

WHY STUDY THE UNIVERSE AND ITS LAWS?

Man is an image of the world. He was created by the same laws which created the whole of the world. By knowing and understanding himself, he will know and understand the whole world, all the laws that create and govern the world. And at the same time, by studying the world and the laws that govern the world, he will learn and understand the laws that govern him. In this connection some laws are understood and assimilated more easily by studying the objective world, while man can only understand other laws by studying himself. The study of the world and the study of man must therefore run parallel, one helping the other.

(P D Ouspensky, First Cosmological Lecture)

The cosmological side of Mr Ouspensky's System can be described as a model of how fundamental unity, the Absolute, creates a series of worlds of ever increasing diversity and density. It describes the progression of pure spirit, or consciousness, into materiality and the consequent return journey of materiality to consciousness.

Every path to Self-realization has an implicit or explicit model of the individual and the universe. Though a model is not itself the Truth—as a map is not the territory—a true model leads to and lights up the Truth as existent in oneself. Part of the purpose of the System is to clarify the intellect and the emotions; first by orienting the seeker to their actual position, and then to establish the true location of the destination.

Both mind and emotions need purifying with true knowledge to allow a union of head and heart to take place. This union produces something greater than the sum of its parts, something which exists in and perceives a greater world hitherto unknown. Individuals are designed as essentially self-transcendent beings and the System is a model, a blueprint of this same design, provided by a 'higher mind' to help us remember and rediscover our innate potential.

Nevertheless, in its original exposition, the System was focused upon the incompleteness and mechanicalness of human beings, and mankind was said to exist in a remote region of the universe far from the direct influence of the Absolute. The presence of 'real I', was described only as a distant possibility, almost impossible to attain and then only by great effort and suffering. Though this view may not be entirely untrue, it remains only as one side of a paradox and its emphasis in those early days was often severely discouraging.

When in 1960 Dr Roles met the practical system of Self-realisation as taught by HH Shantanand Saraswati he recognised it, and the being of the man who taught it, as the source and completion of the System—the 'source' of the practical method that Mr Ouspensky had insisted must be discovered. This brought about a great change in our teaching of the System; whilst all the perennial ideas were upheld in their order and emphasis, they were reconstructed in the light of new knowledge and experience.

The most striking change was to regard pure Consciousness, the Absolute, as being in fact the 'Real I' that forms the core of every individual's being and existence. Neither at all distant, nor inaccessible, but immanent in every moment and in reality concealed only by a particular variety of ignorance.

'The question of the unity of the individual with the Absolute has different facets. It can be said that every individual in the world has some unity with the Absolute every day. If he did not have *some* unity and communication daily it would be almost impossible to sustain life. Nothing in this creation can exist without some link with the Absolute. For everyone who sleeps at night, in their deep sleep there is some union with the Absolute which re-charges the body and makes it fresh and does away with fatigue for the next day so that another day's work can be begun. This is also a union, but it is not a conscious union.'

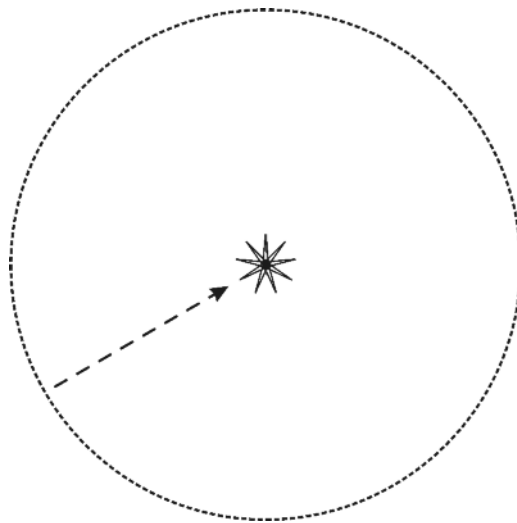
(HH Shantanand Saraswati 31.10.77)

Nowadays we present the System in terms of how this natural union with the Absolute can become more conscious and more prevalent in our lives and this process is described as a shedding of unnecessary limitations and impediments, rather than a laborious construction of something we do not possess.

‘Now, somehow we have forgotten that the Absolute is immanent everywhere and is ready to meet us with its full force—not only that one meets the Absolute in Samadhi with full force, but this Absolute is ready to meet you as a table, as a chair, as food and everything. It is ignorance which has covered our vision, and we have to come out of this ignorance . . . When we have learnt to come very close to this undifferentiated unity of the Self, then we will see that the Absolute, which appears to be outside and seemingly separated, becomes united with yourself and there may be a time when there is no beginning, there is no end, there is no inner, and there is no outer — it is the same Absolute available everywhere, and there is never any separation.’

(HH Shantanand Saraswati 22.9.75)

We can use a simple figure to demonstrate this relationship — a circle, which is of course entirely dependent upon its centre; for without the centre there could be no circle. We can consider the centre to be pure Consciousness, timeless Being, ‘real I’— and the circumference to be the succession of moments of passing time experienced by all of our mechanical and changing ‘I’s’, each of which is nevertheless constantly and directly connected to the centre by a radius line from any point on the circumference. ‘Motion’ along a radius line, towards the centre, is effected by the expansion of the moment ‘now’. The practice of stillness in the moment paradoxically produces a ‘movement’ towards a higher dimension of perception — where the nature of our real being in any moment is revealed as pure Consciousness itself.



This figure can also be used to represent the Absolute at the heart of creation, surrounded by the whole universe, and with further elaboration it will show how infinite unity becomes infinite diversity both for the universal and the individual being. The two ideas, ‘the Absolute is constantly immanent in me’ and, ‘Real I is infinitely remote from me’, constitute another paradox whose resolution can only be found in a larger context:

‘In order to understand a thing, you must see its connection with some bigger subject, or bigger whole, and the possible consequences of this connection. Understanding is always the understanding of a smaller problem in relation to a bigger problem.’

(P.D. Ouspensky. Fifth Psychological Lecture)

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