

29 October 1973

READING 5

DIFFERENT LEVELS OF 'MYSELF'

PART 1

An important part of our Western System is that which starts with the question 'Who am I?', and discusses the answer from the point of view of 5 different levels – Body, Personality, Essence, Soul and Permanent 'I'. At a meeting way back in December, 1930, Mr. Ouspensky outlined this scheme and mentioned that it is interesting to connect it with the Eastern allegory of carriage, horse, driver and Master. People asked some questions about Essence, and he said that we must remember all that we have heard about it:

Essence is what each of us is born with – one's capacities and incapacities. It is connected with 'type' and also with the physical body, because part of essence is the 'physical constitution' which makes each person different from any other [as shown, for instance, by one's finger prints].

From the point of view of Self-development, all we have to work with at the beginning is personality – what we learn from experience of the world and from other people. Personality is our means of verbal communication. Man in his ordinary state (that is his personality) consists of a multiplicity of I's which are changing all the time. Some of these I's are connected with the physical body and some with the essence.

In later talks he reminded us that the word Personality comes from the Latin word *Persona*, meaning the mask that the actor (in Greek and Roman drama) wore in different plays, or different roles in the same play. Concealing our true nature, Essence, we use a series of masks which we present to the world – one for the home circle, one for business, one for social occasions, etc. Also one (a 'Work' personality) which we develop at our meetings! Using these masks, we lose our individuality in trying to look all alike, dressing according to the current fashion, and speaking the current clichés. When some of us got to know him well, he was fond of demonstrating the difference between the two halves of the body (right and left), one of which is the servant of personality and the other of essence.

When we tried to describe this part of our Teaching to the Shankaracharya, we found that there are no exactly equivalent words in Sanskrit or Hindi. But with the general description he agreed, particularly with the idea of the actor's mask, and the changing ego which suppresses our true nature so that we forget who we really are. Both essence and personality are on the subtle, soul on the causal, level.

In Eastern literature, as well as in classical European philosophies (such as Plato), the words are all mixed up and translators use those words essence, soul and Spirit indiscriminately. Yet many famous stories, such as those in the Gospels, in the *Mathnawi*, and in the Shankaracharya's Tradition, bring the idea to life if we really understand the difference between the different levels precisely. For example, consider this one (which he told at our last meeting) in terms of essence and personality:

S. To realize what we really are we have to do away with those limitations based on illusion, and to illustrate this he told a story about the lion cub:

Once in the forest, the lioness who had several cubs went off to search for food, and while she was away one of the cubs strayed and got into the middle of a flock of sheep. The cub followed the sheep, and the shepherd, seeing the cub with the sheep, kept him. The cub behaved like the sheep because of the company of the sheep. The shepherd thought that if he remained in this forest, then one day the lioness will roar, and the cub, hearing the roar would remember it was a lion and would attack the sheep. So he took the flock with the cub to another forest where he believed there were no lions.

One day, a lion *did* roar in this other forest, and all the sheep ran away, and the cub also tried to run away. The lion, (in lion language!) asked the cub to stop, and said: 'Why are you afraid of me? There is no need – you are not a sheep, you are a lion like me. If you are not sure I can show you.' So he took him to a pond and the little lion saw in the reflection that he had the same face and same characteristics as the one who roared. Then the lion asked him to roar with him, so he learnt how to roar, and the whole personality and individuality of this little lion was completely changed and he started roaring like a lion.

All our efforts in the world are learning the language of the world which is like the language of the sheep, and the worldly behaviour which is the behaviour of the sheep. By good company – the company of Self-realizing people – we learn to give up the language of the world and take to the language of the Spirit. Once we have learnt and have seen how people who are nearer the Absolute conduct their lives, we also can be like this lion cub and start behaving like proper lions, because we are all proper lions by nature.

Meditation. This is the quickest and most universal way of discovering and developing our essence. We all come to meditation through personality – through contact with friends or descriptions in the mass media – and it is personality which starts meditating.

