

THE STATE OF ALONENESS

By Rohit Mehta

It was Plotinus who very picturesquely described the path of spiritual realization as a “flight of the alone to the Alone.” This element of “aleness” has been stressed with reference to the spiritual life by mystics of all ages. [*Light on the Path*](#), too, exhorts the disciple to “stand alone.” The spiritual journey has to be undertaken in absolute aleness, for the Path to Reality is so narrow that there is space only for one to walk at a time. The great Indian mystic, Kabir, says in one of his famous songs: “The Path of Love is so narrow that on it there is no place for two.”

One can understand the aleness of the spiritual pilgrim due to the narrowness of the path, but why has the end of the journey been described as “Alone” by [Plotinus](#)? In the philosophical literature of the world, Reality and Absolute are synonymous. In the philosophy of the Vedanta, the Absolute is termed as Brahman, and the description of Brahman given therein is, “One without a second.” Now, if the Absolute or Brahman is “One without a second” surely it stands alone. Since there is no second to it, it cannot be compared to or contrasted with anything else. Thus, nothing can be more in a state of “aleness” than the Absolute or the Brahman. The Absolute transcends all realms of relativity for there is nothing like it—nor is there anything contrary to it. Relationship implies comparison or contrast; in fact relationship has no existence outside of these two processes. Thus spiritual pilgrimage is characterized by “aleness,” both at the beginning as well as at the end. It indicates that it is only the alone that can move towards the Alone. It establishes the truth of the old occult maxim which says, “Thou canst not tread the path until thou hast become one with it.” In order to journey to the Alone, one must start in a condition of absolute aleness. It is only the alone that will be able to comprehend the Alone.

Light on the Path says, “To ask is to feel the hunger within.” In the spiritual life this is the only asking that is recognized—all else is mere curiosity. It is only when the asking arises from the hunger within that there is a depth in it. In a superficial contact with life, no spiritual realization is ever possible. We have been assured, “Ask and it shall be given”—but the asking must come from the depths of experience. And the depth of experience is possible only in a state of aleness, for in that state the subject and the object are face to face with each other with nothing to disturb or distract them. How can there be a depth of experience when our mind is distracted in all directions? How can Truth, God, or the Master enter our life, if we are not alone but are subjected to numerous distractions? The person who is subject to distractions will not even

recognize the presence of God or Truth if they are not alone. The exquisite thrill of the great presence of Truth, God, or the Master will be felt by us only in moments of absolute aloneness.

But it is this aloneness which humanity ever wants to escape. We are afraid of being alone and that is why we are always with somebody or something. If there is nothing on hand—no subject or object with which to occupy our mind—we dig out something through curiosity and inquisitiveness so that we may not have to face aloneness.

Now, what is this aloneness and why are we afraid of it? Are we alone when we are just by ourselves? Does aloneness mean avoiding other people's company? Are we alone when we refuse to talk with anybody? There is a great deal of difference between aloneness and isolation. The moments when we avoid other people's company, or the moments when we are by ourselves, not inclined to talk with anybody, may be moments of isolation but not necessarily of aloneness. In moments of isolation we are in the company of our own thoughts; in fact the company of our own thoughts is most intense and intimate in moments of isolation. How can there be aloneness when we are in the company of something?

Aloneness is not a physical condition—it is a state of the mind. The more we crave for conditions of physical isolation, the farther are we from aloneness. It is not suggested here that physical isolation and aloneness are contradictory. All that is indicated here is that they are not necessarily together. One may be utterly alone in moments of physical isolation or one may not be alone at all, even though completely isolated with reference to physical influences. Aloneness is a state in which the mind has nothing to hold on to. As long as it can hold on to something—an idea, an ideal, a concept, an image—there is no aloneness. *Light on the Path* describes this state when it asks the spiritual pilgrim to “hold fast to that which has neither substance nor existence.” When the mind has neither substance nor existence to hold on to, then is the state of aloneness experienced.

