

15 November 1965

## READING 6

### INTRODUCTION

In order to know ourselves better, we should begin now to study systematically (once more, but in a new light) the total capacities of the human organism; for we urgently need to correct the mistakes which are impeding progress.

Such a study must embrace, a) the general plan of construction and experience of common man, b) the different working of this construction in different states of consciousness, c) how and for what the human mind is created – i.e., its full capacity, when completely evolved, in the Fully Realized Man – what we call ‘Higher Mind’, d) its manifestations on the various steps of Self-realization as directly experienced by ourselves.

For this purpose a simple overall picture or simile is required. What picture could be better than the earliest one now available in written form, which has been repeated with many variants over three or four millenia?

On Saturday, 23rd October (just before the farewell lunch given to Mr.Allan at the Ashram), we put to the Shankaracharya part of this quotation from the Katha Upanishad (one of the 12 main Upanishads of the 128 which, he says, are known today):

Know the Atman as Lord of a chariot; and the body as the chariot itself. ‘Understanding’ (or wisdom) is the firm-footed charioteer, and the ‘discursive mind’ the reins. The horses, they say, are the senses; and their paths the objects of sense... He who has not right understanding (Buddhi) and whose operative mind (Manas) is never steady, is not the ruler of his own life, like a bad driver with wild horses. But he who has right understanding and whose mind is always steady, has become the ruler of his life.

[This is a composite translation from a) *The Ten Principal Upanishads*, Shri Purohit Swami & W. B. Yeats, Faber and Faber 1937, p.32, and b) *The Upanishads* translated from the Sanskrit by Juan Mascaró, Penguin Classics 1965, p.60.]

Chariot (Body)	Horses (Senses & Manas)	Charioteer (Buddhi)	Owner (Atman)
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[Pause for Discussion: How do we broadly apply this symbolism to what we know already?]

### PART 1

#### A Provisional answer to this question:

The *chariot*, the body, is constructed on a certain plan common to all human beings. Even in complete rest it is an entity which can govern itself, surviving on a minimum of food and air and its own internal impressions.

Harness the *horses* to the chariot, and the sensory impressions received by the horses from the environment are converted by them into action imparted to the chariot. At this level of

control governed by the ‘horse mind’, the ‘old brain’ which we share with the higher mammals, is subject to the Laws of Organic Life. A man at this level is like a man in a crowd, his psychology is crowd psychology, he thinks and feels and does what the crowd does. This is the level of Manas uncontrolled from above; such a man can be rightly described as a ‘biological machine’.

Now introduce the *charioteer*, and a potentially higher level of control exists. The charioteer can know what the chariot is for, he can have an aim – to fight a battle or win a race; or he can forget what it’s all about and be carried anywhere, and perhaps get trampled on.

So the essential idea of the whole chariot lies in its *owner*, in the understanding of the owner’s wishes by the charioteer, and his training and skill in carrying out those wishes. This is the function of the level of control described in the Shankaracharya’s System as the ‘awakened Buddhi’. The Buddhi represents the ‘new brain’ peculiar to man as a self-creative being. It includes many things which we know, like controlled attention, intellectual and emotional realization of Truth and, above all, Discrimination between the Owner’s wishes and any other impelling forces. It also contains many new functions, many latent qualities, which we only know of from hearsay. All these are derived from the Owner himself and the charioteer gets them by reflection.

Thus you will see that these four elements of the chariot cannot be equated with the ‘Centres’. At each level parts of five centres can work; at the highest level all five can work perfectly and two more centres come into operation at the instance of the Owner – the Higher Emotional and the Higher Intellectual Centres. The chariot, the horses, the charioteer and the Owner are levels of Integration – levels of Consciousness and Will.

[Pause for discussion]

## PART 2

Having broadly related this simile of the chariot to ourselves, we can see from above our general structure and purpose. We have from our own experience to know something of the behaviour and manifestations of those four elements in different states of Consciousness.

But we also have to study in our experience the *to and fro connections or relations between them*. When in action the horses are connected with the chariot by shafts and girths. Then the driver must have a firm seat on the chariot and control its brake. The driver controls the horses with reins, bit, bridle and whip. But the relation of horses and driver is more subtle than that. They will only give their best if they know that the charioteer understands them, have confidence in his touch and are in no doubt about his signals.

The charioteer keeps the body (the chariot) clean and in good order – but he shouldn’t spend all his spare time polishing it up like the people you see spending all Sunday cleaning their cars! He has other work to do; for instance, he must feed, water and brush down the horses, exercise and train them. He also should attend on the Owner and get to understand what he wants. *After all that* he can take time off to enjoy himself!

The nervous connections providing the means for all this can be found by anyone well-acquainted with the human nervous system; the psychological meaning can be observed through self-observation. But unless you really understand what the purpose of the whole construction is, and how far the daily life of common man departs from that purpose, you’ll only have a very little knowledge and a ‘little learning is a dangerous thing’<sup>†</sup> – hence the state of the world to-day.

[Discussion: Try to find the right questions!]

## CONCLUSION

Now hear the Shankaracharya's short comment on those verses from the Upanishad:

This image is described and discussed in many places. The chariot is the body, the five senses are the five horses. Manas is the reins, Buddhi the driver and Atman the Owner. The chariot is created to do anything and everything – it acts, it takes in impressions, it rests, it sleeps, all these and more. This is a description of the small chariot. There is a bigger one as well, on another level, where the five *elements* are the horses, Universal Manas the reins, and Universal Atman the Owner. Likewise there is a Cosmic chariot (Brahma the Owner).

There are tiny chariots for babies, bigger ones for children, and full-sized ones for grown-ups! For us the chariot is the body, for the Atman it is the whole Universe. Atman is not the chariot, but he can take any chariot when it is needed.

It is not the chariot itself that matters, but where it is taken, how it is used. Our chariot is for the use or pleasure of the Atman.

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Toward the end of the same conversation, when told that the BBC were planning a discussion on Happiness, and asked how we could contribute if given the opportunity, he said:

Introduction should be in three parts: First, explain that this method (of meditation) accumulates extra energy; and secondly, that this extra energy can be used more positively in ordinary life. Thirdly, mention should be made of the Spiritual side. It should be said that the dweller within this body won't die when the body dies. The Eternal aspect of the eternal journey of the body-dweller when he leaves his perishable body should be stressed. The Eternal part feels pain on departing from the body only because it has become too attached to it. The meditation will break these bonds so that the Eternal can move freely at journey's end.

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†NOTE: The quote above comes, of course, from Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, and we should keep these two couplets in mind:

A little learning is a dangerous thing;  
 Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring:  
 These shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,  
 And drinking largely sobers us again.

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