

Behind the Veil of Reason

Last term, we looked at the third sheath, *manomaya* – the flow of thoughts, images, ideas, perceptions, sensations – that constitute the moving aspect of mind, *manas*. The fourth sheath is *vijnanamaya* – the sheath of ‘lower reason’, or *buddhi* in the Indian tradition. It is another function of mind and can also be seen as a discriminatory function that examines the objects of the moving mind and makes judgements or draws conclusions about them.

When the concept of *buddhi* was first introduced to Dr Roles, there was much confusion about it. Initially it was seen as something entirely ‘good’ and was equated with Conscience in Mr Ouspensky’s system. But Conscience is quite different – it is not a function of mind. (Mr Ouspensky’s described it as the emotional realisation of truth. Actions which flow from Conscience arise automatically from pure consciousness without any ‘thinking’ being involved and are in that sense entirely ‘good’ and appropriate.) However the Shankaracharya made it quite clear that *buddhi* could be either pure or impure. It is simply a function of mind that – like all other aspects of the human body/mind – can be used either in the service of the truth, or in the service of ignorance. This is how he explained the veiling power of *buddhi*:

R. I feel that the world being vibrations and the vibrations passing through me are blocked by my thoughts.

H.H. The vibrations first reach the senses, then mind and later on *buddhi*. *Buddhi* is the inner gate where all this stops and doesn’t reach up to Atman which is in fact apart from that and holds us apart. One should watch this *buddhi*. It can be a barrier. Once this barrier is removed the passage is clear.
[HH Record 1964, 26th August]

(Note that Dr Roles’s experience relates to an earlier step on the ‘path of discrimination’. As we discussed in the last meeting, it is not entirely correct to refer to ‘vibrations passing through me’. It would be truer to say that ‘all experience, including the experience of my body/mind and its conceptualised “parts”, is a vibration of consciousness’.)

The Shankaracharya’s comments on pure and impure *buddhi*, have sometimes been misunderstood to mean that we need to ‘do something’ to purify *buddhi* before we can reach enlightenment. But HH explained that it was the other way round:

R. Is it true that unless he achieves pure *buddhi* as described by Lord Krishna in the Gita, man cannot see the full Truth and nothing but Truth?

HH Pursuit of Truth cures and clears the *buddhi*; just in this single activity both are achieved, the Truth comes and *buddhi* is cleared and cleaned. But if the direction is the other way, with the pursuit of the Untruth, then the *buddhi* becomes muddled and the result is pain and suffering.
[HH Record 1962, 17th October]

We need to be careful to distinguish between *buddhi* – lower reason – and the higher reason that is used in self-enquiry in the Direct Path. Here is a description from Shri Atmananda Krishnamenon:

111. THE CONTROLLING PRINCIPLE

Every perception by itself is invariably governed and corrected by the relatively higher faculty called ‘*buddhi*’ (‘lower reason’). This *buddhi* is in its turn controlled and corrected by another faculty called higher reason (or *vidya-vritti*), which is well beyond the mind. This is Consciousness itself, appearing to be functioning.

We are usually slow to accept the existence of this faculty, as it is usually confounded with the lower reason itself, their workings being apparently similar.

1125. WHAT IS REASON AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Reason is of two kinds: the lower and the higher.

Lower reason (mind) is a negative instrument. Its findings are sometimes negative and sometimes positive. The negative findings may be helpful in disproving the reality of the apparent world, and in bringing one nearer the Truth. But the positive discoveries of the lower reason emphasize duality and have always been an impediment in the progress towards Truth. It is too objective and speculative.

Higher reason is a positive instrument and its positive discoveries, being based upon the one real being within, are always true and changeless. When we say the higher reason 'destroys', it only means that it clearly exposes the falsity of appearance. Our *samskaras* [inclinations] themselves, when they become more *sattvic* [balanced, pure], begin to notice and question the vagaries of the lower reason.

It is then that the presence of a higher faculty becomes necessary, in order to enquire and come to an ultimate decision. The higher reason comes in to answer this urge. But at last, this higher reason turns out to be the Truth itself, which stands established as the permanent background.

867. WHEN AND HOW DOES HIGHER REASON FUNCTION?

... The function of the higher reason is to dissolve the mind, and then the higher reason stands transformed into *Atma* itself.

