

2 November 1970

READING 6

We had this short but valuable message from the Shankaracharya while in transit last week. 'Our man on the spot' writes:

I had a brief talk with him about how you have tried to explain Param-Atman to your group, as 'the sum total of all the Atmans of all individual living beings, past, present and to come.'

He said: 'In a way you can think like that. But you might add that:

1. Param-Atman is the Atman of the whole universe – living and non-living, conceivable and inconceivable.
2. Atman is the image of the Param-Atman possessing all the properties of the Param-Atman, just as a mental image of the Sun could compass all the properties of the sun such as heat, light, etc.
3. The Atman, in association with the Buddhi (impure), may seem to be under worldly bondages (such as the mind and the body), but Param-Atman is above all such things.'

The last sentence brings us back once again to the structure of our own mind, the subject we wanted to embark on this week.

PSYCHOLOGY – THE STUDY OF THE PSYCHE

If one sufficiently observes one's own mind (that familiar part of the mind of which we can be directly conscious) in the light of practice and knowledge of Self-realization, one must inevitably come to the conclusion that there are four elements which are essential to its working:

1. The *body-mind mechanism* by which impressions from outer and inner physical vibrations are converted into mental images, desires and thoughts, of some of which we can be conscious.
2. The *Consciousness* of the observer himself. As we have little or no experience of Pure (and unrestricted) Consciousness, the observer must for a long time be content with a *reflection* of that Consciousness in the mirror or on the screen of his own mind; a reflection which is continually fluctuating in brilliance and clarity.
3. The *feeling of 'I'*, or sense of one's own individuality, which likewise fluctuates.
4. A power of *choice or discrimination* (between the True and the false, between useful and useless or harmful) which is capable of being trained and brought to perfection, but which is often very misleading.

We would like you first of all to be quite clear in plain and simple English, about these four elements of our Psychology as proved by our own experience. (1) and (2) are felt in the body and the heart; (3) and (4) in the head.

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[Pause for discussion, and make sure that these four elements are basically clear to everyone in the above simple terms.]

All current scientific writings or television programmes about the nervous system and the brain, are concerned only with (1), and the 'threads of the carpet' are known down to the smallest details. But *how* the threads (material elements like nerve fibres and nuclei, electrical recordings, etc.) are converted into the 'patterns' of psychological experience, is completely and admittedly unknown.

The other three elements are outside the province of laboratory science, and are therefore being dismissed as subjective and irrelevant. Knowledge about them can only be approached by a different kind of science – the science of Self-knowledge based on special techniques and experience. Both kinds of science are however valuable, and indeed for our sort of Society essential.

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We may perhaps now be ready to equate those four elements of our own psychology to four names used by the Shankaracharya:

1. He calls *Manas*; and since all the mechanism is *done for us*, below the threshold of our consciousness and altogether outside the range of our will, it is true to say that the Psychology of Self-realization begins where laboratory science leaves off. We just have to know that this complicated mechanism is going on all the time; but all we can do about it directly is to be careful about the environment from which these impressions are arising – i.e., the 'medium in which we choose to live'.
2. He calls *Chitta*, which is the fluctuating reflection of Chit (the pure Consciousness), just as a mental image of the sun could contain all the characteristics of the sun itself. Moreover, the Chitta (like a librarian) stores previous Conscious experiences and serves them up when wanted. It is this 'Chitta' which evolves in purity through the seven steps of Self-realization until, at last, the reflection becomes so pure that it is the same thing as the sun or the light of pure Consciousness itself.
3. He calls *Ahankar*. Every normal person must have his own 'feeling of I', that 'sense of individuality' which is only lost in mental breakdown. But it is composed of a mixture of both the true and the false in a man's picture of himself. We can only let the false fall away as the truth becomes established, but it is virtually impossible to do this alone, without help from 'good company'.
4. He calls *Buddhi*. Like Ahankar this is felt in the head, so the purity of Buddhi (our power of discrimination) depends upon its alliance with the Truth or the falsity of one's feeling of 'I' from time to time.

Over all these four elements shines the Light of pure Consciousness, which in the individual is called Atman, and in the total universe is called Param – (or universal) Atman, both of which are of the same substance, Eternal and Perfect. It is only ignorance of the existence and the nature of that Consciousness that keeps us from Self-realization, which becomes impossible if the Ahankar is false, and the Buddhi is weak and unable to distinguish between what can truly be called 'oneSelf' and all the rest.

The natural function of the Buddhi is to be attentive to, and interpret for us the Will of the Atman. On the Causal level, these four elements being all under one and the same Will, they are all experienced as One, the inner organ or *Antahkarana*, which is conscious of 'One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of us all, who is above all and through all and in you all.'

The recent practice recommended by the Shankaracharya is a way to train the Buddhi to perform its proper function. It could clear away the 'cloud of unknowing' and untruth which obscures the windows of this inner organ.

On the subtle level the four elements appear to be in action separately, and the Buddhi is the only one of the four which can be directly brought under our control. In one ancient description it is 'the bird which possesses great discrimination and twitters beautiful songs'. The finest spiritual literature of all times and all countries are these 'beautiful songs'; but unfortunately in this material age and on the mass media it mostly twitters very ugly songs indeed. However, in the happy hearts of many individuals it is still faintly singing the same beautiful song.

It must be realised that the above account is only on the level of our present understanding. We have much to learn about the nature of Buddhi, but unless we can break up the unholy alliance between the twittering Buddhi and the false Ahankar we shan't make good progress.

During the coming weeks it would be valuable to take the major psychological terms – awakening, dream formation, creativity, etc. – and consider them with examples in relation to the above sketch plan.

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