The Initiation ceremony is designed to touch something deeper, for the essence is listening in; and immediately we start meditating the essence begins to light up, for this is the kind of food for which it is hungry. Success in the meditation depends on leaving behind as quickly as possible the body and the personality, so that essence takes over and leads our attention to the Soul and the Self. At the next Meditation meeting we hope to tell one or two of the Shankaracharya's stories which illustrate the process.

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PART 2. THE CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

All this remained far removed from practical life and from modern scientific knowledge until the present decade. The study at different clinics of people with injury or disease of one or other hemisphere of the brain, showed that the left hemisphere (which contains in its front half a network of centres monitoring all forms of verbal communication) tends to become dominant over the other which cannot communicate by language.

At the California Institute of Technology, Roger Sperry and his associates carried out an operation designed to relieve intractable epilepsy, at which they divided the connections between the right and left sides. Though it failed in its object, the result of the operation surprised everybody, for the subjects appeared superficially quite normal; but careful tests revealed that it was as if 'each consisted of two people perceiving the world in two different ways'.

The dominant (left) hemisphere is concerned with the labelling and card-indexing of impressions from the external world according to names, labels and definitions, i.e., intellectually; while the right hemisphere (which is passive), has functions which are not so easily tested but which seem to be concerned with 'insight' and the inner life ('autonomic'), and is registering the same world in a more aesthetic, instinctive and, sometimes, emotional way. At present there is only a mass of unrelated observations directed towards trying to discover the real function of the passive half and the true relation between the two, which should be functioning reciprocally in normal individuals all the time. The consensus of opinion now seems to be that the degree of dominance of each half over the rest of the body (e.g., right-handedness, etc.), varies from person to person because the human machine provides for all possibilities; so there will be different relations between the two sides.

We have long known that in some people there is a perpetual conflict between what we call the personality (dominant) and the essence (latent); whereas in others the two work more or less harmoniously; and that where the dominance is especially marked (as in professional talkers and other intellectuals) the passive hemisphere becomes completely submerged, remaining at a childish level. All our systems of 'intelligence testing' (IQ), being devised by intellectuals, are directed to the personality, so that the meaning of 'intelligence' has become far too limited, with sad results in grading children at school or selecting people for jobs.

Those who express interest in the technical aspects of this newer evidence, can hear more about it. But from our point of view of Self-discovery it is important only to achieve greater harmony between the personality and the essence, both of which are indispensable.

This conception sheds a good deal of light on the new formulation of the Ladder as an aid to meditation. As was pointed out in last week's paper, Step 4 shows itself in the 'peak experiences' when the energy of Sattva accumulates and brings the two sides into harmony.

Concentrating this week on the single function of *speech* as the main factor in preventing this harmony, I think you will find the following quotation valuable if you manage to put it into practice and compare notes about it at your meetings :

The anthropologist, Carlos Castaneda, is talking to his teacher (an Indian shaman in Northern Mexico):

'For years I have truly tried to live in accordance with your teaching,' I said.

'Obviously I have not done well. How can I do better now?'

'You think and talk too much; you must stop talking to yourself.'

'What do you mean?'

'...What do you do when you are alone?'

'I talk to myself.'

'What do you talk about?'

'I don't know. Anything, I suppose.'

'I will tell you what we talk to ourselves about. We talk about our world. In fact, we maintain that (imaginary) world with our internal talk.'

'How do we do that?'

'We renew it, we kindle it to life, we uphold it with our internal talk... Thus we repeat the same choices over and over again until the day we die, because we keep on repeating the same internal talk...'

‘How can I stop talking to myself?’

‘First of all you must use your ears to take some of the burden from your eyes... We talk to others and to ourselves mainly about what we see... Be aware of that and listen to the sounds of the world.’

(*A Separate Reality*, Carlos Castaneda, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1971)

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We are frequently told that we cannot be talking and listening too. Especially we cannot hear ‘the Voice of the Silence, the soundless sound’ of the Self unless we stop thinking and talking so much. The 17th century mystic, Jacob Boehme, has the same idea in his *Dialogues between a Disciple and his Master*:

If thou canst, my son, for a while but cease from all thy thinking and willing, then thou shalt hear the unspeakable words of God.

The ‘mystical’ truths like this now seem to have a rational basis!

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