

### Who am I?

An important part of our Western System starts with the question 'Who am I?', and discusses the answer from the point of view of 5 different levels: Body, Personality, Essence, Soul and Permanent 'I' (Atman). At a meeting in 1930, Mr. Ouspensky outlined this scheme and mentioned that it is interesting to connect it with the Eastern allegory of the carriage, horse, driver and Master. Asked about Essence, he said:

'Essence is what each of us is born with — one's capacities and incapacities. It is connected with 'type' and also with the physical body — because part of essence is the 'physical constitution' which makes each person different from any other (as shown, for instance, by one's finger prints).

From the point of view of Self-development, all we have to work with at the beginning is personality — what we learn from experience of the world and from other people. Personality is our means of verbal communication. Man in his ordinary state (that is his personality) consists of a multiplicity of different 'I's which are changing all the time. Some of these I's are connected with the physical body and some with the essence.'

The word 'personality' comes from the Latin *persona*, meaning the mask that an actor wore in Greek and Roman drama, a different mask in different plays, or different roles in the same play. Concealing our true nature, Essence, we use a series of masks which we present to the world — one for home, one for business, one for social occasions, etc. Also a 'Work' personality which we develop at our meetings! Using these masks, we lose our individuality in trying to look all alike, dressing according to the current fashion, and speaking the current clichés. When some of us got to know him well, PDO was fond of demonstrating the difference between the two halves of the body (right and left), one of which is the servant of personality and the other of essence. *(from FCR 73/24)*

A story from the Shankaracharya's Tradition brings the idea to life:

There was once a man who loved to listen to a great teacher, but who never bothered to practice the instructions that were given him. At home, he kept a large and beautiful parrot in a cage. After several years this very clever parrot asked him where it was he went each week? He said that he longed to know about God and the possibility of Self-realization so he went to hear the wisdom of this saintly teacher. The parrot asked him to put a question to the Saint on *his* behalf, 'How can *I* be liberated?' Next day the man put the parrot's question but the Saint only gave a little gasp and fell down as if unconscious. The other pupils were very angry with this man for having put such an awkward question and threw him out of the hall. Much aggrieved he went home and told the whole story. The next morning the parrot was found lying motionless at the bottom of his cage. His master took him to be dead and opened the door to remove him. The parrot immediately flew up to the branch of a tree and said: 'I got the Saint's message and now I am free. It would be good for you if you too acted on the instructions given.'

#### **For tomorrow's meeting:**

Can we identify examples in our own make-up of an habitual behaviour or a character trait relating either to personality or essence? Perhaps three of each? And each one expressed in not more than one sentence.