Now we value the most that which we receive in aloneness. We cherish it as the great prize of life. That which comes to us when we are alone is indeed of the greatest significance to us. What comes to us when we are surrounded by others, or when we are in the company of our own thoughts, has very little significance to us. What will be the purpose served by the arrival of Truth, God, or the Master in our life if we are not alone? Even the highest Truth or the most sublime Beauty will seem to us of little significance when the experience of aloneness is not there. A thought, an idea, a vision that descends upon us in aloneness enters our very being, for there is nothing to resist or distort it. It is the experience that comes in aloneness that has a profound revolutionary import.

If we have not experienced the compelling power of Truth, it is because we have not known what aloneness is. If our contacts with life are superficial, it is because we have never been alone. Our receiving of life has no depth—it is casual. How can our giving be rich when our receiving is so poor?

It is this state of aloneness that has been indicated in the first four sentences of *Light on the Path*. It is this subject of aloneness which forms the main theme of [this book](#). Aloneness, being the critical state of the mind, provides the ground in which the spiritual plant can grow. Creativity of the spirit is possible only in this aloneness. The spiritual enlightenment can come to us only when we are alone. Since *Light on the Path* deals with problems of spiritual life it rightly emphasizes the value and significance of aloneness.

Spiritual life is not a continuity—not even a modified continuity—of temporal life. The principle of gradualness operates in the realm of continuity. But since spiritual life indicates a new quality of existence it is not the principle of gradualness, but that of suddenness, which operates here. And suddenness is possible only in a critical state. In scientific terminology, a critical point is a point of transition. The mind in a state of aloneness is indeed poised at this critical point—the point of psychological or spiritual transition. It is at this point of transition that true spiritual transformation occurs—this is indeed the Revolution at the Center—the sudden arrival of a new quality of existence. *Light on the Path* describes this as “the mysterious event.” It is no exaggeration to say that the central idea of that precious book is the occurrence of this “mysterious event.” The following passage appearing in *Light on the Path*, indeed, holds the key to the understanding of the entire spiritual problem so beautifully and clearly discussed in its pages:

There will come a calm such as comes in a tropical country after the heavy rain when Nature works so swiftly that one may see her action. Such a calm will come to the harassed spirit. And in the deep silence the mysterious event will occur which will prove that the way has been found.

The swift action of Nature is indeed the sudden appearance of a new order of existence. According to *Light on the Path* this mysterious event occurs only in deep silence—the silence that descends after a heavy storm.

It is to this deep silence, the critical state or the moment of aloneness, that the attention of the neophyte is drawn in the first four opening sentences of this great book of mysticism. The book opens with the following instruction:

Before the eyes can see they must be incapable of tears.

When do tears come to our eyes? When we does not like a particular situation. It means we want things and situations to be other than what they are. It is when we are

unwilling to accept things and situations as they are, and feel frustrated in our efforts to change them, that tears come to our eyes. The tears obviously imply a loss of perspective and therefore a distortion of vision. Does not aloneness suggest looking at things and situations as they are? The eyes are capable of tears when the mind is in a conflict between *what is* and *what it would like it to be*. Now the mind that is in the company of its own thoughts and ambitions is not in a state of aloneness. To be incapable of tears is to be willing to look at life as it is.

It must be remembered that *Light on the Path* does not suggest insensitivity of the eyes. It is true that tears can be prevented by refusing to see, by closing the eyes, or by running away from a situation. But that is not the instruction given in the book. The injunction to the neophyte is: the eyes must see and yet they must be incapable of tears. In fact, this first instruction to the spiritual pilgrim says that the eyes will not be able to see clearly so long as it is capable of tears. And tears come because of the mind's unwillingness to look at life as it is. Thus, unless the mind is alone, free from its own ambitions and affiliations, it is not possible for the neophyte to fulfill the first instruction.

Usually our minds are either too dull or too interfering. If the neophyte has dulled his mind, the eyes will be incapable of seeing anything. But if the mind interferes, due to its own ambitions, refusing to accept the situation as it is, then surely the eyes will have fears constantly welling up, arising out of a conflict between what is and what the mind would like it to be. The first instruction, therefore, indicates the state of aloneness where the mind is completely free from all psychological attachments and affiliations, where it is not in the company even of its own modes or trends of thinking. It is in a condition where the "thinking faculty is tense and yet not thinking." To be able to see and yet be incapable of tears is indeed a state of great tension—a condition in which the mind has come to a critical point.

