

21 February 1972

### READING 3

#### A NEW VIEW OF THE MESOCOSMOS

At several of last week's groups (some held by candlelight!) there were encouraging signs that some of us are beginning to get accustomed to a new way of picturing the old doctrine of Cosmoses. There's still a long way to go; but last week we had the benefit of a new mass of data which is what we need to envisage the leap in scale from one cosmos to the next.

#### PART 1

Our small earth – to us the most important member of the Mesocosmos or planetary world – was the subject of an impressive television broadcast last Wednesday. It was written by Nigel Calder on the basis of his book *Restless Earth* (a BBC publication) which was sold out at general bookshops a couple of days after the day of its publication.

Nothing has hitherto been more reassuring to humanity than the idea of a solid and unchanging earth under its feet. To learn that its crust consists of a few large plates (some carrying whole continents which are continuously moving into or away from one another) is giving rise to a rewriting of the whole of human history. To take just one instance: the Mediterranean and its surrounding countries – which have been the cradle of Western civilisation – lies at the 'plate boundary' between Africa and Europe which have been colliding with each other so that the sea is disappearing, and fresh mountain ranges thrown up to add to the long belt stretching from the Pyrenees to the Caucasus, which have already been formed by this same movement. In the process there are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, islands have been blown up and new ones formed.

Space does not allow us here to review the evidence and its implications – you'll have to read the book. But if, as now seems certain, this is a much truer picture of physical life on this planet than we used to have, then there is no place any longer for picturesque ideas like 'wrathful acts of God'. Only a proper understanding of cosmoses could give any encouragement to the ideas we have of Self-realization and the concept of Param-Atman. If, however, one learns 'to pray to the All-knowing Param-Atman in solitude with a settled mind' will 'an answer be sure to come forth'. Then the solution of this dilemma between subtle and physical is found to be a very simple one, which it is the job of each of us to discover.

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Nigel Calder in the preface to his book recommends a new look at the earth's time-scale and suggests a rather amusing analogy that would help us with one aspect of the Mesocosmos (see last week's diagram). The age of the earth has been estimated at 4600 million years, her time-unit being a 'megacentury' (100 million years) which is the time she takes to engineer or dismantle a major ocean basin.

We can depict Mother Earth as a lady of 46. The first 7 of her 'years' are wholly lost to the biographer, but the deeds of her later childhood are to be seen in old rocks in Greenland and South Africa. Like the human memory, the surface of our planet distorts the record, emphasising more recent events and letting the rest pass into vagueness...

Most of what we recognise on earth, including all substantial animal life, is the product of the past six 'years' of the lady's life. She flowered, literally in her middle age. Her continents were quite bare of life until she was getting on for 42, and flowering plants did not appear until she was 45 – just one 'year' ago. At that time the great reptiles, including dinosaurs were her pets and the break-up of her last super-continent was in progress.

The dinosaurs passed away eight 'months' ago and the upstart mammals replaced them. In the middle of last 'week', in Africa, some man-like apes turned into ape-like men and at the 'weekend' mother earth began shivering with the latest series of ice-ages. just over four 'hours' have elapsed since a new species calling itself *Homo sapiens* started chasing the other animals and in the last 'hour' it has invented agriculture and settled down. A 'quarter of an hour' ago, Moses led his people to safety across a crack in the earth's shell, and about five 'minutes' later Jesus was preaching on a hill farther along the fault line. Just one 'minute' has passed, out of mother earth's 46 'years', since man began his industrial revolution, three *human* life-times ago. During that time he has multiplied his numbers and his skills prodigiously and ransacked the planet for metal and fuel.

To which picture I would add, as a doctor, that the dear lady, being 46 and approaching her 'change of life', she is temporarily in a more than usually restless and disturbed state before settling into the serenity of her later middle age! Perhaps, too, man, the latest of her 'pets' is more of a trouble to her than those dinosaurs. As she's unlikely to have any more babies, she seems to be stuck with little Luna.

(After some discussion)

In case you don't realise in what the dilemma for many people consists – 'materialism' versus 'religion' – the first few sentences of the above book give an example (p.15):

The great Lisbon earthquake of 1755 shook Christendom morally almost as much as it shook the ground of Portugal, not least because devout Lisboners were in church at the time, celebrating All Saints' Day. The stonework fell on them; of the survivors, many fled to the waterside only to be drowned in great waves that raced in from the Atlantic. The event provoked impassioned preaching on the punishment of sinners and also anxious discussion of 'the problem of evil' by philosophers and theologians. Later generations adopted more scientific attitudes to earthquakes and fewer people were inclined to regard them as wrathful acts of God. Nevertheless, the mechanism of the Lisbon earthquake has become clear only in the past few years.

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## PART 2

Within the next 50 years it is calculated that the whole of the fine city of San Francisco with its  $\frac{3}{4}$  million inhabitants will slide under the sea unless something can be done to the San Diego rift, so the matter is not all that remote.

Since human lives are so cheap, it will comfort you perhaps to hear another talk by the Shankaracharya to the public at the January festival. Though the personal fear of death doesn't appear to affect one much till one gets past the 'three-score years and ten' mark, yet we all have ageing relatives or friends who are faced with illness or accident, for whom the fear may have become acute.

## The Fear of Death

The previous speaker spoke about the fear of death, which haunts the mind of even the bravest of people.

His Holiness picked up the same theme. He said that everybody fears death – whether great or small, learned or ignorant. But there is no such thing as death. The so-called ‘death’ is nothing but a natural corollary of the phenomenon of birth. The only way to avoid death is to avoid being born. It is not possible to be born and not to die.

Actually the individual Self, living in the body, is immortal. It gives up an old body in order to put on a new body, just as we give up our old clothes and put on new ones. If we are happy to discard an old garment and put on a new one, there is no reason to be unhappy when the Atman discards an old body and adopts a new one.

An Indian went to Africa. When his money was finished there, he went to a money-lender to ask for a loan. Just then, there was a death in an Indian family living in that neighbourhood and the people of that family were weeping. The money-lender asked the Indian why his countrymen living in that house were weeping. He replied that it was a custom in his country to weep when there is a death in the family. The money-lender asked again, ‘And what do you do when there is a birth in the family?’

The Indian said, ‘Then we rejoice.’

The money-lender said, ‘Then, if you are the sort of person who rejoices when receiving a thing but weeps when you have to return it, I certainly won’t lend *you* any money.’

A person who dies has never written back to say what happened to him after death. Therefore, the only course open to us is to take authority from our holy Scriptures on subjects relating to death and thereafter. We can find a lot of information there on these subjects. The following teachings from *Shrimad Bhagavatam* tell us how to deal with death:

1. Forget the past. Do not fear the future too. Devote the *present* to the Bhakti of the Param-Atman. A devotee of the Param-Atman never perishes.
2. For two half-hours a day, give up all duties and obligations; surrender yourself completely to the single care and protection of the Param-Atman. He will save you from all evil consequences, and therein would lie the end of all your worries.
3. One who sees Param-Atman in everybody and everything, and sees everybody and everything in Param-Atman, Param-Atman never becomes obscure to him and he never becomes obscure to Param-Atman.

We fear death because, under the influence of Maya, we have forgotten ourSelves. And it is this forgetting of the Divine Self which makes for us all the troubles we get. It is not a God who is the maker of our troubles.

(Synopsis of a talk; Record, 13 January 1972)

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