

1 May 1972

## READING 7

During the Easter holidays, having more time for peace and quiet, one came back to that perennial question, 'Who am I?' One recalled that our western System described each individual as consisting of four different entities: *Body, Personality, Essence and Soul*. But, since it had lost the meditation, it left out the most important point: namely, that *none of these is mySelf*. The True Self, or Atman, alone can be called 'I' – the only permanent reality – and these four entities are simply four servants of mine. So in the '1st Line of Work' – work for oneself – each person must concentrate on attaining Yoga or Union with this true Self by a process of giving up 'what is *not I*'.

But in the '2nd Line of Work' – work with and for other people – we need to know more about these four servants, because people differ greatly in the relations between them. Remember, that all we know of *other* people is their physical body and their personality; just as, in ordinary life, we regard ourselves as consisting only of those two: my 'body' and my 'mind'.

These four servants – to understand them we have to translate other people's insights into our own experience. The word for 'physical body' and the word for 'Essence' used by the Shankaracharya, agree with our System. I try to use the word 'Soul' exactly as he uses his word 'Antahkarana or inner organ': 'In the Antahkarana of each person there lives the Universal along with the Individual Self for the purpose of guidance. Therefore we hear a guiding voice from time to time when we are in difficulties.'

But I do not find in the East the exact equivalent of our word 'Personality', nor the beautiful precision of Mr. Ouspensky's description of the relations between body, essence and personality. I try to see them as he did – in relation to Time and Place. *Events* take place only on the physical plane – once done no word or deed can be undone. It is already past but exists for ever. 'Every idle word shall be remembered in the day of judgement'. Any suffering that it brings about is a debt that has to be paid in full. 'Dismiss our debts inasmuch as we dismiss the debts that others owe to us' – turn negative emotions into positive – 'Love your enemies'. The idea of 'karma' also means not to incur unnecessary debts – to remember oneSelf *before* one says things or does things. 'It doesn't matter so much if we go wrong once; what is important is not to make a habit of going wrong'.

So physical events are past; the physical sciences study only the *past* of a man, of the earth or of the universe. On the other hand, personality revolves round a 'past' which cannot be undone or a future which is unpredictable. But essence, like a young child, is for Here and Now. It takes only what is there this moment. If it is cold or hungry or lonely it yells until the needs of the moment are satisfied. Old Walt Whitman often spoke up for essence:

A child said, 'What is the grass?' fetching it to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

Or again:

I think I could turn again and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained.

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,

They do not lie awake and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

...

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

While essence, then, is for Here and Now, soul is *for ever*. That is all I know; don't let us talk about them until we have experienced them. I beg you not to let *personality* talk about love or sex, or poetry or art or Essence or Soul – for of none of these does it know anything at first-hand. It just spoils the experience of the other three servants. Among so-called 'primitive people', essence is much more in evidence; but in more 'sophisticated societies', personality is all-powerful. So it is *personality* only that we dare talk about at groups.

It must be remembered all through that each of these four servants is magnificently equipped to do his proper job, and all four are essential for our journey through life. But like all servants (even the celebrated Jeeves or Bunter!) they have picked up certain foibles, bad habits and fixed attitudes. While it is often easy to see these in other people's personalities, we need to work with other people in order to see the limitations of our own.

It happens that two stories received only last week from the Shankaracharya beautifully describe both the liabilities and the assets of personality. Personality is needed to get us *started*, because it is through it that we learn from other people what is going on in the world. It must introduce us to the meditation, for instance; he illustrates this by retelling an old story in a new way:

### **How good associations sometimes work**

A king once wanted to see a real Mahatma; so he sent out his men to find one. They tried for a month but failed, so they devised a trick to save themselves further trouble. They asked one of the servants to impersonate a real Mahatma, so he dressed himself up and sat under a tree observing complete silence.

Then they informed the king that a very great Mahatma was staying under a tree outside the town, and that he neither spoke nor slept nor ate anything. The king went to him, bowed down at his feet and offered baskets of fruit and flowers. Without speaking, the false Mahatma waved to him to sit down; the king sat for a while before humbly taking his leave.

