

Start with Meditation

During the week, many comments and observations relating to three questions regarding the aim of the individual, purpose of School and man's relation with the cosmos have been sent in.

It is going to take a little time to put these together in a paper, so that we all get the best benefit from the various thoughts and observations.

In last week's paper it was mentioned that we now understand the need to see third force in everything instead of looking at everything 'in opposites'.

Also to carry in our minds the idea of the 'Three in One and the One in Three' so that we receive nourishment from a higher level.

RS has written a very good paper on this subject for a Christian group at the theology college in Salisbury, whose present mission is an enquiry into 'what nourishes the spirit'.

At the present moment this is what we too are seeking and we will find Bob's paper stimulating and helpful in our search.

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**Nourishing: the ultimate**

I started to look at the last step in realising the presence of God, or as in other religions and philosophies: enlightenment, self-realisation.

In John 4:10<sup>1</sup>, Jesus asks the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob for water and he says to her:

‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.’

And when she misunderstands, he explains (4:13-14):

‘Everyone drinking from this [well] water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.’

There is a similar statement by Jesus in John 7:37-38:

‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and let the one believing in me drink. As the scripture has said, “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water”.’

followed by John’s gloss (7:39):

Now he said this about the Spirit which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

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<sup>1</sup> I used *The Gospel according to St John* by C K Barrett as a guide to the Greek text, but the interpretation is my own.

That is, the spirit (as in Holy Spirit) would come only after the end of Jesus' ministry, as in Acts 2. But if Jesus' words in John 4 & 7 are an accurate record of what he said, there is no such restriction. Also, in the Gospel of Thomas 108, Jesus says:

“Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself will become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to that person.”

It is then more likely that the experience relates to this life than the next.

The simplest interpretation is that Jesus meant that any person *affected* by him might be changed so that they would receive unceasing spiritual power from within their selves. We would now call this process a ‘conversion’, but the literature on the conversion experience in general is so complicated that I use the neutral word ‘affect’ to indicate a triggering effect, which could in principle be ‘belief in Jesus’, ‘faith followed by intervention of the spirit’, etc.<sup>2</sup>

However, in the passages in John it is possible to be more specific about what the ‘affect’ is, because it seems that the spiritual power subsequently possessed by the subject is of the same nature as that initially imparted by Jesus – they are both ‘water’. That brings to mind the kind of pump for a well that is not ‘self-priming’. An old fashioned hand pump, for example, cannot lift the water up the pipe from the bottom of the well unless the body of the pump is first filled with water; it needs to be ‘primed’ with a small amount of water.

#### Pause

There are many equivalent statements in other religions, many of which also describe the initial stages in spiritual development in detail. It is worth studying these as they may throw some light on the Christian experience and also because the underlying psychology is so well developed.

Here are two samples. The first comes from a Muslim Sufi, Inayat Hasrat Khan (1882-1927), writing in alchemical terms:

. . . the whole process was explained by the alchemists in a symbolical way. They said gold is made out of mercury: The nature of mercury is to be ever-moving, but by a certain process the mercury is first stilled, and once stilled it becomes silver; then the silver has to be melted, and the juice of a herb is poured on to the molten silver, which is thereby turned into gold.

That is, as he goes on to explain, the mind has to be stilled (silver) and then melted with human love, and finally with the power of the love and knowledge of God (the herb) it becomes gold (‘the heart that expresses what God would express’). As in John, it seems that the ‘affect’, here something of Godliness, is of the same nature as the result, permanent Godliness.

In eastern religions, the experience of the Self or God, either temporary or permanent, is referred to as a state of consciousness: kensho, satori in Zen Buddhism; samadhi, turiya in Vedanta. The process here is said to involve leaving the ordinary sense of consciousness behind, again through stillness. The ‘affect’ here may be knowledge of the Self or love, and here is a description by

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<sup>2</sup> There is a strong suggestion in John 4.13 that the ‘affect’ - the drinking of the water proffered by Jesus - is momentary, not ongoing, because of the tense used for the verb ‘to drink’.

Vedanta teacher, the Shankaracharya Shantanand Saraswati (d. 1997):

‘If you begin to be what you are you will realise everything, but to begin to be what you are you must come out of what you are not. You are not those thoughts which are turning, turning in your mind: you are not those changing feelings: you are not the different decisions you make and the different wills you have: you are not that separate ego: Well, then, what are you? You will find when you have come out of what you are not, that ripple on the water is whispering to you 'I am That', the birds in the mango tree are singing to you 'I am That', the moon and the stars are shining beacons to you 'I am That': you are in everything in the world and everything in the world is in you since for you it only exists because it is mirrored in you; and at the same time you are that – everything.’ [*Good Company*, 1987]

Once again, the result is not something *different* from the ‘affect’, the trigger. Something, a vision or feeling of reality is given or achieved, something that momentarily lifts the state of mind to a point where the reality is perceived in full.