

The Three Caskets

Mr Ouspensky taught us that the true knowledge of the Self is always kept very well hidden in spiritual 'Schools' and only made available to those who seek after they have undergone many years of spiritual practice and shown themselves to be worthy of it.

The Shankaracharya seemed to confirm this situation when he described the spiritual knowledge of Realised Men as needing to be preserved in three caskets:

H.H.: An ordinary wooden casket is for the simple part of knowledge which can be given to anyone who is searching; it can be spoken of at any meeting open to the public, without fear of its being misunderstood or misused. A silver casket is kept for knowledge which can be given to prepared people who are on the Way. Then there is a very special Knowledge of Mysteries which the Realised Men keep in a casket of gold—very precious, never to be given away free, because it would be bound to be spoilt or distorted.

[At a later time he has also said that this Knowledge cannot be put into words and has to pass between conscious people on the subtle level.]

(H.H. Record 1964, 27 August)

It was assumed that the contents of the 'golden casket' had been revealed to Dr Francis Roles by the Shankaracharya during a private audience sometime between 1974 and 1975. But there was no further mention of caskets in *The Record of Shankaracharya Audiences* until 1979 when Professor Richard Guyatt asked the Shankaracharya about the contents of the gold casket and was given a further clue:

The golden covering is the brilliant form which one comes across in this universe. The whole creation is brilliant and shining like gold all the time and it attracts our attention. Because we get attached to these shining brilliant and attractive forms created by the Absolute, we do not go beyond them to the truth which lies behind these brilliant things. This uncovering of truth is done only through the teacher. It is with the help of the teacher that this golden cover can be taken away so that the disciple can see the Truth.

(H.H. Record 1979, 31 August)

Although there was much speculation about the contents of the gold casket, both before and after Dr Roles's death, no further information could be found, until ...

One day you are walking past a building site when you spot an interesting-looking box in a rubbish skip. It's covered in dust and dirt, but as you clean it up you see it's a gold casket. Gently and lovingly rubbing off the dirt around the key-hole, a key emerges. You try turning it. Nothing happens. ... But when you turn the key in the other direction it unlocks. On opening the casket, you find a very, very large, pure white sheet of paper. It becomes so large that you can't see any edges to it. As you look at it, a message begins to appear ...

You'll find what you're looking for in the wooden casket. Nothing was ever hidden or kept secret - it was always available but just overlooked.¹

You have no further need for all that holy, spiritual stuff - all the complicated 'true knowledge' and spiritual disciplines contained in the silver casket. Just look carefully at your ordinary, everyday experience. When you examine that carefully and thoroughly you will come to realise for yourself the simple, direct truth that I told you right at the beginning. (You'll find it at the top of the wooden casket and it provides all the knowledge you need.²) But you have to discover it for yourself, from your own experience.

Self-remembering is all that is needed for that truth to become apparent and established in your life. And you have now found the simple, natural method I told you to look for³ - just to be aware of being aware. There's no need for any of those special techniques such as continuous prayer or mantra meditation that involve focusing attention on an object. They were useful at the beginning because they helped gather in dispersed attention and produced blissful states of mind which gave you a taste of enlightenment. But those blissful states just come and go. They can never become permanent and they are not what you are really looking for - the ever-present, deep inner peace that is your true nature.

That multiplicity of I's, false Ahankara, ego, the separate self - whatever you like to call it - doesn't exist and never existed. It is just a set of thoughts and beliefs created by mind, appearing, disappearing and reappearing through habit. You have watched these appearances and disappearances over many years. Surely it's not too difficult to see that what you are aware of cannot be you?

Forget all the complicated cosmology, and all the teaching about the universal laws, the Gunas, the Antahkaran, the five centres. It was helpful at an early stage to engage your interest. It gave you some different models to superimpose on your experience and thus loosened

some of those fixed ideas. But you don't need any of that now. Just be open to the possibility that there is no separate world made of matter. After all, the 'world' that you think you know is nothing more than a set of sense perceptions arising in awareness onto which mind has superimposed a model of solid objects.⁴ Is that really so very different from the 'world' which comes into existence in your dreams? All we can really be sure of is that 'I am aware'. Nothing else is certain.

Enlightenment - the discovery of our true nature - is not difficult and it's not just for special, highly spiritual people. There's no need for all that effort to keep the mind still or to think only holy thoughts, or all those struggles with negative emotions. A pure body/mind might be desirable for its own sake, but it is not a prerequisite. What you really are requires no purification and cannot be purified. So why not discover your true nature first? It's much easier that way round. See that whatever thoughts, feelings, agitations are present, none of these alter or affect the pure, imperturbable, unlimited awareness that you are. Because once you understand your true nature, then realignment of the body/mind with this new understanding begins to happen automatically. There is almost no resistance to it. Then all that's needed is loving cooperation. It's gentle, simple and much more enjoyable.

Don't build a career, an identity and a social circle out of a search for enlightenment. If you do, it will remain a search and your attachment to it will continue to hide reality. How would it be to simply enjoy life to the full without attachment or personal desire - always in touch with the peace and happiness of your true nature? Be brave. Just go for it!

I

As you read the message, it starts to fade, just leaving the signature - I. ... And then, as you look deeply into it, that, too, slowly disappears ...

¹ c.f. Lalla – 14th Century poet and mystic in the Kashmiri Shaivite tradition:

*I travelled a long way seeking God,
but when I finally gave up and turned back,
there He was, within me!*

Or TS Eliot, *Little Gidding*:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

² H.H.: If you begin to be what you are you will realize 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 the 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. *(From one of Dr Francis Roles's first audiences with the Shankaracharya)*

³ When I first began to sit with him (P. D. Ouspensky) alone he would often say, "Something is missing in the System. Either G didn't know or he forgot. We are told that everything depends on remembering ourselves and the next minute we are told, 'You can't remember yourself'. If man is meant to remember himself there must have been some simple natural method. But it's been lost. I could never find it. Once in India, I heard an echo of such a method." And he told me, "Try it if you like", he said, "but I can't teach it because it's not the real thing—it's only second hand. Perhaps you have to find the real thing." And from that time on he sent me to see anyone who came to London with any claim ... *(Dr Francis Roles, November 1960)*

⁴ c.f. H.H.: There is no such thing as the 'world' from the point of view of real existence. Yet we see a 'world' around us. This seeing is like seeing a mirage—because the world we see is not what it appears to be. ... Unreal though a mirage is, yet we cannot dispel it by any physical means. That is, we cannot dig it out with a spade or blow it away with artillery. As it is due to certain conditions of light it goes away only when those conditions have gone. Similarly, the mirage of the 'world' is due to certain conditions of ignorance, and it goes away only when that ignorance is gone. *(H.H. Record, 18 August 1970)*