

27 September 1971

## READING 1

Last Autumn we were told that ‘the object of meditation is Param-Atman,<sup>†</sup> the ultimate Truth, the absolute Truth and the one and only Truth that has permanent (and therefore ‘real’) existence.’ The idea underlying Self-realization is that by stripping away the false, the partial, and the inessential, we can come to that Source of Truth within ourselves which is permanent and inexhaustible.

Now, a year later, we should, I think, gather ourselves together at the start of another ‘Academic year’ and determine whether we are indeed proceeding in that direction and not misleading ourselves and other people. Note that the further we get, the simpler and more natural appears the issue.

What do we now know for sure about this objective? First, we have learnt how careful we must be about the use of words. Param-Atman seems to be the word for us to use at present, since other words used in the past are like a currency that has become devalued – words like ‘God’ and ‘Self’, I mean.

The word ‘Param-Atman’ can have no wrong associations, whereas the word ‘consciousness’ is equivocal. *Pure Consciousness* must first be distinguished from reflected, applied, or qualified ‘consciousness’, a vital distinction that all current Western psychological literature fails to make. Every human being is born with an atom of Pure Consciousness called the Atman. When the Atman (being no longer limited by the individual nature) becomes Universal, it merges with the Param-Atman ‘which is the Atman of the whole Universe, living and non-living, conceivable and inconceivable.’

To set one’s sights on this has several advantages, as you will soon discover when you practise it. First, it is a way of acquiring in diversity, Unity; secondly, it becomes a way of distinguishing the useful from the useless in our own thinking; and thirdly, it can lift us above all petty limitations, personal prejudices, self-will and selfishness, separation from other people, and the other snags which everyone meets on the Way.

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Next, we are assuming that everyone to whom this is addressed has had a few ‘peak experiences’, moments of Self-remembering, and so on. For those who are lucky enough to get them, these

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**†Stop Press: Note on Param-Atman**

Those who, like myself, prefer to refer to this ‘Absolute’ conception by a symbol which implies no qualification whatsoever, can find a label ready to hand in the current September number of the *Scientific American* which was delivered to my door only this morning. The whole of this number is devoted to energy on different scales; and the second article, ‘Energy in the Universe’, begins surprisingly with a quotation from a poem by William Blake (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1790):

‘Energy is Eternal Delight’. One need not be a poet or a mystic to find Blake’s definition of energy more satisfying than the definitions given in text books on physics... the concept of energy has proved more valid and durable than the definitions in which it has been (at different times) embodied.

We can therefore use the symbol ‘E’ for Param-Atman, as in the two fundamental equations of this century – Einstein’s and Max Planck’s. Try it, and let E stand for three ideas – Energy, Eternity, Delight.

experiences are like life-giving showers in the desert of life. They are what make this physical life in the world worthwhile. It is natural then, *first* to want more of them and want them to last longer; *secondly*, to make a firm determination to get to the Source of them (which we are calling the Param-Atman); and *thirdly*, to allow them to govern our lives in terms of permanent happiness and goodwill in the face of changing conditions. This three-phase aim then, we set before us; and we measure our success by our progress toward it.

I propose that we shall discuss what we have recently learnt, by instruction and by direct experience, about these three phases:

### **Phase 1: More about the nature of the 'good impulses'**

These can be called 'mystical' if we are careful to define the word, of which the OED gives a very good definition: 'Concerned with direct communion of the Soul with God; seeking absorption into God or the infinite; believing in the spiritual apprehension of truths intellectually incomprehensible; spiritually symbolic, esoteric, mysterious, awe-inspiring. A 'mystic' is one who holds these views.' They would be 'mysterious' only to one who does not experience them. With this definition in mind (substituting if we like, Truth or Param-Atman for the word 'God'), let us turn to what the poet W. H. Auden wrote in his introduction to the recent paperback of Shakespeare's sonnets:

I think that the *primary* experience... out of which the Sonnets spring was a mystical one. All experiences which may be called mystical [see our definition above] have certain characteristics in common.

1. The experience is 'given.' That is to say, it cannot be induced or prolonged by an effort of will, though the openness of any individual to receive it is partly determined by his age, his psychophysical make-up, and his cultural milieu.
2. Whatever the contents of the experience, the subject is absolutely convinced that it is a revelation of reality. When it is over, he does not say, as one says when one wakes from a dream: 'Now I am awake and conscious again of the real world.' He says rather: 'For a while the veil was lifted and a reality revealed which in my normal state is hidden from me.'
3. With whatever the vision is concerned, things, human beings, or God, they are experienced as numinous, clothed in glory, charged with an intense 'being-thereness.'
4. Confronted by the vision, the attention of the subject in awe, joy, dread, is absolutely absorbed in contemplation and, while the vision lasts, his self, its desires and needs, are completely forgotten.

(Signet Classics, 1964, p.29, New American Library of World Literature, N.Y.)

Ordinary people cannot, I suppose, expect to have experiences so 'clothed in glory' as those which creative artists and mystics have earned by their life-long devotion. But all who are trained in some systematic daily effort like meditation, taste from time to time *something* of those four characteristics.

Their enumeration here is simply a reminder that all our little waves of progress start with this, '*the good impulse*' – the first step on the Ladder of Self-realization. One makes a private store in one's memory of our own and those recorded by other people, and keeps reminding oneself of them. But probably the less they are *talked about* or analysed out loud the better.

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