

The Six Activities of Man: Part 1

We continue our exploration of the universal laws or principles by looking at another specific example of ‘threeness’ that has special relevance to our path to Self-realisation: that is the three gunas from Samkhya philosophy – rajas, tamas, sattva. Here is a description from the new ‘Ouspensky Today’ website (due to be launched on 13th May):

The law of three is represented in the Vedanta by the concept of the three ‘gunas’ or qualities, (‘guna’ means literally, ‘a string or a rope’) which together create, sustain and finally eliminate the illusion of Maya, the universe as we subjectively perceive it. As in the western formulation, rajas is active, tamas, is passive, and sattva is neutralising, but in the context of human experience to which the concept of the three gunas is mostly applied, they are given more specific definitions. Rajas is always active, like fire, tamas is always passive, like darkness or ignorance, and sattva, neutralising, is once again less closely defined but always conveys an unmistakable quality such as light, love, purity, harmony, intelligence and wisdom.

These three strings vibrating together create the whole universe. As stated in the Mahabharata: ‘The unmanifest Absolute, by means of the six unions of the gunas (sixfold yoga of gunas) transforms himself into the hundreds and thousands and millions and millions of forms.

Helped by his knowledge of Samkhya philosophy, Ouspensky further developed the concept of the three forces into a framework that became known as ‘*the six activities of man*’. Three forces can give rise to only six combinations (and one more, ‘incomprehensible to the human mind’), and all possible phenomena can be classified as belonging to one of these six combinations. The basis of the idea is that the order in which the three forces act upon each other determines the nature of the phenomena they create. [from www.ouspenskytoday.org: *Law of Three*]

The three forces come together in a particular order at a single point in space and time to form a triad. Each triad represents a type of activity – determined not so much by *what* is done, but more by the *feeling* or ‘*unmistakable taste*’ associated with it. It is possible for two activities to look very similar but actually to come from quite different triads. Mr Ouspensky said that the arising of Conscience (the emotional realisation of truth) is required for us to see which triad is operating in any given situation. However, the feeling from which the activity arises and the feeling associated with the end result gives us a useful clue. The six triads are:

1. **Refinement:** Tamas-Rajas-Sattva
2. **Growth or Development:** Rajas-Tamas-Sattva
3. **Creation:** Sattva-Tamas-Rajas
4. **Healing or Invention:** Tamas-Sattva-Rajas
5. **Elimination or Destruction:** Rajas-Sattva-Tamas
6. **Corruption or Crime:** Sattva-Rajas-Tamas

This paper focuses on the first three of these triads. Here is an explanation from Gerald Beckwith’s book *Ouspensky’s Fourth Way* due to be launched on 12 May. (The original uses the enneagram labels for the triads, but since we are leaving the enneagram until later, these have been replaced in the quote below with the relevant gunas):

All the highest possibilities for human beings, the finest art and science, all the higher qualities of human nature up to Self-realisation itself arise from the triad *Sattva-Tamas-Rajas* [Creation] which begins with the third force, *sattva*. If there is not enough of this energy available, nothing of the kind occurs. The question is, how to find enough of this special energy?

... it can be seen that only two triads, *Tamas-Rajas-Sattva* [Refinement] and *Rajas-Tamas-Sattva* [Growth], produce the energy of *sattva*. These are called by Ouspensky the 'two preparatory triads' which, working together in a circulation ... generate the energy needed to germinate the transforming, creative triad *Sattva-Tamas-Rajas* [Creation].

In terms of energy, these two triads offer the only way to ascend the 'stairway'. ... Allowing the mind to be passive and frequently dip into the stillness of the moment [triad of Refinement] produces the *sattva* necessary to perform good quality, attentive actions in worldly life [triad of Growth], which again produce more *sattva* that feeds back into the capacity for stillness. The circulation of the triads, *Tamas-Rajas-Sattva* [Refinement]; *Rajas-Tamas-Sattva* [Growth], forms a virtuous circle that goes around and around. True meditation goes by the triad *Tamas-Rajas-Sattva* [Refinement], and actions in a life fuelled by the energy of meditation go by the triad *Rajas-Tamas-Sattva* [Growth]. [Ouspensky's Fourth Way: ch.8]

The triad of 'Refinement' comes from 'being aware of being aware'. It is characterised by a passive kind of openness or 'allowing' in which there is no desire and no feeling of 'doing': the 'right' thing (whatever is 'best' in the context of the totality of experience) just arises naturally from stillness and emptiness. In Mr Ouspensky's System it is sometimes described as 'good professional work'. The crucial difference in the 'good professional work' of a lawyer, accountant, doctor etc. compared with work on a production line is that it requires some element of quiet reflection or contemplation to allow the best solution for the client to come to the surface. In other words it is allowing attention to relax back into its source, rather than directing or focusing it. It is known as 'refinement', because in this relaxing back into the source of our being we progressively shed layers of identification (world, body, feelings, mind) that appear to veil the light of Pure Consciousness.

