

SUMMER PROGRAMME 1978

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

The ancient teaching of the five sheaths or limitations of Consciousness depends upon the structure and functions of the human machine at the present stage of evolution, and determines the way an individual is bound to see himself and the world.

Whether man exists or not, the universe is governed by one unchanging Consciousness, Being and Happiness (Sat-Chit-Ananda). But as the first Shri Shankara expressed it in the description he gave in his long poem *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*:

Enclosed by the five sheaths of illusion (Maya) the Self does not shine forth; like water in a tank covered by unbroken masses of sedge arising out of man's own nature. Only when the sedge is completely removed is the clear water experienced by the individual (Jiva), allaying the pangs of thirst and bestowing happiness to the highest degree.

Our guide, his present successor, uses also another simile:

If we lived in a glass house with transparent walls, the light of Consciousness would, like the sun, illuminate all the rooms; but the walls have been covered with dirt and delusion, and in the majority of people have become solid matter (like hardboard or bricks and mortar). If he wants to see himself and the world as they really are, he must successively remove the five layers of this delusion.

The programme points out one practical way of achieving in time all the latent possibilities contained in human nature. It should be done after meditation or a full five minutes of stillness at any other time.

1ST DAY

The body of flesh and bones

Look at your hand and imagine it deprived of its circulation at the moment of death, but before disintegration has set in. It is white and cold like marble and consists only of its physical elements endowed with a certain structure. To the first limitation which confines the attitude of absolute materialism, the name of *Annamaya* (literally 'food' sheath) is given.

2ND DAY

Now look at your hand as it is, warm and glowing with colour due to the circulation of oxygen in the arterial blood – the *Life Principle* or *Prana*. The *Pranamaya* sheath confines our attitude to ourselves and the world to the physical rhythms which we share with all organic life (moment to moment, heartbeat and breathing; twenty-four hour 'arcadial' rhythms of sleeping and waking; monthly, seasonal, annual and reproductive rhythms) which underlie our vitality.

3RD DAY

Those two sheaths together keep our consciousness on the physical or material level. Now attend to the *sensations* arising from your hand and to its restless movements: though its cells and tissues are being continuously renewed, your hand with its shape and lines and fingerprints

remain recognisably your own from birth to death, unlike any other person's hand. This 'individual essence' is confined by the *Manomaya* sheath, for *Manas* is the mechanical part of the mind which converts sensation into reflex or indiscriminate action. At this level we respond to pulls from outside desires arising from the body as a moving automation.

4TH DAY

Now clench and extend your hand, for we possess a discriminative mind (the Buddhi) which gives us the *power of choice* according to what we consider to be right and wrong. This is limited by the *Vijnanamaya* sheath (Vijnana meaning pure Reason or secular knowledge). A man whose consciousness *remains* at this level is governed by reason and intellectual knowledge.

5TH DAY

But a moment's inspiration could (through heightened emotion) take man's consciousness through this sheath to the *Causal level* where the direct influence of the Conscious Self is felt as ecstatic emotion culminating in Samadhi from which the adept receives guidance and energy during his life and by which he prepares himself for physical death. But even this state of 'abundance' is confined by the *Anandamaya* (or sheath of Bliss). Your hand making some symbolic movement such as the sign of the Cross could express this level.

6TH DAY

To understand that there is a state called *Turiya* (enlightenment) that lies beyond the longing for this blissful state, we have to learn from the examples of great men who have passed beyond the five sheaths to the Divine state, depicted by the Christian Messiah or the Lord Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In this state it is possible 'both to swim in the water of ecstasy and to walk on dry land', that is, to exemplify the nature of the Creator while living on the stage of ordinary life, the individual consciousness becoming universal or cosmic.

7TH DAY

According to the Vedas the *Atman* (Self) is what remains after the dissolution of the five sheaths. It is the witness, it is Absolute Knowledge.

This Atman is self-illuminated and different from the five sheaths; it is the witness of the three common states (waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep); it is stainless and unchanging; it is eternal bliss.

Thus must it be realized by the learned man of Wisdom (Brahmana)

(From *The Crest Jewel*)

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