

11 December 1967

THE FIVE VEILS

At the first meeting we had with His Holiness on this last visit, a conversation developed which (though not appreciated at the time) was to have far-reaching effects. It started with his answer to a question from the School of Meditation put by W.W.

29.10.67 (4)

S. We naturally live in the world of names and forms; we are surrounded by them, and even the being we call 'Myself' has as many names and forms. People have name and form and also the Real I; and although in reality everything is everywhere, yet, because of ignorance people get involved only in the world of names and forms. Usually they take their 6 foot body as their Ultimate Being. The System of Liberation (System of Knowledge and method of Meditation) is given to remove the narrowness of the boundary and the prison wall, so as to allow them by discrimination to see the unlimited and unbounded Atman, which cannot be brought into the narrow limits of names and forms. Here is an illustration:

Someone went to a Holy man and asked to be introduced to God. The Holy man said that when I go to Him, he will ask about you. What shall I say about you? So first give me some details of your own credentials. The man pointed to his body and told his name. The Holy man said that all this is made of flesh and bones which is always subject to growth and decay. How could this be you; it is only your body and name? Get me your proper credentials. The man thinks and says that perhaps his thoughts, desires, feelings were his proper credentials. The Holy man again observed that even these are changing all the time. Give me your proper and fixed credentials. In this way this man was led to recognize his own True Self, and then he did not go around seeking any more introductions.

The System of Knowledge and the method of Meditation are simply to lead people to discriminate between the transitory and the Eternal, between formal and informal, between words and the Spirit, so that one can enjoy forms, words and also the real Being.

(5) W. May we ask for clarity about the elements you spoke of and which we have to discriminate in relation to Manas, Buddhi, Chitta and Ahankar?'

S. When we relate the five veils to the elements of which the physical body is composed, we have to keep in mind the great difference of materiality. The first two veils are formed of the coarse material and are called the Annamaya and the Pranamaya veils respectively. The other three – the Manomaya, the Vijnanamaya and the Anandamaya – are formed of the Subtle body. This subtle body is formed of relatively conscious material, and it is only through these that we become conscious of the phenomenal world.

(6) W. May we ask about those? We have a beautiful description of the five veils in the book called *Crest Jewel of Wisdom*. Would you tell us how these actually show themselves and how they are recognised so that we can come to discriminate between them?

There followed a fairly full description which was recorded on tape and subsequently translated. But R. was not attending. He thought: 'O Lord, all these Indian names!', and dismissed them all from his mind.

But three nights later he had a strange experience in the form of a very vivid dream which woke him up about 1.00 a.m. into clear Consciousness. In the dream there was a big audience hall with many people present, and he was just one of the audience. On the dais was the first Shankara, a commanding figure with robes and banner. The figure was quite impersonal and the features could not be distinguished, but the form resembled the statue of Shankara in the shrine in the Ashram grounds seen two years before. He was explaining the five veils with the utmost simplicity and clarity and R. felt there was no difficulty at all in understanding them.

The essence of the description was that there are five forms of Maya or imagination, five veils of illusion which obscure for each man his 'Real I' and which have successively to be torn away before a man can see himself and become himSelf.

The *first (Annamaya)* is the illusion that the body of flesh and bones, of cells and organs and systems is himSelf. [This is the materialistic view of man that fills all our textbooks of medicine and accounts for the feverish desire to keep the body alive at all costs by artificial respiration, organ transplantation and the rest.] In the ordinary Westerner it obtrudes itself especially in times of pain and illness, or physical urges like hunger and thirst and sexual desire; and then he is apt to forget altogether that he is something more than a piece of flesh.

The *second (Pranamaya)* arises from the Autonomic nervous system with the changes of respiration and circulation and the endocrine cycles and rhythms. It is manifested by changing physical vitality and by chemical cycles and reactions between people. It is the physical motivation that keeps the heavy body in movement.

The next three veils arise in the Subtle body (what we call our 'minds') and account for all our psychology and mental warfare.

The first of these, the *third veil or Manomaya* is the ceaseless mental activity so prominent in the West at present, whereby the mind chases after sensory impressions, labelling, relating and associating them; the mind that forms opinions, talks and writes books, looks up references, consults encyclopaedias and forms theories. It thinks of itself as 'objective', but really is mixed with dreams and much influenced by the Subtle body and the chemical weather. It never can relate the part to the whole, but takes the part for the whole.

