

The Bigger Picture

After taking a quick look into the darker and dustier corners of our psyches it's time now to stand back and regain some perspective regarding our aim in this work.

We have seen that the world around us and the world within us contains both light and dark, conscious and unconscious, ego and shadow elements. The 'shadow' refers to those aspects of ourselves and other people which the personal ego finds unacceptable and is therefore banished from sight, often with dramatic consequences. In its broadest sense 'shadow' means that which is unknown. Most emphatically, it does not necessarily mean that which is bad. Sometimes of course it presents us with the very difficult task of learning how to manage negative emotions — which we have begun to consider.

We have spent some time looking at this phenomena of 'shadow' which affects all our lives, and questions have been raised about the efficacy for us, given our concern with spirituality, in doing so. Primarily we do so because, like the constellations of stars in a night sky, our unconscious (or shadow), contains points of light – aptly called 'scintillae' – which repay close attention and, just like stars which fade away in daylight, would not otherwise come to our notice. These 'light' spots often take the form of dreams which, when understood, can be very helpful in correcting a conscious attitude to our everyday world which has become too extreme. Sometimes we have deeper dreams which may contain archetypal elements which the psyche needs to integrate. Sometimes, we may even be graced with a vision which affects our whole life. We are all familiar with the Three Kings of the Christian nativity story who, inspired by a visionary dream, set out to follow a bright new star which had appeared in their night sky. They were successful because they did not allow their 'kingly' status to get in the way. Surrendering to something greater than themselves they allowed the 'unknown' to lead them. Similarly, meditators who have practiced their art for some time know they have to learn to surrender any ego expectation or wish to control and allow their mantra to lead them into the unknown.

The issue really is not WHAT is seen — light or dark, positive or negative, beautiful or ugly — but WHO is seeing. Creation is made up of opposites which depend for their existence on remaining linked together. Just as you cannot separate day and night, neither can you separate love and hate, sorrow and joy, good and bad. The ONE who sees all this endless variety without making any preference or choice is the Absolute or Atman within. Shantanand Saraswati, the teacher of Advaita, chosen by the Society as its Teacher after a search first put in train by Ouspensky before he died, says: 'We wonder how Param-Atman, who is good, could allow bad things to happen. But good and bad are just comparative notions. There cannot be anything good without something bad by contrast. The way to get over this is to dissociate ourselves from the events viewed, and associate ourselves with the viewer of the events — the Param Atman. Param Atman is everything; He is friend as well as enemy; He is the saint and the householder; the beast and the man; He is sorrow, attachment and everything else'.

The power to discriminate, make choices and plan what we wish to do, is the one attribute which distinguishes *homo sapiens* from the rest of the animal kingdom. Yet this power to choose results in endless difficulties for us all especially when it is in the hands of the ego with its rather limited scope of vision. Besides, current evidence supplied by neuro-science is reinforcing the teaching of Advaita non-dualism in questioning the very basis of that so called 'free will' which the ego is so fond of asserting. So finally here is a story about Gawain, one of Arthur's Knights, who learnt the power of surrender:

At one point in his Knightly adventures Gawain was betrothed to what he first took to be a fair damsel but on closer acquaintance turned out to be a witch with supernatural powers. Consequently the relationship continued on an uneasy footing until one day his wife proposed something which placed Gawain in a painful double-bind. She said; 'You must decide which you wish me to be: beautiful in daylight but a hag at night, or, wonderfully desirable at night but hideous by day'. After pause for thought Gawain replied; 'alright, but you can choose'. His wife smiled and said sweetly, 'in that case I shall be beautiful both by day and by night'.

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