READING 6

PART 1

The rather complicated diagram you had last week was meant to raise questions about the richness of human nature, which contains all possibilities for good and bad alike. It works best if you recall it as a *general* picture to which questions and first-hand experiences may be referred. The questions we need to ask are these:

1. In what sense can we accept that only the Atman is real, and the sensory world (backed up by habitual thought processes) is illusion?

2. How can we exchange the false idea that Self-realization refers to the familiar 'self' that we know, for the truth that it means the Atman realizing its own Nature, which brings about the unaccountable happiness we sometimes feel?

3. What is the meaning of the statement that, 'for the individual to merge with the Universal, there must be nothing in-between?

The changed atmosphere that followed the story of *The Snow Queen* in more than one group last week, encourages me to give you this short synopsis of another famous one by the same author as an answer to the above questions:

> A mother duck had much trouble sitting for ages on her last egg – so big and so slow to hatch. Everyone was upset when there emerged from it a big and ungainly duckling with a strange grey colour, so it was pecked and battered and made a fool of. At last it managed to fly on to the moor where the wild ducks said, 'You are remarkably ugly, but that is all the same to us, so long as you don't marry into our family.'

> And, once, in the autumn sunset, there came over the moor a whole flock of great handsome white birds, so that the duckling felt that he had never seen anything so beautiful. They uttered a very peculiar cry as they spread their white wings and flew from that cold region towards warmer lands and open lakes; the ugly duckling felt quite queer as he watched them. Though he had to survive through all that cold winter with little to eat, eventually the sun began to shine warmly again and the larks were singing.

> Then all at once the duckling flapped his wings, which bore him strongly to a large garden where the apple trees were in bloom and the lilacs hung their long branches down to the winding canals. There, right in front of him, came three big white swans which filled the duckling with a feeling of longing.

> 'I will fly down and swim to those royal birds', he thought, 'and they will kill me! But better to be killed by them than to be pecked by ducks and fowls, and kicked around by the poultry girl!'

> As he swam towards the swans he said, 'Only kill me,' and bent his head down to the water awaiting death. But what did he see, in the clear reflection? His own image, though now he was no longer that clumsy, dark, grey bird; he was himself a swan! 'It matters little to be born in a duck-yard, when one comes from a swan's egg!' ... The children came and threw bread and cake on the water crying, 'The new one is the most beautiful of all.' Feeling shy and very happy (but not at all proud), he ruffled his feathers and lifted his slender neck, and from his heart he cried joyfully, 'Of so much happiness did I never dream when I was the ugly duckling!'

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That is Self-realization – the Atman seeing its own true reflection in the clear water, the individual 'coming out of all that he is not'.

> [**Note:** This idea seems to have come from Hans Andersen's own life story. At the age of eleven he was thrown back on his own resources by the early death of his father, a village cobbler. When only fourteen and without any education, he got to Copenhagen hoping to train as a dancer or an opera singer. He was too ungainly for dancing, and his voice was not good enough for opera; but his writing ability was noticed by a director of the theatre, who got him educated and took him into his own home. It was not, however, until he was thirty – after trying different kinds of writing, without success – that his first fairy tales, which he had considered unimportant, appeared in print and won him instant fame.]

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PART 2

All this has a bearing on our own outlook and the way we have to go to work. This is how His Holiness began a talk at his Ashram, 11 June, 1971:

> S. There is something in all of us which is unique or outstanding. Thus, some are intelligent, some are affectionate, some are strong, some are learned, some poor but honest, while some are rich. Each should try to serve the Param-Atman with that attribute chiefly in which he or she excels. This is the path of least resistance; it is sure to work, as it has always worked in the past...

That is a very practical meaning also to the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14–30).

In conclusion, and if we ask why our minds are carrying so much useless luggage that we seldom remember Who we are, the answer lies here:

> S. This is because of untrained Manas, which is always ready to fall for coarser objects, mostly related to the temporary, physical world. Manas considers them most important, and so likes to dwell on such activities. Certainly the worldly physical things have some importance in life and need to be attended to; but work on Self-realization also has important features which demand one's attention. Thus the pull of the world and the pull of the Work create conflicts; one wonders what one must put first.
>
> Here we are in the domain of Reason (Buddhi). Reason is free to decide what is more useful to the Atman, and this can only come about through personal experience. If one observes one's activities, one will soon find which will give more and lasting goodness...
>
> Manas goes for pleasure; Buddhi stands for good; and good is important in comparison with pleasure. Follow the Buddhi, and just practise good work again and again. Make sure what is important; keep doing this, and you would not need anyone else to tell you what you ought to do.

<div align="right">(Record, 9 February 1971)</div>

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> [**Note:** Our charioteer – the Buddhi – is highly trained and knows his job perfectly well, but he is often asleep or inattentive, so has to be shaken and brought back to his job at important moments! This is where the Good Company of a School can be such a help.]

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