1107. HIGHER REASON OR VIDYA-VRITTI

This is a supra-intellectual organon to be found in everyone. In the presence of the Guru, this organon is aroused, and is made use of, in order to understand the Truth. It corrects and supplements the findings of the lower reason. It destroys all that is objective and unreal, created by the mind; and when nothing else remains to be destroyed, it stands revealed in its own glory as the Reality – just as the fire that consumes the forest extinguishes itself when nothing else remains to be consumed, and Peace prevails.

[Notes of the Discourses of Atmananda Krishnamenon]

For those who prefer to keep to Western terminology, here is Rupert's description:

This belief that mind (in this case, thinking) is the enemy of truth, enlightenment or understanding, is a popular and simplistic misconception found in many expressions of contemporary, as well as traditional, advaita. It results from a lack of clarity between what could be described as two different sorts of reasoning.

The reasoning that is used in this expression of the teaching is derived directly from the non-objective experience of our true nature. These lines of reasoning compare or measure all the conventional beliefs we have about ourselves and about the nature of experience, with this direct, intimate, non-objective experience. Atmananda Krishnamenon described this type of reasoning as Higher Reasoning to distinguish it from what is normally considered to be reasoning (conventional reasoning).

Conventional reasoning makes implicit reference to a number of fundamental beliefs that are considered to be so obviously and absolutely true as to be beyond the realm of doubt or question. Such beliefs are the belief that Consciousness is limited and local, that it is a by-product of the brain, that it appears in time and space etc, etc...

Higher Reasoning subjects these beliefs to the reality of our experience. In other words, Higher Reasoning is not really something that is done by the mind. It is a subjection of the mind to the

Reality of our experience. Another way of saying this would be to say that Higher Reason is a revealing power in the service of truth and that Conventional Reason is a concealing power in the service of apparent ignorance.

[\[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/do_appearances_veil_or_reveal_consciousness\]](http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/do_appearances_veil_or_reveal_consciousness)

Lower reason, *buddhi*, is essential for many of our activities in everyday life. It can also be helpful in the early stages of the spiritual path to discover some of the 'things that we are not'. But it eventually becomes a barrier and in the Direct Path it is almost immediately replaced by 'higher reason' which leads directly to the discovery of and abidance in our true nature.

Another concept closely associated with *buddhi* (but not identical to *buddhi*) is the power of discrimination. In traditional, dualistic paths this is sometimes associated with a moral code, a code of behaviour or a system of practice, and the Shankaracharya sometimes used the concept of discrimination in this context:

HH: The *buddhi* works for discrimination, the discrimination as to what is right and what is wrong; or between what is useful to the Self and what is not useful to the Self.

[HH Record 1970, 24th January]

But in his pure Advaita teaching, HH used the same concept of discrimination in relation to the *neti-neti* method ('not this, not this') practised in the 'path of discrimination' – in this case to 'see through' all of the sheaths, including *vijnanamaya*:

When one thinks that the body is the Self, or his mind or *buddhi* are the Self, then he feels pain and pleasure. By discrimination one has to see the freedom of Atman, who has nothing to do with pain and pleasure.

[HH Record 1965, 15th October]

But if there is no 'doer', how is it possible to discriminate? Who discriminates? Who chooses? We discussed this in detail last October in the paper on the *pranamaya* sheath 'Am I the One Who Makes Things Happen'. But as a brief reminder, here is Rupert's explanation:

The idea that we have the freedom to choose whether or not to become entangled with thoughts and feelings is a concession to the separate self we believe and feel ourselves to be. From the separate self's point of view, it has choice, freedom. If we think we are a separate self, then by definition we feel that we are making choices.

For this reason, the teaching says, 'You have the choice. You have consented to limit yourself. You can choose not to. Choose to disentangle yourself. Make that your first choice in life, to disentangle yourself from the body and the mind and to know yourself as you truly are.'

As an apparently separate self, the highest choice we can make is to turn our attention away from the objects that we seem to know, towards the Knowing with which they are known.

Making that choice effects this disentanglement of our self from the body/mind, and, as a result, our true nature stands revealed as it is.

[\[http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/the_disentanglement_of_the_self\]](http://non-duality.rupertspira.com/read/the_disentanglement_of_the_self)

Contemplation

Our only knowledge of a mind, body or world is our experience of them and there is no substance present in our experience other than the Awareness in which it appears and with which it is known. Thus, all that is ever known is Awareness itself and it is Awareness that knows itself as such.

[Rupert Spira]