

28 September 1970

## AUTUMN SESSION 1970

## READING 1

## PART 1

We have been considering what subject you could discuss which would combine both theory and practice, and this one seems to give most scope.

On 18th August last one of us (D.B.C.) was sent a translation of a talk just given by His Holiness to his followers in Allahabad which began as follows:

Meditation, meditator, and the 'object of meditation' – these three always go together. There can be no meditation if either meditator or object of meditation are not there. The 'object of meditation' is Param-Atman – the ultimate Truth, the absolute Truth, and the one and only Truth which has real existence.

This paragraph refers to *any* effective spiritual discipline; there will always be the discipline, the disciple, and the aim or object of the discipline.

In case you have not previously heard this word 'Param-Atman', you can begin to think of its meaning like this: The Atman is the Divine Self present in each individual (in St. John's words, 'the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world'). The sum total of all the Atmans of all individual living beings past, present and to come is the Param-Atman.

We had been told of this idea chiefly in two contexts – first on the scale of the individual, and secondly on the scale of humanity as a whole. In 1962 R. first asked him about the 'Four Bodies' (as described in our Western System) and was given the following answer:

He says the first is the *Physical body* of flesh and bones; second body is the *Subtle body* which makes everything move; the third body is the *body where the Atman lives*; and the fourth body is the body where everything lives – the *Eternal body*. The description of all these is a lengthy process, but he is going to explain these one by one.

The *First body* is *Sthula Sharira* (literally the 'instrument') by which everything gets done, it is the machine; it gets its orders from the Second body and obeys it; but can do nothing of its own. The *Second body*, the body which makes it move like the power that runs a machine, is the *Shushna Sharira* (literally 'subtle' body). This is composed of many elements (which we won't stop to enumerate at present, but are comprised of what we in the West would call the 'physical basis of mind'). These two together compose our individual nature given us to use as we like.

The *Third body*, which is the *Causal body*, belongs to the Self or Atman, and he gives the example that just as we, after finishing our work in the marketplace go to our home and rest in one of our personal rooms (study, boudoir), so does the Atman have his room and rest in the Third body that is entirely for Him.

There is another body, which contains all the bodies, and he calls it the *Divine body* – the body of the Absolute, and there all the Atmans have their abode. So this *Fourth body* belongs to the Param-Atman, the Universal Self.

R. In common man I suppose these bodies, except for the first, the machine, are not formed yet. Does His Holiness speak of the four bodies in a state of perfection when they are completed?

S. Some of the properties of all these four bodies are made available to everything living, but in the creation of beings below the human level they cannot be completed and made permanent. The possibility of these four bodies being felt and realized only belongs to the human being, and ordinary men are only capable of realizing three bodies. The Fourth body could only be realized by great men once in a way. But the full development and crystallization of the first three bodies is possible in ordinary people, the limit being the Third body. It all depends on how much an individual is on the Way.  
(16 October 1962)

On the Scale of Humanity we have frequently heard from him that the Param-Atman has been symbolised on earth in the perfect forms of certain rare beings regarded as Divine incarnations, such as Sri Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gita* and Jesus the Messiah of the Christian Gospels.

[Though we try in our discussions not to use the exclusive language of any particular religion, yet the Christian can think of the Christian Trinity as parallel with H.H's teaching: The individual Atman is like the Holy spirit – the Comforter; the Param-Atman is like the Christ who said 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me'; God the Father is Brahman, the Creator of the Universe, or Absolute – the ultimate concept of every religion.]

On the Way of Self-realization, for each individual there are three chief stages. The first is to rediscover your own Atman – to recognise the signs of His presence by a process of exclusion 'Neti, Neti – not this, not this'. Next is to learn to love Him with heart and mind and soul and strength, to hear His voice and obey His instructions until one becomes Him. Finally, it is He who has to take command of the whole organism until His 'sphere of influence' becomes that of the Param-Atman – 'your own Self lives in the hearts of all'.

Two advantages accrue from this lofty concept of the Param-Atman: the first is that all confusion between the ordinary ego (Ahankar) and the Divine Self (Atman) disappears; the second is the removal of duality between oneself here and a 'God out there', which is the rock on which many Christians, Moslems, Hindus and followers of any 'orthodoxy' continuously founder. An individual, working alone, cannot rise above his own separate ego; a wise instructor, proper knowledge, and a School ('good company') are needed; but the School itself, as it rises in level, must become more and more liberal and less exclusive in its outlook.

[Pause for discussion. Please see that the concept of 'Param-Atman' is understood.]

## PART 2

Having established to some extent an understanding of what the Shankaracharya means by Param-Atman, let us continue to quote from the discourse with which we started since it contains a wonderfully practical method:

The 'object of [a discipline like] meditation' is the Param-Atman – the ultimate Truth, the absolute Truth and the only Truth which has real existence.

There is no such thing as the 'world' from the point of view of real existence. Yet, we see a 'world' around us. This seeing is like seeing a mirage – seeing a thing where none exists.

Unreal though a mirage is, yet we cannot dig it out with a spade or blow it away with artillery. As it is due to certain atmospheric conditions which modify the light, or goes away only when those atmospheric conditions vanish. Similarly, the mirage of the sensory world is due to certain conditions of ignorance, and it goes away only when that ignorance is gone.