The triad of 'Growth' is the triad that operates throughout the development of the Ray of Creation by means of which the Absolute, Pure Consciousness, modulates itself to manifest ever-increasing levels of diversity in the universe. In our everyday life it is needed when we are required to give focused attention to something, either for practical purposes or for what Rupert Spira describes as 'celebration' – simply celebrating the happiness and love that comes from 'being knowingly what we really are'.

Here is Rupert's description of how these two triads can work together in a continuous circulation throughout all our day-to-day activities:

Sometimes our attention is required by the world, in which case your attention ceases resting in its home, its home of awareness and it goes out towards the object that is calling it. And then when your attention is no longer required by that object, instead of manufacturing another object to keep it busy, let your attention sink back into its source and rest there until the world requires it again. And at that moment, let your attention go outwards again towards the object. So to begin with, our attention goes outwards towards the object, it sinks back into its source, it goes outwards towards the object, it sinks back into its source, and this resting of the attention in its source seems to be something that takes place *in between* the activities of the mind. But after a while, even when the attention goes out towards the object, that doesn't *obscure* the

knowledge – the experiential knowledge – that ‘I am pure Consciousness’.

[Rupert Spira: Colet House 25 January 2015]

That ‘after a while’ refers to the natural arising of the triad of Creation.

But we all know that it doesn’t always work as smoothly as that – we get lost in thoughts or activities and forget who we really are. Here is some advice from a webinar with Rupert:

***JB:** OK. So how does one stop it [attention] getting taken over by other things, when it’s not really required by the world any more?*

RS: Yes. When it’s *not* required by the world, in other words, when our attention is manufacturing an object to busy itself with, *that* is the pure ego. Because at that moment our attention is reluctant to flow back to its source and dissolve in pure awareness, pure consciousness. And it’s manufacturing an object to keep busy with, in order to perpetuate itself. So in those times, when your attention is directed towards objects, when it’s not *required* to be directed towards an object and yet you still find yourself busy with objects, then that is the time to ask yourself: ‘On whose behalf is my attention busy with objects? Who is it serving?’ ... When you find yourself attending to objects for no reason, then is the time to ask the question: ‘On whose behalf is my attention wandering around in time and space?’ And you will always find it is on behalf of a temporary, finite self, that you go. So that is the time to explore the nature of this self on whose behalf our attention is wandering around in time and space.

[Webinar: 5th June 2014]

In the terminology of the Direct Path, the triad of ‘Creation’ is seen as a ‘collapse of the feeling of separation’ – true Self-remembering. It is sometimes accompanied by a sudden surge of happiness and a deep relaxation in the body. This collapse happens when we fall in love; we feel ‘one with’ the person we love. It occurs when we get a sudden glimpse of our true nature as infinite, eternal Consciousness. And as Rupert Spira explains, the highest level of art can also provoke this collapse:

Although all objects ultimately come from this experience [of unity] and are therefore an expression of it, there is a particular category of objects that could be called sacred works of art, that shine with the presence of this understanding and therefore have the power to convey or communicate it directly. They evoke it.

In classical Greece this experience was described as ‘Beauty.’

Beauty is not the attribute of an object. It is inherent in the fundamental nature of experience. It is the experience of recognising that Consciousness and Reality are one.

Such sacred works of art stir a deep memory in us. We recognise something in them. In this recognition Consciousness is recognising itself. Consciousness is remembering its own Reality, its own Being.

It looks in the mirror of experience and sees itself. It experiences its own Reality.

Such works of art give us the ‘taste of Eternity.’

[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/natures_eternity]

Contemplation

Attention is Awareness directed towards an object. Divested of the object, attention, finding nothing to grasp, quivers for a moment, flows back to its source, and stands revealed as pure Awareness.

[Rupert Spira]