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## READING 2

We had better now give you the whole of the Shankaracharya's talk to think about and give gradually, with the object of expressing this idea in Western form:

## DISCOURSE ON MEDITATION AND PARAM-ATMAN

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Meditation – meditator – and the object of meditation – these three always go together. There can be no meditation if either the meditator or the 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 that has real existence.

There is no such thing as the 'world' from the point of view of real existence.<sup>†</sup> Yet we see a 'world' around us. This seeing is like seeing a mirage – seeing a thing where there is none.

Unreal though a mirage is, yet we cannot dispel it by any physical means. That is, we cannot dig it out with a spade or blow it away with artillery. As it is due to certain conditions of light, it goes away only when those conditions have gone. Similarly, the mirage of the 'world' is due to certain conditions of ignorance, and it goes away only when that ignorance is gone.

Consider a sugar-cube; the real thing about it is its sweetness. Its form is irrelevant – whether it is cubical or round or any other shape. Now the Manas ('computer mind') is incapable of imagining 'sweetness', though it is real. It can, however, imagine objects having the property of sweetness – like sugar-cube or fruit or pudding; and these, in turn, enable us to realise what sweetness is. Thus to get at the abstract we take the help of the concrete; to get at the extra-sensory we go from the sensory object. Similarly, we meditate with the help of a 'mantra', which is a sensation of sound, in order to get at something which is otherwise beyond the reach of the human mind – the Param-Atman.

Let us revert to the sugar-cube. The sugar-cube comes from sugar; sugar comes from sugar-cane; sugar-cane comes from soil, water, air, light, etc. Carrying on the argument 'this comes from that, that from that...' etc., we ultimately trace the origin of the sugar-cube to the 'Avyakta' ('Unmanifested Nature'). Then the origin of the sugar cube, which we can perceive through our senses, lies in Avyakta, which we never could perceive through our senses. Similarly, all perceptible phenomena (collectively called 'the world') originated from Avyakta, and will finally merge into Avyakta. This is the view of the Tradition of the Shankaracharyas.

We want to meditate on the Param-Atman. As it is the source of all greatness, its own greatness must be infinite. As it is the source of all happiness, its own happiness must be boundless. As it is the source of all beauty, its own beauty must be – we do not know... But how could we ever meditate on such a Param-Atman, whose qualities and nature are thus beyond the utmost stretch of human imagination?

This was the question which was naturally put by Arjuna to the Lord Krishna, and the answer is contained in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 10, vv. 20–42.

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<sup>†</sup>Used in the same sense as Christ's words: 'In the world ye will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

[Here is a translation of a few of those verses:

O Arjuna! I am the Self, seated in the hearts of all beings;  
I am the beginning, and the Life, and I am the end of them all.  
...

Of the Scriptures I am the Hymns; I am the Electric Force in the powers of Nature;  
of the senses I am the registering mind; and I am the Intelligence in all that lives.

Among vital forces I am Life itself; I am Mammon to the heathen and godless; I am  
the energy in fire, earth, wind, heaven, sun, moon and planets...

I am all-devouring Death; I am the Origin of all that may happen; I am fame,  
fortune, speech, memory, intellect, constancy and forgiveness.

...

I am the gambling of the cheat, and the splendour of the splendid; I am Victory; I  
am Effort; and I am the Purity of the pure...

Whatever is glorious, excellent, beautiful or mighty, be assured that it comes from  
only a part of My splendour.

But what is the use of all these details to you? O Arjuna! I sustain all this world with  
only a fragment of Myself.]

(Discourse continues):

All this implies that by thinking of the most powerful manifest thing as only a tiny  
particle of Param-Atman's power; by thinking of the most beautiful object we can, and  
then treating it as a mere atom of Param-Atman's beauty and so on; we can gradually find  
our way to the Param-Atman. Thus, starting from sensory objects and rising higher and  
higher, we reach a state where all difference between sensory and ultra-sensory, between  
definable and undefinable has faded away from us.

Then, what to ordinary people are *different* forms and shapes, are to a fully Realized  
person all manifestations of one and the same Param-Atman. What he sees then, around  
himself and within himself, is Param-Atman, and *not* the mirage which we call 'the  
world'. Such a man would welcome heat and cold, pleasure and pain, fortune and  
misfortune – all alike, because all are manifestations of Param-Atman.

After reading this, perhaps several times, one may recall Western writings which have tried  
to express the same thing. The book *Tertium Organum* does so in the language of a Russian in  
the year 1915. Reading it now one finds many similar passages, notably perhaps in chapters 13  
and 14, from which we take some quotations out of the shortened private edition, Stourton  
Press, 1961. Chapter 13, for instance, ends with this passage:

Moreover, we must remember that our world is not stable but changes with the  
slightest change in the forms of our perception. Phenomena which appear to us  
unrelated may be seen by a wider Consciousness as parts of one whole, but in a category  
quite incomprehensible to us. So that, besides our view of things, another is possible –  
a view as it were from another world, from 'over there'... But 'over there' is not another  
place; it is another method of perception, a new understanding.' (p.98)

(see also Routledge, 1951 edition, p.139)

And in Chapter 14 leading up to Plato's *Dialogue of the Cave*, the author wrote:

Much that is new and unexpected may be revealed in the transition of one  
phenomenon into another. Birth, death, life, love, enmity, and so on, may appear in

quite a new light. It is difficult for us to imagine the nature of this *newness*, although it is only our incapacity to feel and understand it which separates us from it, since we live in the midst of it. But our senses are too primitive, our ideas too crude for the subtle differentiation of phenomena which should become revealed to us in higher space. Consequently, if we manage to become acquainted with the world without the limitations under which we usually view it, our feeling would be one of wonder, becoming greater and greater as acquaintance with it becomes better... We must strive to notice those realities (which are expressed in the imagery of art) and develop in ourselves the capacity to feel them, because it is only in this way that we enter into communion with the noumenal world, or in the world of causes... (p.101)

For an artist the phenomenal world is merely his material; it is only the means for understanding and expressing his understanding of the noumenal world. The mystery of life is that the noumenon, which is the hidden meaning and the hidden function of a thing, is reflected in its phenomenon. The phenomenon is the reflection of the noumenon in our sphere, and through the phenomenon it is possible to know the noumenon. Only here chemical reagents and the spectroscope will accomplish nothing. The reflection of the noumenon in the phenomenon can be felt and understood only by that subtle apparatus which is called the *soul of the artist*. (p.103)

(see also p.143 & 145)

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