We must not expect that this astounding statement (that this familiar sensory world is an illusion) could be accepted at once. It takes time to see in what sense it is really and literally true.

We can give you three quotations from contemporary writings which may help:

1. What is it that [we are pretending] you observe? Lights and colours and sounds. But this brings us up against a very important fact. *There are no such lights or colours or sounds in the world dealt with by physical science.* They are what are called 'sense data.' 'Data' means 'things given'; and the non-physical elements in sensory phenomena are said to be 'given', because, if you had never experienced, say, the *redness* of a field poppy or the *sound* of a tolling bell, you could never, from other knowledge, infer that there existed anywhere in the universe such extraordinary facts. They are not physical, because, to be physical, means to be describable in the language of physical science; and no description of moving *particles* – lumps possessing nothing but inertia – no description of shifting *stresses* in an ether, no mathematical formulae can provide a man who has never experienced *redness* or *sound* with the remotest conception of what these phenomena are like. How then, did the materialists deal with these sense data? Well, those who were least intelligent dubbed them 'illusions' – a word which they misused with considerable frequency without troubling to consider its essential meaning. But the task of the materialist was to explain how the element of *redness* got into that 'illusion', when by 'illusion' he meant some motion or other of brain particles. Those capable of clearer thinking admitted that sense data were non-physical, but added that they were of no importance. 'No importance' to what? To whatever remained for the materialists to handle, of course... Such ineptitudes as, 'The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile'; such irrelevancies as 'I have dissected the human body and I have found no trace of the soul'; these were not the utterances of the leaders. What they said was simple, true and very much to the point. Here, in condensed form it is:

Sense data make their inexplicable appearances only when certain tracts in the brain are in a state of excitation. Granted that the motions of brain particles cannot *create* sense-data, the fact remains that these two different kinds of event – physical (which means, 'mental') sense data, and neural ('nervous') activity – invariably accompany each other.

*(Nothing Dies, J. W. Dunne, p.15)*

In other words, when we are going about our business in the ordinary physical world, we must accept the narrow physical world and its laws upon which all agree. But unless we realise that *it is a mirage*, we can expect no answers to questions about the causes of this mirage, or the true purpose of life.

2. Another reason why the sensory world is really a 'mirage' is that all motion is relative to the observer, and different observers count in different units. Astronomers have often used the method of changing units of space to bring the magnitude of the universe into the compass of one's mind; but only recently have they begun to change the units of time (the other component of motion). A simple illustration of such an idea was suggested by Lord Clark at the start of the last talk, called 'Heroic Materialism', of his television series on *Civilisation*:

Imagine an immensely speeded up movie of Manhattan Island during the last hundred years. It would look less like a work of man than like some tremendous natural upheaval. It's godless, it's brutal, it's violent – but one can't laugh it off, because in the energy, strength of will and mental grasp that have gone to make New York, materialism has transcended itself... Well, nature is violent and brutal and there's nothing we can do about it. But New York, after all, was made by men. It took almost the same time to reach its present condition as it did to complete the Gothic cathedrals. At which point a very obvious reflection crosses one's mind: that the cathedrals were built to the glory of God. New York was built to the glory of mammon – money, gain, the new god of the nineteenth century. So many of the same human ingredients have gone into its construction that at a distance it does look rather like a celestial city. At a distance. Come closer, and it's not so good.

Adopting Lord Clark's suggestion to 'imagine an immensely speeded-up movie of Manhattan Island during the last hundred years', we can run such an imaginary film at the speed of an observer for whom the unit of time is a human generation of about 30 years (or  $10^9$  seconds) – so that 30 years passes over the screen in 1 second. The 300 years since 1664 (when the city of New York first took its name) will pass in 10 seconds, of which the last 100 years will look like a great explosion taking place instantaneously and going 'up' in the form of skyscrapers, rather than going 'out' as it did at the start.

On television we are very used to the technique of the slow motion run-through of a particular incident (especially in sport) so that we can grasp each separate movement of some episode in the game. This is essentially the same technique as that used by our sense-organs, nervous system and brain for recording rapidly changing and vastly complicated physical scenes. We forget, however, that to have insight into the causes and meaning of things, we have to learn to employ the reverse process. As in Lord Clark's example, we speed things up so that our consciousness can cause the mind to work as one whole and at its full speed. Only then do we cease to 'be identified' with the details and begin to 'see the wood for the trees'.

### 3. The late Russell Brain suggested another helpful simile:

Is it likely that physiology will ever throw any real light upon the relationship between the brain and the mind? I believe that, working in conjunction with psychology, it will; but you must not expect me to give you a clear idea of how that will happen. I can only guess where present advances seem to be leading us. Think of a pattern. An atom is a pattern of electrons, a molecule is a pattern of atoms. There are patterns of patterns of patterns, and so on indefinitely. The most complicated patterns we know are in the brain. Not only are there twelve thousand million nerve cells out of which the patterns can be made, but *nervous patterns exist in time, like a melody, as well as in space*. If you look at a tapestry through a magnifying glass you will see the individual threads but not the pattern: if you stand away from it you will see the pattern but not the threads. My guess is that in the nervous system we are looking at the threads while with the mind we perceive the patterns, and that one day we shall discover how the patterns are made out of the threads.

*(The Physical basis of Mind, pp.54 & 55, Basil Blackwell, 1950)*

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