The second instruction given to the neophyte is:

Before the ear can hear it must have lost its sensitiveness.

How can one hear if the ears are not sensitive? Just as the first instruction does not suggest loss of sight, similarly the second instruction does not indicate loss of hearing. Thus the word "sensitiveness" here has a psychological—not a physical—meaning. In other words, the instruction refers to the touchiness of the mind. It is a fact that it is not the ear but the mind that hears. It is only when the mind ceases to be touchy that there can arise the possibility of right hearing.

What does the touchiness of the mind indicate? It suggests that the mind wants to hear something other than what it does. The mind does not want to accept life as it comes through the sense of hearing. It wants life to be different. It wants to hear only

that which is pleasant and avoid that which it declares to be unpleasant. Now the distinction of pleasant and unpleasant springs from the memory of past experiences. And so the touchiness of the mind arises from, and is rooted in, the past. Most of our hearing, in which the ears have not lost their sensitiveness or touchiness, is only chronologically in the present; but psychologically it is in the past. We hear only the voices of the past caught up as our mind is in the memory of the pleasant and the unpleasant. It is only when hearing, both physical and psychological, is in the present that there is right hearing. Once again, to hear without a reaction from the mind is a condition of extreme tenseness comparable to a state of aloneness. When all the voices of the past are silenced, then the mind is without any company. It stands alone in complete silence. And it is only the silent that can hear. Thus, it is absolutely true that "before the ear can hear" all reactions of the mind born out of psychological memory must cease. It is only when the mind is alone that there can be true hearing—this indeed is the ear losing its sensitiveness.

The third instruction given to the neophyte in the very beginning of the book is:

Before the voice can speak in the presence of the Master it must have lost the power to wound.

Speech is one of the most powerful instruments that we have in our hands. We can heal or harm others with this weapon. Very often our speech contains a conscious or an unconscious sting. The sting of our speech is not in the word but in the mind. The word by itself has neither healing nor harming power. The thing that is conveyed through the word makes it pleasant or unpleasant. Word or language is only a form. It is the mind that imparts quality to it. Speech is a means of communication. Without it social relationship would become well nigh impossible. But a means of communication by itself has no significance. That which is communicated makes the word or language significant. All of us use the same words and follow the same forms of language, and yet there is a distinct difference in the quality that is conveyed by each. Very often our spoken word has no power or vitality in it, but sometimes the word becomes intensely alive. Just a word from our friend many a time heals the wound from which we have been suffering, but at other times a word from the same friend deepens the wound. Why does this happen? It is not the word that matters—it is indeed the source from which the word emerges that is of fundamental importance. The healing or the harming quality of the word resides in the source and not in the form or pattern of language.

In our day-to-day relationship with others the source of our speech is in the mind, which is conditioned by the memory of past experiences. In other words, the conditioned background of the mind is the source wherefrom all our words emerge.

"In the beginning was the Word," says the Christian scripture. In Hinduism there

is the concept of *Shabda-Brahmâ*—creation arising from the Word. “As above, so below,” is the age-old maxim. It indicates that what is true at the macrocosmic level is true at the microcosmic level also. Thus, the world of mankind arises from the word even as the macrocosmic world has arisen from the Word of God. Our world centers round the words that we use. To be able to utter a word with reference to a thing, a person, or a situation is indeed a great power. Having spoken the word, we weave our own world round about it. The uttering of a word is indeed the act of naming an object, a person, or a situation. A man or woman does not feel that a thing is under their grip so long as they have not named it. Once an experience is named, they feel utterly secure.

