

6 June 1966

## READING 4

## PART 1

We have come back again to the Law of Three Forces; and on the last Monday we met a rather interesting line developed from these words:

The important thing that we are learning from practical observation is that, whereas the Three *Forces* are everywhere in the Universe, the Three *Gunas* specifically refer to the awakened Charioteer (the Buddhi). The Charioteer, if he wakes up, is alone capable of seeing the Three Gunas in relation to himself – seeing which predominates, and what combination is needed. Everything else is mere abstract theory.

The teaching on the Three Gunas is that part of the general Law of Three Forces which enables the Charioteer to control his own ego, his activities and, above all, his relation to the Owner, his Employer. It is easy to begin: we begin with the busy part of the brain behind the forehead. We can learn to observe quickly and easily at any moment what is going on there – Is it Rajas, activity, excitement? Is it sleep, laziness, heaviness, or as when one says, ‘my brain is full of cotton wool’ – that is all Tamas; or on rarer and happier occasions, is it something new and different?

I think it will help at this stage if we go back to the root meanings of the names of the Three Gunas, and the following very good summary is to be found in Heinrich Zimmer’s *The Philosophies of India*:

1. *Sattva* is a noun built on the participle *Sat*, from *as*, the verb ‘to be’. *Sat* means ‘being, as it should be; good, well, perfect’, and *Sattva*, accordingly, ‘the ideal state of being; goodness, purity, clarity, and quiet’. The quality of *Sattva* was said to predominate in Gods and heavenly beings, in unselfish people, and those bent on purely Spiritual pursuits. This is the Guna that facilitates enlightenment...
2. The noun *rajas* means, literally, ‘impurity’... and more generally, ‘dust’; and the word is related also to *ranj*, *rakta*, ‘redness, colour’, as well as to *raga*, ‘passion’ from which our word ‘rage’ is derived. [The active fool so often ‘sees red’ like an angry bull.]

The dust referred to, is that continually stirred up by the wind in a land where no rain falls for about ten months a year; for in India, except in the rainy season, there is nothing but the nightly dew to quench the thirst of the ground. The dry red soil is continually whirling into the air, dimming the serenity of the sky and coming down over everything. In the rainy season, on the other hand, all this dust is settled; and during the beautiful Autumn that follows the rains, when the Sun has dispelled the heavy clouds, the sky is spotlessly clear...

The Buddhi of the wise is translucent, clear, and untainted, whereas the Buddhi of the fool is filled with rajas, the ruddy dust of passion...

3. *Tamas* – literally, ‘darkness, blackness, dark-blue colour’; Spiritually ‘blindness’ – connotes the unconsciousness that prevails in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. *Tamas* is the basis of all lack of feeling, dullness, ruthlessness, insensibility and inertia... On the human level, *tamas* is manifested in the dull stupidity of the more self-centred and self-satisfied – those who acquiesce in

whatever happens as long as their personal slumber, safety or interests are not disturbed – our word ‘tame’ may have come from it (Anglo-Saxon ‘Tam’).

The counterparts of these two in the Universe are on the one hand the restless Creative energy of Nature, and on the other the force of Inertia that holds the frame of the Universe together, the frame of every Society and the fixed constitution of any individual; thus counter-balancing the explosive quality that perpetually attends the restless dynamism of the force of Rajas.

The Sattva or Third Force in the Universe harmonises and brings the two into special relationships – just as Oxygen and Hydrogen can be made to combine to form water (or hydrogen peroxide); and sodium and chlorine to form common salt. We are, however, by nature blind to the necessity for a Third Force until it is actually experienced or pointed out to us. In the same way, the Charioteer gets to know the taste of Sattva by experiencing it, and only then can he recognise its presence in other people, or in certain scenes, places, works of Art, or in events.

