefore to create a new and deeper LANGUAGE OF AWARENESS (and along with this, new and deeper PRACTICES of awareness) requires, ABOVE ALL, a new, more deeply questioning AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE. In the revolutionary European practice of awareness called ‘phenomenology’, this means FIRST OF ALL putting all such words and terms in ‘inverted commas’ (‘...’) and not simply ASSUMING (as most people, and even most ‘spiritual teachers’ do) that we already know what they mean, that this meaning is obvious and already clear to all - and so needs no deeper questioning at all.

Conclusion

Friends and comrades, soul brothers and soul sisters: is not the time for such impersonal, de-individualising and non-relational Eastern-style practices now over? For whether we speak of India or China, the East is now becoming an ever more Americanised 'East'. Similarly, in Europe, the imperialistic Moloch of Americanism and the Monotheism of Money rolls over and tramples everything of true worth and value.

Is it not time instead to begin to respect and study again our own European 'Masters' of wisdom – and to stop worshipping photographs or putting up poster pin-ups of semi-naked Indian 'gurus' of the 20th century such as Ramana Maharshi and others? Is it not time also to let new shining insights and stars of wisdom arise from our European heartland – in and through the richness and uniqueness of our own individual culture, language, values, potentials and relationships?

"The individual is a fact of existence in so far as he steps into a living relation with other individuals. The collective is a fact of existence in so far as it is built up of living units of relation." Martin Buber

Buber's message: it is NEITHER through the activity of groups or communities, NOR through the individual solitary meditations – whether conducted alone or in groups - but only through the relationship of one individual to another WITHIN any group or community that their very individuality - and all its unbounded potentials - can come to light up and 'shine' out AS the Light of a Divine Awareness.

In the most practical terms then, let us move away from lines of chairs in elevated halls of wisdom - and towards intimate circles – but not circles in which people close their eyes in frozen, introspective silence, their bodies totally IMMOBILISED by rigid and frigid meditational postures, their eyes closed to EACH OTHER – and with them also their bodies and senses.

Non-relational group or class 'meditation' of this sort simply shuts out every possible variety of subtle and fluid body language - and with the rich possibilities of resonant and embodied soul communication. So let us instead create circles in which individuals are, as bodies, fully present and open - to and for EACH OTHER – and in which individuals can therefore resonantly face and communicate with each other, whether through speech or silence, the language of the word or that of the face, eyes and body as a whole.

In other words, let us make our new motto 'OTHER Enquiry' rather than 'Self Enquiry' – recognising in this way that the qualities and potentials of awareness embodied by each and every 'Other' individual in our lives (or in a meditational group) are, in themselves, a greater gift of the Divine than the person of any one teacher - offering both a mirror and a path to new aspects and qualities of our own many-faceted SOUL – a word which has no equivalent or translation in any Eastern language.

Finally and above all, let us not assume that our purpose is to seek 'liberation' FROM our 'ego', 'intellect', 'mind', 'body', 'desires', 'emotions' and 'senses'. Let us see our purpose instead as the liberation OF them. This means letting them freely arise, express, embody and communicate themselves within and with Awareness - not seeking to dissociate from, control or 'yoke' them - this 'yoking' being the earliest and most life-negating meaning of 'yoga' but one still perpetuated in neo-Eastern cults of meditation.