An experience contributes a challenge as long as we have not named it. An unnamed object or experience requires our close and undistracted attention. It is out of a desire for security that we show eagerness to name an object or a situation. Yet it is true that without naming, social life would become impossible. Names and labels bring order in this otherwise chaotic existence. Consequently, they are necessary for social communication. They help us to differentiate one thing from another. But verbal differentiation is one thing while psychological distinction is quite another. The names that are given to objects and situations are not merely for the purposes of verbal location or differentiation—they are primarily for psychological identification. In names are stored up all our psychological associations or memories. Thus to verbal differentiation we add this factor of psychological association. And so when a word is uttered or a name is pronounced, there is the whole background of past associations or memories present. It is this background, which becomes the source of our speech. In other words, our speech arises from the mind that is conditioned by past associations and memories.

We rarely utter a pure word or pronounce a pure name. Our words and names are contaminated by a touch of the past. It is this contamination, which gives a sting to our words. Even pleasant and polite words, if they emerge out of this contaminated mind, produce a jarring sensation in those who hear them. Thus it is not the form of speech that matters so much as the source of speech. Whatever arises from a source that is pure and uncontaminated is bound to be fresh and vital and can cause no wound. But an uncontaminated mind is utterly alone, for a touch or attachment with anything produces contamination. The mind must be incorruptible before it becomes a source of pure and uncontaminated speech. Thus “before the voice can speak in the presence of the Master” the corruptible must put on incorruption—the contaminated mind must be rendered pure and unsullied. And the mind that is pure stands absolutely alone. The voice that emerges out of this aloneness can doubtless have no power to wound.

The last of the opening sentences states:

Before the soul can stand in the presence of the Master its feet must be washed in the blood of the heart.

When does the heart bleed? Obviously it bleeds when the personal self is being crushed—when the personality is being destroyed. The bleeding of the heart is a process of being torn away from the very roots of one’s existence. What greater aloneness can there be than that which arises on being separated from oneself? When the heart bleeds, the body must perish. In spiritual terms, the bleeding of the heart must result in the perishing of the psychological entity, which we call the “I”. Paradoxically, we can stand before the presence of the Master or God only when we have ceased to exist! According to Eastern tradition one must not enter the Holy of Holies without washing one’s feet. It symbolizes an act of purification. How can a soul stand in the presence of the Master without being purified? And what greater purification can there be than that which arises out of the annihilation of the self?

The self has gathered dust through the ages and built an entity called the “I”. The “I” is indeed an accumulation of the past—it is the point where all past memories are focused. How can we enter the Holy of Holies carrying the dust of the ages clinging to our feet? It is the removal of this dust of past memories, which causes the heart to bleed. When we are separated from our own past we stand all alone. It is the past and the future that give us company. We cling fast to these companions. We know not what aloneness is so long as they are with us. It is the “present” which constitutes a moment of absolute aloneness. But perception can only be in the present—it can never be in the past or in the future. Thus, it is only when we are separated from our past—and therefore from our future—that we can “see” the Master or Truth. We can stand in the presence of the Master only in the moment of the present when we are absolutely alone, having removed from our feet the dust of past memories. Being purified due to a complete separation from our own psychological past as well as future, we are enabled to stand in the presence of the Master. This indeed is the mysterious event about which *Light on the Path* speaks.

The vision of the Master can come to the spiritual pilgrim only when his eyes, ears, and speech have been purified. And this purification is indeed the deep experience of aloneness. To see and have no tears; to hear and take no offence; to speak and cause no harm—this is possible only when the mind receives the challenge of life but does not send out any response from its sphere of memories. When there is only challenge and no response the way is found, for the mind is illumined from above. So long as the mind struggles in the dark to find a way, the way cannot be found, for the mind is lost in the jungle of its own projections. It is only when the mind ceases to project—to cast its own shadow—that the path can be seen. “His Light

dwelleth ever in our midst” —but the mind casting its own shadow prevents us from seeing this light. The mind must cast away its opaqueness and be transparent so that the path may be illumined. The transparency of the mind is indeed a state of aloneness, for it has been stripped of everything that it had. It has nothing to hold on to—neither substance nor shadow. This is indeed the supreme spiritual state in which the mind has been rendered mindless.

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