The *fourth veil, the Vijnanamaya*, is that which surrounds the Soul or Buddhi, governing the main tendencies of a man's life. It makes one man go after trade or money, makes another join a certain religion and still another become a crook. It sets the general pattern of successive lives in which particular tendencies grow or diminish.

Even when this is torn aside, there is still a *fifth veil* which I did not understand. Its name, *Anandamaya*, suggests that even in the state of ecstasy there is still a veil preventing final union, still a mistaken point of view about the Real 'I', still some kind of duality.

Shankara concluded his discourse with the answer to a question asked by myself or someone else present (I couldn't be sure which): 'When the five veils are torn away because of their unreality, I do not see that anything remains but universal negation. What then remains to be known?'

As he replied: ‘That which remains unchanged among changing things, that by which everything is known, though unknown by anything else, realize that Knower to be...’ I woke right up, got out of bed and read the account in the *Crest Jewel*.

At our meeting the next morning, Whiting and I agreed to ask to hear more of the Tradition of the Meditation and particularly about the first Shankara and his Teacher Govinda. Part of the answer given was this:

1.11.67 (5)

S. When we talk about the first Shankara and his Tradition of Shankaracharya, we don’t really mean that this Tradition was produced and created by him. It was only made available through him at a certain point in our history 2,500 years ago, though the Tradition itself started right from the beginning of creation.

True Knowledge does not come from men at all whether Shankara or any other Leader of other Traditions. The Knowledge belongs to the Absolute and the Atman. These Leaders only catch the Knowledge and expound it according to the needs of the time, place and people; they clothe the Knowledge in such a fashion that suits the standard of people living at the time and place where he happens to be. This is why the religions differ. Fundamentals are always the same, but details are always different...

Not expecting to be taken seriously at all, R. said: (7) ‘This is a rather lighter subject: perhaps you would explain why, last night, I had a vivid dream in which I was in the presence of the original Shankara and he explained to the crowd of us assembled round him, all about the five veils and what was left when they disappeared. I got up and read the account in *Vivekachudamani* and found it was just what His Holiness was saying at our talk three days ago.’

His answer was unexpected:

The Shankaracharya started a new movement in India when the way was practically lost. Sidetracks had been created and people were distracted to somewhere which was not the true goal of the human beings. Intellectual pursuits covered the True Knowledge. He was in the world to shed light on the way of the True Knowledge, so that the people could remember their goal and find the way to reach it. If one knows the address and does not know the way to reach it, or if one knows the routes and does not know the address, then in both cases efforts will be futile. Shankaracharya showed both together. The historical man Shankaracharya was only the need of the moment; the Real and Eternal is the Knowledge which might appear anywhere, wherever the need may be. If someone who is devoted to Truth with sincerity, then he might well be connected with him. Bodies may be different but Atman is the same. If you have seen him in person in your sleep, you have seen the Knowledge personified. Such moments are very important.

When there was chaos of ideas and principles, the first Shankaracharya appeared to present a synthesis of Truth. He did that and disappeared. The principles are the same which have come down through this Tradition right from Narayan, Brahma and others to the present day. There will never be any difference of the principles, but the modes of expression will differ from Shankaracharya to Shankaracharya due to the difference in the Being of the Shankaracharyas and the need of the time and place. The true search is to find the unity in diversity.

During the week, R. felt he understood and could get rid of the first three sheaths (veils) by persistently going in Meditation from movement to non-movement. The fourth, the Vijnanamaya, which surrounds the Buddhi, also seemed to become clear in the course of the question and answers – in particular:

4.11.67 (5)

R. Could it be said that his Buddhi sets the general direction of a man's life, what he goes after? And will it follow that when His Holiness says that the man's last desire sets the pattern for next life, this is due to how his Buddhi is pointing at that time?

S. What you say is true, and changes in the directions are also possible, and all through the life in different atmosphere, circumstance and likes and dislikes, one gets fixed in ideas. He might like many, but one of them is most dear to him, and at the last moment this dearest liking does not leave him and he goes with it and sets a sort of new pattern for his next life.