## PART 2

Perhaps we are now in a better position for understanding the Shankaracharya’s use of these words, for the three volumes of his recorded talks contain many examples of his way of using the idea of the Three Gunas as the key to everything on the way to Self-realization. A good starting-point would be one of my early conversations with him at the point where I asked:

May we hear something more about the relation between the Gunas and Attention? Surely Sattva Guna is necessary because, unless one’s mind and one’s heart are both in it, attention is just scattered and ineffective?

S. There is no Attention in Rajas and Tamas. Rajas is the state of activity when everything seems to be moving; and Tamas is the state of inertia when nothing moves, nothing seems of interest, everything seems dead. So Attention can only be with Sattva, and Attention can only be helped by Sattva.

Whereas people with Sattva experience Bliss and other benefits, if they have no Attention they cannot retain it. So with Attention, prolonged experience of the Bliss of Sattva is achieved; otherwise it may come, but will be lost.

I would really like that to go deeply into our minds, because it has many important implications. For instance, if in meditation we are attending only to the mantra, while at other times we have enough Sattva to attend to whatever we are doing, to be ‘in a state of Attention’, then we make quick progress towards Self-realization.

Colin Lucas makes this point when he writes (28.5.66):

I wonder if it has ever struck you that the only reason why some people can’t get on with the Meditation is because they are using the wrong triad? In fact, if we really understood the Meditation in terms of triads, there would be no need for any more checking! But what is the right triad, and how can we understand it better?

As you have said, it is the relative concentration of each of the Three Gunas – their order of emphasis – which determines the difference between one activity and another. For some activities it is necessary for Rajas to predominate, for others it is necessary for Tamas to predominate, and for still others it is necessary for Sattva to predominate.

Since the first Shankara, and even before him, the Leaders of the Holy Tradition have always stressed that the Meditation is one of those belonging to the last category. You can't do it by any sort of active effort; and you can't do it in a sleepy and inattentive way, careless of the position you sit in, or with an attitude of depression and frustration. Each time you have to start afresh, in an attentive posture, and with a longing to reach one's True Self. It is not so much that *other* people use the wrong triad, but that so often one finds *oneself* using the wrong triad; and this may happen many times during the meditation when it is not going easily, and needs to be watched out of the corner of one's eye. Only when one has acquired a sure taste for the Three Gunas in one's own meditation can one really help other people.

As the alchemists used to say, 'in order to make gold a little gold is needed at the start'. In fact, the impulse to meditate is due to a drop of Sattva. That drop gradually becomes ten drops, then a hundred drops, then a thousand, and with this comes the certainty that Ramakrishna's words are true:

Clap your hands and the birds fly out of the trees;  
pronounce the name of God, and your sins fly out of the window.

Genius (the capacity to use faculties which are latent in ordinary people) was defined by Mr. Ouspensky as the 'capacity to use the third triad'. Meditation is the easiest and most direct way of acquiring this capacity. It would be a thousand pities if anyone of us persuaded himself that this simple thing is beyond him for ever, just because he has hitherto been approaching it in the wrong way.

For with increasing realization of the miracle of the Eternal presence of the Atman within each of us, meditation becomes more and more natural and inevitable. That's why we keep on reminding ourselves of the noble words of people who have realized this Truth – words such as those of Mevlana:

The whole world is the outward form of Universal Mind, which is the Father of whomsoever is a follower of the Divine Word.

Make peace with this Father; abandon disobedience, that the water and clay of the visible world may appear to you as a carpet of gold.

Then the Resurrection will become immediate experience; heaven and earth will be transfigured before you.

Since I was ever at peace with this Father, this world is like Paradise in my sight.

At every moment appears a new form and a new beauty, so that from seeing the New, all *ennui* dies away.

I see the world to be full of Bounty – the waters constantly gushing from the springs.

I see the tree boughs dancing like aspirants to the higher life; and the leaves clapping their hands like minstrels.

The gleam of the mirror comes flashing through its cover of felted cloth. Think how it will be if the mirror itself is displayed!

(*Mathnawi*, Book 4, p. 452)

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