

## The heart has reasons reason knows nothing of...

IN THIS AGE of cerebral wisdom and computer statistics when man has invented incredible technology to communicate with one another, man, in fact, has nothing to say anymore. It is not that mankind (womankind) has exhausted the truth but that he has entangled himself with so much useless information that he gropes blindly when the truth slithers past him. He has exhausted the art of mind-knowledge by looking at the wrong end of the stick, through baffling psychoanalysis, self-searching techniques and holistic alternatives in the quest to know 'himself'. He has painfully studied, scanned, probed the false self, the ego, the unaware surface consciousness that glorifies itself as the real person. Christianity, Moslem and Hindu saints have alluded to this; Thomas Merton, Ibne Arabi and Mahatma Gandhi. Naturally the subject is not a simple tale of the heart versus the mind, the ego versus the soul. Having been brought up on Freud, Jung and the Bible (we are all Moslems), I recall searching for the hidden subconscious as if for the lost arch, hoping excitedly that it would surface from the Twilight of the Unknown. But Thomas Merton calls the 'self' the heart and not the soul, as is common in many writings on mysticism. The self, Merton suggests, is the feeling self, the subconscious, the emotional self, the suffering self, love which is in the heart. It is this identity that survives death in all people, although the conscious self is also known to survive. "The heart will go on" sings Celine Dion in the film *Titanic*. It is this self, love, which is the salt of tasteless lives, without which we would all be clanging gongs.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. (1 Corinthians). But for some saints, such as Merton and Gandhi, the Truth and Intelligence are just as much rooted in God as love. Merton writes: "God, being Pure Actuality, Pure Intelligence, not only sees all truth but is all truth. Every truth, every being, is simply a reflection of Him, Truths are only truths in Him and because of Him. The light of reason is a natural participation in His Truth. Reason itself draws its authority from Him. That is why reason, if it be allowed to light our way, will bring us, without prejudice, to faith." (*Ascent to Truth*, p. 24) Although he qualifies "right reason" as we shall read further on, Gandhi similarly qualifies God as Truth, howbeit, attainable through Love. It is through truth and ahimsa (loving-kindness) that I can have some glimpse of God. Truth and non-violence are my God. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin." (*Quotations of Gandhi*, p. 40). As for Gandhi, for Thomas Merton, a religion void of moral laws, virtue and self sacrifice and love was no religion at all. Yet, faith, which according to the Quran and other scriptures, is God's testing ground for His people, is an emotional thing which over rides reason, according to Merton. There are also loopholes. An emotional faith, one that follows a Master's teachings, and yet stamps on reason's common sense and makes reason a servant of the heart is not commendable either. Helas, the heart also errs and the heart's hot fervour has sometimes to be checked by the cold water of reason.

Obviously an equilibrium between the two is the happy medium, perfection. Merton puts it humorously: Fearing that domestic peace is no longer possible, faith (emotion) barricades itself in the attic, and leaves the rest of the house to reason. Actually faith and reason are meant to get along happily together. They were not meant to live alone, in divorce or in separation. (*Ascent to Truth* p. 25) Of course the intellect likes to understand and decide given the reality of experience, whereas the heart listens to the soul's wisdom and leads the intellect to it. This is believable for someone working and living in the mysterious ways of God. But when the spirit's love carries the heart to itself and then sometimes manipulates the heart for its own selfish ends, it divorces the reason from the heart. This is an uncomfortable situation which most contemplatives do experience some time or other. The more impure a soul, the more selfish are its 'revelations' and sometimes the contemplative falls flat on his face having adhered to this false mysticism. Only the merciful love of God can save one in such a situation. Merton speaks of the wisdom of the "divine" soul whose wisdom and illumination engenders ultimate vision and union with Absolute Love. The intellect in such cases cannot labour and item the methods. As Hafez, the great Iranian metaphysical poet said. "although union with God is not achieved through effort, yet O heart, make the effort." Merton says Mystical union is a gift of God. It cannot be acquired by any ascetic technique. It cannot be merited in the strict sense by any man, however holy he may be. No system of meditations, of interior discipline, of self-emptying, of recollection and absorption can bring a man to union with God without a free gift on the part of God Himself. Still less can a man arrive at mystical union with God by an effort of the intellect on his own natural level. (*Ascent to Truth*, p. 56)

St John of the Cross writes Nothing, created or imagined, can serve the understanding as a proper means of union with God. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. 2 ch. 8, no. 1 It is the law of God which lies in the depth of the heart of the saint, writes Thomas Merton, that unites a person to God and makes the person into the image of God. How then is this feat to be achieved? Merton proposes: In the first place, this law must not be understood as the law of Moses, the law of fear. The "Law" that is in the depths of the heart of the saint is not a law that paralyzes Love. It is not and can never be a narrow, exterior religiosity, concentrated on the literal fulfilment of external precepts, a law that merely weighs and measures sins in the balance of a pitiless scrupulosity." (*Bread in the Wilderness*, p. 95) Although this tells us what the law of the heart is not, Merton nonetheless elsewhere refers to prayer as the safest means of tapping the need of the heart. Monastic prayer begins not so much with "considerations" as with a return to the heart, finding one's deepest centre, awakening the profound depths of our being in the presence of God who is the source of our being and our life. (*Contemplative Prayer*, p. 34) Further on, he says: Finding our heart and recovering this awareness of the ground of our inmost identity implies the recognition that our external, everyday self is to a great extent a mask and a fabrication. It is not our true self. (p. 87, *Ibid.*) Recognising this condition is a grace of God for which few qualify as the majority of people wander about with this illusory identity of the bloated ego and make life miserable for true contemplatives who often prefer to be recluses. Let us remember the pitfalls of this reality. Many masters like to "chisel" at the person's so called ego so obsessively that the person may be maimed for life rather than made perfect.