(J. asked if this last desire was intentional or accidental.)

S. The last desire is climax of all our strivings and belief. If one has undergone a life with discipline and manages most of his life in conscious state, such men will have a desire with a conscious origin, whereas others who don't have had a discipline or faith might have just one of the many desires. It really makes not much difference because they all originate from ignorance.

A few days ago four sanyassins were going to Badrinath on pilgrimage. In Rishikesh the leader asked them to leave any money they had, or leave the party because food and shelter will be available free on the way, and if one wanted to use extra money others might be distracted. One of them had a sum of four guineas which he buried under a tree with certain mark. On the way this man died of cholera. When the other three came back to Rishikesh they decided to unearth the money to use in Yajna on behalf of the dead man. When they dug it up they found a small snake sitting round it. This must have been the dead man who was so attached to his money. They killed the snake and let his soul free from this bondage and performed Yajna to help his soul.

Attachments are very strong. When one has to leave home one always picks up the dearest thing first.

[R. remembered a French girl telling him of her flight from the Nazis when they advanced through France. She had five minutes to put possessions into a suit case. When she got to a safe place and unpacked, she found 17 pairs of shoes and little else, She had always been attracted to shoes!]

But it was only on the day before we departed that we understood something about the *fifth* and last veil – the *Anandamaya*:

4.11.67 (1)

A. At a certain stage in the development of meditation there seems to be a barrier blocking final unity. Is this illusion? If so, can one destroy it? If not, how can one overcome the barrier?

S. The last barrier to the Atman is Ahankar, the feeling of 'I' – 'I' the one who is

meditating, or 'I' am the one who is about to go over the barrier into the unity. As long as one sticks to this the unity is impossible. We have to learn this and make sure in our self that when one reaches to a spot of this nature, one should drop even the idea of the feeling of 'I'. Everything is to be given up even the sense of 'I'. Once the sense or feeling of 'I' is given up, then only the unity is possible.

A certain man went to a Holy man to be initiated in meditation. He was asked as to what things he saw on the way. He said that among all those things I saw I remember a donkey very well. He was then asked to remove him from his memory. The poor man tried hard, but failed, and expressed his inability to do so. The Holy man said that the art is to drop the memory. This memory or the feeling of 'I' is the greatest and the last barrier to meditation. The man who meditates or the man who observes must be dropped so that one is able to merge into One.

(2) R. It was possible in the night (remembering the story of the arrow-maker) to have no *movement* for quite a long time, but still the feeling of 'I' remained there in the stillness.

S. When one knows that one is still one is not still, and when one knows one is at peace, one is still away from it, because the great barrier is still there to recognise 'I' and its relation with peace and stillness. In complete peace or stillness there is no 'I'.

Brihaspati is the Teacher (Guru) of all the Devas (Gods). His son Kach was sent to Ashram for study. He was taught the Vedas and the Shastras, and also the Upanishads. The essence of all his knowledge was that he should give up everything to be at peace. When he came home he did not start any work, so his father asked him as to why he is sitting there lazily. He said that I have realised from reading the Vedas, Shastras and Upanishads that to be at peace one must give up everything, so I have decided to give up my work to remain happy. Father said to him that he was still enjoying being in the house and the services of the servants, so he left house and went to the forest to live alone in nature. But when he found that he was not in peace, then he asked his father for advice. Father said again that perhaps there was something else which he could give up. The son gave up the tree under which he lived and also threw away his garments and moved around the banks of Ganges. Even then he was not at complete peace, so he thought that his body should also be given up and he collected wood and lit a fire and was about to jump into it. His father came out from the hiding place and asked him to answer a few questions before giving up his body. The father said that according to nature and your being you will have another body when you have left this one by burning. This means you will take one for another, and this cycle will go on till eternity. Should you then give up this body? The son was puzzled, and asked his father for guidance. Then his father said to him that to give up all, you have only to give up the feeling of giving up. This, your Ahankar, who is trying to give up everything else, is still with you. Once you give up Ahankar, then there is nothing yours to be given up.

R. It seems to take a long, long time! Some people perhaps are more egoistic than others.' (S. laughs).

(3) A. What is it that gives up? What is it that surrenders?

S. That which is never absent from anywhere.

(4) A. And part of that substance is in me?

