

Why study the universe and its laws?

Every system of philosophy and every serious student at a certain stage of their work or development must come to the conclusion that it is impossible to study man without the study of the universe, exactly as it is impossible to study the universe without the study of man. 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 teaching 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.

Any teaching about a 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 joins with the Truth existent in oneself. The point of a model is to clarify the intellect and the emotions. For many people it is necessary first to convince the mind before the emotions can be lit up. Both faculties must be purified with true knowledge before the union of head and heart can take place. A model must be used in this practical way; if it is just a subject for discussion its real value is lost.

In its original exposition this System focused on the incompleteness and mechanicalness of ordinary human beings living in a region of the universe remote from the influence of the Absolute. The presence of 'real I' if not entirely denied was regarded as a distant object almost impossible to attain, and then only by great effort and suffering. This emphasis was frequently discouraging and even damaging to genuine aspiration. It is not entirely untrue but there is another side to the story.

In 1947 Mr Ouspensky told Dr Roles to reconstruct the System for himself and to search for its source, which, in its psychological aspect, Mr Ouspensky had come to regard as incomplete. When in 1960 Dr Roles met the practical system of Advaita as taught by HH Shantanand Saraswati he recognised it, and the being of the man who taught it, as the source and completion he had long sought. This brought about a great change in our teaching of the System; though 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 the mainspring of every individual's existence.

“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 this is not a conscious union.”

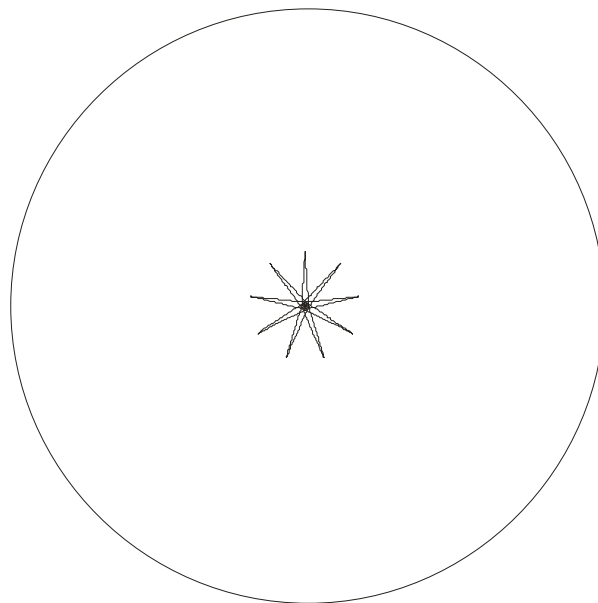
(HH Shantanand Saraswati 31/10/77)

So 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 is described as a progress of shedding unnecessary limitations 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—we cannot do it unless we go into meditation. 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 22/09/75)

The first figure to demonstrate this relationship is simply a circle which is of course entirely dependent upon its centre. Without the centre there would be no circle at all. To begin with we can consider the centre to be pure consciousness, “real I”, and the circumference to be the succession of all our mechanical little “I's”, each of which however is constantly and directly connected from the circumference to the centre by a radius from any point.



This figure can equally be used to represent the Absolute at the heart of creation, surrounded by the whole of creation itself. The aim for this term is to show how the figure can be elaborated to

demonstrate how infinite unity becomes infinite diversity both for the universal and the individual being.

These two ideas, “the Absolute is constantly immanent in me” and, “Real I is infinitely remote from me”, constitute a paradox whose resolution can only be found in a larger context. As we read last term:

“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.”

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