

8 May 1972

READING 8

PART 1

At this point we should pull ourselves together (as indeed we ought always to do when we embark on a new topic), and ask ourselves: ‘Why was it introduced? Why are we talking about it?’

You may recall that the original insight (mentioned at the beginning of Reading 7) arose from once more asking the question ‘Who am I?’ And that the answer came very clearly: ‘The True Self or Atman, alone can be called ‘I’ (the only permanent reality), and ‘Body, Personality, Essence, and Soul are simply four servants of mine, each of whom is magnificently equipped for his own proper job, *all four* being essential for our journey through this life.’

It was therefore decided to use that old ‘System’ description, at the beginning of this term, because it could answer many questions we have all been asking – chiefly in connection with difficulties arising from time to time in meditation. Unfortunately my own personality got too interested and rode its usual hobby-horse, so that the original impulse and its purpose were partly forgotten! So now we must ask, ‘Is this being useful for Self-realization?’ Does it make us realise that all good things come from acquiring the habit of constant recall of the presence of the Param-Atman (Universal Self) in our own soul; and to achieve that we have to *give up everything else* for short periods during every day.

Our attitude can be as expressed in those three short parables:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hid in a field; when a man finds it he hides it, and for joy of it, he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. [Here the ‘field’ is the soul].

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he has found a pearl of great price, goes and sells all that he has and buys that pearl.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea gathering fish of every kind; and when it was full, they pulled it ashore and sat down, collecting the good into baskets and throwing the worthless away. [This illustrates the discriminative function that we must learn to practise.]

(Matthew 13: vv. 44–48)

[Pause: ‘How shall we at this group use this piece of knowledge in that way?’]

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PART 2

At your lively discussions last week there were many good questions, and some were about whether the ‘four servants’ can be related to the three levels – physical, subtle and causal. Yes, they *can* be; but only through your own self-observation and experience, and not through mere associative thinking and talking. For all these four servants have a role to play on each of the three levels, but their mutual relations and relative importance change with the level. At death two of them become expendable.

One way to see them is to study some example. Five of us have had the great advantage of seeing them operated by a fully Realized man. The Shankaracharya clearly has all four at his

command and uses them with the appropriate emphasis for every occasion. Thus he pays careful attention to his *body*, and even when he is giving a private audience, he is always dressed in his full robes sitting on his golden throne; every step, every movement or posture is just right; he knows exactly how he places his sandals; who is present in the room, and is the first to notice details like the position of our tape recorder and microphone. Even when walking over slippery rocks or in a small boat crossing the turbulent Ganges, his body is always in balance.

His *personality* he uses for keeping close connection with his audience answering questions according to their experience, solving problems, telling amusing stories through a loudspeaker to the multitudes, etc.

Then he is always seeing the *essence* of a question, of the questioner, or the emotional content of a situation, as when directing a drama or arranging a concert. But he never forgets that he is the mouthpiece, the physical manifestation of the Param-Atman in his own *Soul* and in the world at large... If anyone has a better example, use it.

Another way is to refer the four servants to the space-time scale we introduced last term. We won't go into details again yet, but it's worth remembering that the essence doesn't think beyond *today* because it knows that tomorrow is always becoming yesterday! Animals, too, are geared to the 24-hour rhythm and (as Walt Whitman wrote) are thereby spared much of the misery the human personality makes for itself. Essence seems to ask only for this sort of thing:

Ah, fill the cup: what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our feet;
Unborn tomorrow and dead yesterday,
Why fret about them if today be sweet?

And, after all, 'which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to your stature?'

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PART 3

There is one very familiar story that can best be understood in terms of personality, essence and soul, and sheds much light on these if one finds the characters in oneself. I'll repeat it with the question that led to it – which I took with me from a Londoner:

Miss Jennifer MacGeorge: When we heard about the two categories of people, the first simply wanting to experience, and the second wanting to *know*... I don't understand the distinction... I want to experience very much, but I am also desperately aware of ignorance and want knowledge too.

S. [who, we were told, greatly appreciated the question] Of course there are these two categories – only exceptional cases work through one way only, but most people need both. These two ways should be complementary to each other. There are those who only like to know, but would not put the knowledge into practice; and for such people the world is nothing more than talk; these are poor creatures. Then there are those who only like to experience, and care nothing for knowledge; but they are derailed when they meet with forceful opposition or bad company; their faith is shaken, and the practice lost. Thus a happy combination of the two is most health-giving, because one can taste the bliss of Being, and also stay strong against false ideas and keep on the Way.

There was an intellectual [Personality] who was interested in listening to a saintly man [one who 'sees with the eye of the Soul'] but never bothered to practise his instructions. His trained parrot [Essence] once asked him about where he went every day. The intellectual said that he liked to know about God and Liberation, etc., and so he went every day to listen to a wise teacher. The parrot requested him to ask the wise man on his behalf, 'How can I be liberated?' But the intellectual kept forgetting to ask, until one day the importunity of the parrot forced him to put the question. On hearing it, the saint at once fell down as if unconscious. His people were very angry with the man for having put so awkward a question and drove him away. On getting home, the man explained exactly what had happened and apologised for his failure to get an answer. But the parrot said, 'That is enough for me!' Next morning the parrot was found lying motionless in his cage. His master took him to be dead and opened the cage to remove him. The parrot immediately flew up to the branch of a tree and said: 'I got the Saint's message and now I am free. It would be good for you if you also acted on the instructions given.'

(Record, 3 November 1967)

It is a very strange sensation when (one fine morning) one wakes up and sees one's personality as the 'intellectual' from the point of view of the liberated parrot in the tree!

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