S. Yes. A part of that substance is within you and also that you are within it. It is like the water of the Ganges and Ganges water in a bottle. Break the bottle and there is no individual trace of that water when mixed in Ganges. As long as we associate the Self with the body, senses, Manas, Buddhi, desire or the feeling of 'I' (Ahankar), we are separated and bottled up. Cut out Ahankar and there is no separation.

(5) R. I hope there could be a peaceful co-existence like this quotation from the *Mundaka Upanishad*: (Book 3, 1) 'There are two birds, two dear friends, who live on the self-same tree. The one pecks at the sweet fruit, while the other looks on in silence, not eating.

The first is the human spirit who feels sad and bound in by ignorance. But on beholding the Power and Glory of the Universal made of the same substance as himSelf, he becomes free from sorrow.

(S. quotes the passage in the Sanskrit poetry.)

S. They certainly co-exist as long as they are sitting on the tree of creation and one of them is enjoying the fruit of the tree. These two sweet friends are the Absolute and the Atman. The Atman is involved with the creation and its fruits. It feels as if it is seeing, eating, sensing and enjoying the world, and in doing so gets attached with the world, whereas the Absolute, although in and with the creation, is in no way involved with the creation and only watches and enjoys. One does not see and understand that the changes take place in the Prakriti and not in the Atman. Atman is not subject to change. If it were, it could never be liberated and then the Prakriti would have been absolute which is impossible. One who understands this becomes very light and walks in freedom without carrying the load of the world. He is one who enjoys the drama in true sense and never associates himself with the characters of the drama. Our job is simply to watch and enjoy.

(6) A. Is one entitled to ask for help or should one trust the Teacher to know one's need and act as necessary?

S. The Teacher full of Grace knows the difficulties and picks up the message and comes to the rescue without being asked. The impatient disciple when he gets excited with the so-called difficulties jumps up to seize the nearest opportunity to ask for help. Even then he gets the help no doubt. Best is not to ask, because whatever is necessary will always be provided by the Teacher.

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THE FIVE VEILS. SUMMARY

These are best understood gradually in meditation as we long to be One with our True Self, the Atman.

The *Annamaya* veil of body obtrudes itself when it becomes obtrusive and distracts our attention. We are advised, for instance, not to meditate if we are in pain; we are advised to avoid muscular tensions by letting the body find a comfortable position.

This is true also of the *Pranamaya* veil from which there seems to be no sharp line of demarcation. Anything that interferes with breathing and circulation, such as a stuffy atmosphere in the room, should be avoided. A common cause of interference is when the rhythm of the Mantra coincides with the pulse or with the breathing rhythm. There are variations, too, in physical vitality – excess physical energy, exciting glandular cycles, etc., as also the opposite – exhaustion or depletion of physical energy and ‘weariness of the flesh’.

The *Crest Jewel* says:

Conditioned by the organs of action this vitality becomes the *Pranamaya* sheath (or veil) through which the embodied ego performs all the actions of the physical body. The *Pranamaya*, being the modification of the life-breath and the comer and goer, in and out, like air-currents, is also not the Atman, because it cannot by itself discriminate between good and evil, or the real Self and another; it is always dependent on something higher.

The next, the veil of the restless mind is easy to see, as it is perhaps the most universal obstacle among Western people to the peace of meditation. Thus one has to come away from any and every movement of the mind.

The organs of sensation, together with the Manas, form the *Manomaya* sheath, which is the cause of the differentiation between ‘I and mine’ and ‘other’.

It manifests its power by running on by association, distinguishing objects by name, describing experiences in words, interpreting sensations, etc.

The Buddhi, with its emotional moods, forms the *Vijnanamaya* veil, whose characteristic is to form fixed opinions and beliefs, particularly the belief in one’s ego as the agent. It is the cause of the revolution of births and deaths.

Thus it is closely connected with the next and final veil – the *Anandamaya*, which brings the thought, ‘I am meditating, I am transcending, I am about to enjoy union’. It is the last stronghold of the ‘false I’, and experience and devotion are needed to distinguish all its disguises and ramifications. Once seen, however, they are with full attention not difficult to avoid. Full attention in the moment of merging is like that of the arrow-maker completely absorbed in pointing his arrow.

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