After the king had gone, his men told the servant to put on his usual clothes and get back to his job. But he said:

'When even a false Mahatma can make a king bow down at his feet, how much respect would a real Mahatma command! Now I can see the Light of wisdom. I shall renounce the world and try to become a real Mahatma.'

(Record, 13 April, 1972)

We only hear about the Work or the Meditation or the Turning from other people through personality; personality it is that starts us meditating for various reasons of its own; but once we get results personality has to learn first of all to be silent, and then to get rid of its false values and play a humble part.

[Pause for discussion]

Mr. Ouspensky used to say ‘essence remembers, personality forgets.’ On the 17th April, the Shankaracharya gave a particularly interesting talk at his ashram. He began by saying that the scriptures describe the Truth in many different ways.

The Brahma Sutra alone has ten entirely different commentaries explaining what is Param-Atman (Universal Self) and what is not. The scriptures are a complete repository of all ideas including all shades of opinion and leaving out nothing. Thus one feels lost in a jungle of diverse opinions and wonders what to do. The solution of course is to follow the *example* of great men and, like them, obtain Realization for oneself.

But the greedy personality grabs one idea, then forgets it and grabs another – getting nowhere:

A monkey sat on the roof of a railway carriage, and when a passenger put his head out of a window, the monkey quietly descended, pinched his cap and climbed back on to the roof. The bystanders advised the passenger to give the monkey something to eat, in order to get his cap back. When he passed up a banana, the monkey held the banana in one hand, but hung on to the cap with the other. When offered a second banana, the monkey took it but dropped the cap on to the railway line where it was irretrievable!

S. (comments) We are all temperamentally greedy like the monkey and there are innumerable temptations in the world to attract our greed. The force of these attractions is irresistible, and we continue to fall victim to them all the time. These forces are desires, sex, anger, attachment, greed, vanity, jealousy, which keep beguiling us and we find it difficult to escape. The only way out is renunciation. It looks difficult, but it comes with practice; just practise transferring your love of these attractions to the Param-Atman.

This is the way to conquer personality, reducing it to its true status.

[Pause for discussion]

At the beginning of this paper, reference was made to the principle of the Three Lines of Work, which are: work for oneself, work for other people, and work for the School as a whole. We must all realise that personality can steal from us whatever we may gain by all our work on those three lines. Our personality gets in the way of *our own* Self-realization; each *group* quite quickly gets a personality of its own and then it has to be dissolved; but every *School* or organization also runs a similar risk.

What one can call a ‘Colet personality’ annoys some of our more independent spirits! Mr. Ouspensky warned us about that, and was fond of describing what took place in the Theosophical Society in his day. It became divided into four ‘castes’. The first were the people who actually knew Annie Besant; the second were the people who knew the ones that knew Mrs. Besant; the third were the people who knew someone who knew the people that knew Mrs. Besant. The fourth caste – the untouchables – were the people who didn’t know *anybody!* God save us.

As with any organisation, so on a national and a world scale humanity goes through cycles. Up to the peak of any civilisation essence, soul and self-realization are in greater evidence, but as

personalities become dominant, so there is discord and decline. Let us hope that today enough people are becoming dissatisfied with the conflicts set up by the dominance of personality so that mankind will return again to truer values. The solid personalities of the 'Establishment' must understand that many young people today are longing for this and practising a sort of Whitmanesque way of life; but the young must realise that neither idleness nor needless violence will bring them what they want. It's a subtle, not a bloody, revolution that will bring it about.

Our own practical work – meditation and the programme, turning, 'movements', looking after Colet House and the welfare of our friends – all these are designed to bring about better relations between the servants, body, personality and essence. But for the good of our souls let us remember the Owner of it all!

**NOTE.** The 'better relations' are in practice brought about by seeing the four servants in terms of the Gunas. Personality and body are wholly dominated in the ordinary way by Rajas and Tamas. Essence is thirsty for more Sattva and responds at once to it. Soul is only experienced at moments when the whole organism is saturated with Sattva.

\* \* \*