

Start with Meditation

One of the main points we have been discussing this term and that we are beginning to understand is the Doctor's statement that in order to awaken spiritually we must re-organise our thinking. Thinking with just our ordinary lower minds in terms of opposites will not alone lead us to Self-realisation. We have to re-organise or in modern parlance learn to think 'outside the box'. We have to try to imagine or understand how our Higher Mind (the Atman) would see things.

Remember what P D Ouspensky said:

When we speak of consciousness, we refer to a state of greater consciousness than our ordinary waking state. We have no control over this state but we have control over the way we think about it and we can construct our thinking in such a way as to bring consciousness. By giving our thoughts a direction which they would have in a moment of consciousness, we can induce consciousness. This practice we call Self-remembering.

A major aspect of Self-remembering is to realise *who am I* or who is the 'Self', because, as we have been studying, this is the only Reality. To assist us with this task the Realised Man – the Shankaracharya - has laid before us the seven steps or stages to Self-Realisation.

1st Stage: Impulse

Good Intention and the Right Impulse which leads to the rising of right desire. The desire for liberation or unity arising from some degree of attention as a result of unselfish deeds. This is a start of an enquiry into one's own Self – a search for the Atman. This is the starting point for the next stage – Decision.

2nd Stage: Decision

This is the stage where an individual makes up his mind. It is the result of good reflection, thought, investigation and circumspection. It is the coming to a point where the individual can go further without doubt. The Way appears to be in line with his intention and conviction and his desire for liberation and unity.

3rd Stage: Effort

This leads to the lessening of outward mental movements and entry into the knowledge of Self. Regular practice in experience of the unity of Self and Atman and righteous living leads the mind to go naturally inward rather than outward.

Certain particles of fine matter have formed in the organism which causes him to strive toward Sattva.

4th Stage: Pull of the Way

This is the dawn of the true Self. Having gone inward the individual comprehends the Self as it really is. The doubts and reflections cease and the real Self with right Knowledge begins to appear. Here influences from the Way pull the disciple from the outside world of sensory impressions of pleasure and pain, so that these begin to lose their power.

5th Stage: Insight

This denotes that a man starts looking at himself and other things as they really are.

He gets the right values for everything. He realizes about things, what they are, how they are constituted, what their properties are. At this stage the person ceases to consider all that is in the

world as outside himself. He starts getting glimpses of the fact that he and the outside world are one thing. Realisation of the 5th Stage gives a feeling of unity with the material world – unity of spirit and materiality.

6th Stage: Abundance

This is the stage where the outward pull is nearly gone and he is filled with abundance of Sattva or divine love or happiness. The barriers between the self and the world start breaking. He starts seeing the Great Self in everything and thus getting the sense of unity between all things. This is a tremendous opening-up for the disciple where he can rise to a high level and can establish the full relation with Higher Ideas. Then he prepares himself for the 7th Stage – and so to be a teacher himself.

7th Stage: Turiya

The Shankaracharya calls this stage Turiya, which is the stage of the Realised Man, when he knows himself, he knows everything. He knows how to do, and whatever he does is just the right thing – right actions, right thoughts and right feeling – everything all combined. (Before a man can reach this 7th Stage, an interval has to be filled in the octave. This process is only known to the teacher and unless the aspirant becomes the teacher he would not realize the importance of this conscious shock).

Pause

The Shankaracharya sums up the role of Meditation and Knowledge in leading to Understanding of the seven stages or steps in the Ladder of Self Realisation

After constant meditation and work on oneself, the adept starts to realise that a man is not just flesh and bones, but he is also Soul, he is Consciousness, and he is Bliss. When he has fully realised this everything becomes very simple for him. Whatever he does, the way he moves, the way he talks, is quite fitting to the dignity of Divine Self, or Atman. But this stage only comes after Full Realisation.

Talking about the Ladder in general terms the Shankaracharya said:

The Ray of Creation is from unity to diversity. Development is the reverse. The way of the Ladder of Seven Steps is directed to that end - from too much movement to very little movement. As we walk around the world we need a little rest. That rest gives us a little bliss, which we do not get out of our ordinary activity. The same applies to this Ladder. From activity we go to the level where all activity ceases and we have reached our goal.

Obviously the Shankaracharya is not suggesting we should not go about our daily tasks. Does he not mean when all the repetitive thoughts and desires *cease* and are replaced by the Ultimate Observer, who sees Param-Atman in everything and everything in the Param-Atman, we have reached our goal.

The Shankaracharya goes on to say:

The ascending process on the steps is very systematic. When the preparation is made for the next step he will ascend but it is not like a physical ladder which you ascend foot by foot. It is more like a spectrum in which you find your place and realise your step.

For the moment, let us check that we are making the right kind of Effort. How do we interpret this instruction?

Pause for discussion

Obviously part of our Effort must be to cease to look upon oneself as a separate entity. We cannot continue to allow our various 'I's to try to manipulate the events in the outside world to suit our ambitious purposes. That is sleep. We must wake up. That means allowing an expansion of consciousness to take place. This is helped by increasing our storage of Sattva through a method as well as coming to ourselves at intervals during the day..

Doctor Roles made this comment regarding Steps 3 and 4:

It is said that at Step 3 on the Ladder the 'pull of the outside world becomes weaker' and that on Step 4 we begin to 'feel the pull of the inner world'. It means to begin to feel the real world in terms of light or energy and leave the illusory world of passing events.

He adds further on:

It is a help toward actually experiencing the new world to learn Mr Ouspensky discovered how to think in new categories.

New categories of thinking seem to be found in different languages – mathematics, stories, parables, music, symbols or diagrams, architecture and so on. In our western tradition diagrams played a strong role. So during the week, could we try and look at the Ladder of Self Realisation as an octave with intervals and see if this adds to our understanding