

5 March 1979

READING 4

OWNER, CAR AND CHAUFFEUR

PART 1

In order to begin to make better use of this symbol of which you have had glimpses from time to time, it would be good to begin with the base line of the triangle which can be taken to represent the forebrain and particularly its frontal lobes by which alone we can be directly aware of anything at all, whether it is going on within us or in the world around. So whatever we observe is a reflection of the great Consciousness in the mirror of our own fluctuating and unreliable one. The following passage from a talk with the Shankaracharya in 1971 can help us to do this:

R. What I call 'the impulse of Sattva' is not just a feeling or 'glow' but a state where I see clearly certain habits governing my own behaviour, about which I have got lazy.

S. The influx of Sattva which gives rise to these clear visions as to what one should do and what should not be done is very helpful. But these moments are temporary and one must learn to make them permanent. Only the practice of what one has seen in these visions will make it permanent. Those occasional visions should be turned into one's nature so that it always remains with the individual and thus all his actions will have the force of truth and not the force of habit. This good vision, if made habitual, will displace the useless habits and then truth may play through the individual. When the Sattva has become permanent, then all moments will have clear vision and all actions will be right, the path will be clear and the journey will be straight. Practice is the answer and it must be done with attention and vigilance.

Take an example from a car driver: there may be new drivers, those of one year's experience, ten years' experience, or thirty years' experience. They can of course all drive if the roads are clear. The novice however will find difficulty at bends or intersections or in traffic; the more experienced will find difficulty at sudden emergencies or confrontations with other vehicles; but the driver of thirty years' experience who has gone through it all and to whom driving has become second nature would face all situations, however dangerous they might be, with great ease and would avoid all troubles. He would be most careful and yet carefree.

In fact a being, or Jiva, is very much like a car. It has a body; the mechanisms are the senses; the gears are the arrangements in the subtle body; the engine is the source of energy; the driver is the Buddhi and the owner is the Atman. Now when the Atman wishes to go somewhere, the driver first checks all the gadgets; fills up with petrol, water and oil; checks the ignition, gears, transmission and other things; and then starts the engine and calls the owner to take his seat. Then one by one he carries out the necessary movements in the car and starts slowly on the road and picks up speed, slows down at bends, gives way to others at crossroads and thus safely reaches the destination; stops the car, gets out and opens the door for the Master.

This driver which is Buddhi is a very important person. If he is not experienced, then calamities are in store for the car, himself and even for his Master. If he is careful

and has enough practice, then the Master will be able to accomplish what he really wishes to do. But a bad driver may even lure the Master to go to places not only which are unknown, but are definitely bad and dangerous and so find disaster. One only needs clear vision and lots of practice to arrive at Realization.

(Record, 3 February 1971)

Comment: Simple though this sounds it must be taken as a ‘counsel of perfection’ where the Buddhi is doing its right job, and very different from the myriads of examples in the daily paper or the media of what happens when the chauffeur takes the wrong master (the false ego) for a drive and Rajas or Tamas are rampant.

We are advised to discount all that, and go single-mindedly for what we know to be right, never pausing to dwell on our own deficiencies. The most difficult step is at the beginning: once we learn to stop burdening the driver with worries or ambitions of past or future he can deal with the needs of the moment with pleasure and efficiency.

*

PART 2

A letter (27th February) from Anne Garten puts a question many of us are asking:

I am so grateful for the answer you gave me yesterday about the unity of the Param-Atman beyond the movement of the Gunas. Like many other people, I am finding Attenborough’s current TV programme *Life on Earth* deeply moving to watch as it reveals the miraculous richness, variety and complexity of so many forms of life. But I find much more overwhelming the feeling of a single unified intelligence behind all the fantastic variety. It seems to show very vividly the distinction between Prakriti and Purush – Prakriti so beautiful and varied; Purush ever present but invisible. I should like to learn more about this and learn how to see it in myself.

Comment: Yes, so would we all! We have to convince ourselves of the assurance given us by the Shankaracharya’s Tradition of non-dualism, that at the same time as the Drama of Creation was devised and the cosmic laws laid down, an arrangement was also being perfected, by which an atom of the total consciousness was included in every living being. In all creatures save man, the Self-realizing being, that spark or atom is for self-preservation, improvement and survival of the fittest. Here there is no free will, but the iron law of heredity and response of the species to environment holds firm. But man has choice; has he too big a price to pay? Remember that it is his Atman (not his personality or any of his functions) that has this special connection with the overwhelming Param-Atman.

* * *