

BEING

Whatever one's aim, be it self-knowledge, happiness, higher states of consciousness or just to be in some way a better person, it is pursued within the context of one's being. And what is that?

In this paper we regard individual 'being' as arising from the range of energies which we take in, transmute and transmit. This is of course an immensely subtle and complex process; one simple way to look at it is to liken 'being' to a light bulb. The greater the capacity of the filament to accept the current, the more the power of consciousness can flow through it—and the brighter we shine.

As human beings, we are said to have a wide field of possibility, depending upon which aspects of our endowment, which of the energies at our disposal, emerge as the centre of gravity of our being. Tradition suggests that this range of possibility is as wide as the universe in which we find ourselves. Human beings are represented as microcosms, each individual a true reflection of the macrocosm which supports it—as in "God made man in His own image".

How do we reconcile this extraordinary idea with the realities of our everyday experience, which cannot but suggest that only a minute fraction of our endowment is ever realised?

The Western System regards individuals as seeds — and nature, as we know, is careless, even profligate with seeds, only a tiny proportion of a vast output ever attaining full development and transformation. This begs the question as to what is the real value of undeveloped 'human' seeds. Different traditions suggest different answers.

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Both Western and Eastern systems accent the necessity of self-observation as prerequisite to any development of being. Attention and self-knowledge—awareness of oneself in the moment—can be seen as analagous to the light and water required for any seed to develop. And this light reveals to us both the limitations we have to transcend and the direction in which real development can be found.

One of the first limitations we observe is the illusion of free will—we cannot simply be what we like, we are imprisoned in our being as it has become. The System points out again and again the mechanicalness of our being—how, in the state of waking sleep or identification, successive small 'I's' take the stage in the course of every day to play out a drama in which we have very little control. Advaita confirms this, albeit in a gentler way.

H.H. One of the fundamental characteristics of life on this earth is the worldly illusion of being the independent doer—of having free will. It is very difficult to maintain that individuals are the doers of anything, for the whole creation is a manifestation of the Absolute who is the real Doer.

One branch of modern philosophy, 'structuralism', also emphasises this point. It shows that the social structures present in language, and the cultural framework and beliefs that underlie all our thinking and emotional response, leave very little room for free-will. We like to imagine that we have

our own individual thoughts and our own precious feelings — but mostly all these are merely reflected from the greater ‘context’ within which we experience our being. Neurology also shows how often a mental decision to act is *preceded* by the neural impulses which cause that action. A ‘conscious’ decision is often *consequent* to its unconscious neuro-physiology, not the other way around. And this process can equally apply to important, ‘intellectual’ decisions as well as simple physical and emotional actions.

We really don’t like this idea and it usually gets sidelined in our thinking. Like a dog seeing a large cat blocking its path, we feign ignorance, avert our gaze and pass by on the other side of the road. But unless we do somehow decide to face up to the reality of our mechanicalness and are courageous enough to confront it and hold it in the light of our attention, nothing will ever change. Following this observation something of the conviction of our own self-importance needs to shift.

So it is only too possible to accept the *theory* of mechanicalness without it having any effect on our being. But if we can understand the idea to the point where it becomes a reality then we find ourselves freed from a huge range of negative emotion. Guilt, indignation, irritation, fear, dislike, the whole gamut of ‘hurt’ feelings etc., can simply become redundant and so allow the enormous amount of energy these mechanical manifestations consume, every day, to be employed in quite a different direction. This is where development of being really begins.

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The Western System points out two more important ideas about being. The first is that our level of *understanding* is decided by the relationship between our knowledge and our being. Part of what this means is that our knowledge can only become practical when supported by the necessary level of being. Being is concerned with ‘will’ and the power to do—we can only act according to the power inherent in our individual being.

The second point is that human being is generally thought to be in an arrested state of development due to the fact that personality grows at the expense of essence. And essence refers to the more emotional aspect of our nature as shown by modern studies of the difference between the two frontal hemispheres, active and passive.

So it is possible to say that growth of being, particularly for people belonging to a modern Western culture, depends more upon emotional development than upon any further acquisition of knowledge, of which it is likely that we all have plenty enough to be going on with. In this regard we may consider it necessary to distinguish between the emotional faculties of the three lower centres, which, whether we like it or not, are largely mechanical, and the realm of emotion to be found in higher centres. (The lower three centres are the Moving, Instinctive and Sex Centres, which were for convenience rolled up into one Moving Centre in recent papers).

Emotion, by derivation, means ‘to move out of’. But out of what? One way to distinguish our progress is to see which of our emotions moves us out of a state of attention, back to mechanicalness, and which do the opposite—rouse us from the waking sleep of habitual identification into a better state of consciousness. It is interesting—difficult but necessary—to observe, impartially, our emotional reactions when a particular desire is thwarted. The level of

response in this situation—how childish or otherwise is the feeling generated—is a good indicator of our level of being.

So one of the methods to effect an improvement in level of being is likely to be centred around the transformation of mechanical, or negative, emotion into positive. And this cannot usually be achieved without some degree of what initially we feel as pain or suffering. Once again, these teachings present an uncomfortable reality which in the ordinary way of things we are not usually willing to face—and again, the Western System presents this truth in a paradox:

“Nothing can be attained without suffering. But at the same time one must begin by sacrificing suffering. Now, decipher what this means.” (*ISM* p. 274)

Here lies one of the virtues of ‘devotion’. If our capacity for conscious attention is insufficient to stay the course—if we simply cannot develop enough will to bear the stillness of the moment long enough for this itself to have a transforming effect—another approach is to give up the illusion of being ‘the doer’ by acknowledging that *everything* comes to pass by virtue of some higher being. We simply observe, and accept whatever is presented and wonder at the mystery of it all. Here, the water that nourishes the seed can be represented as love, or positive emotion.

But devotion is not an easy way out. First, it is said that it must be consistent—sporadic and convenient devotion is of little effect—and secondly it requires the same or an even greater degree of attention and observation as the ‘intellectual’ way. But the necessary effort can be inspired and held by a loving impulse rather than an act of personal determination.

No wonder so few of us really become very different and that so many of those rare few we have known who did succeed in ascending to a higher level of being came eventually in later life to espouse the devotional way.

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Experience under Ether

"I wondered if I was in a prison being tortured, and why I remembered, having heard it said that people 'learn through suffering,' and in view of what I was seeing, the inadequacy of this saying struck me so much that I said, aloud, 'to suffer is to learn.' With that I became unconscious again, and my last dream immediately preceded my real coming to. It only lasted a few seconds and was most vivid and real to me, though it may not be clear in words.

"A great Being or Power was traveling through the sky, his foot was on a kind of lightning as a wheel is on a rail, it was his pathway. The lightning was made of innumerable spirits close to one another, and I was one of them. He moved in a straight line, and each part of the streak or flash came into its short conscious existence only that he might travel. I seemed to be directly under the foot of God, and I thought he was grinding his own life up out of my pain. Then I saw that what he had been trying with all his might to do was to *change his course, to bend* the line of lightning to which he was tied, in the direction in which he wanted to go. I felt my flexibility and helplessness, and I knew that he would succeed. He bended me, turning his corner by means of my hurt, hurting me more than I had ever been hurt in my life, and at the acutest point of this, as he passed, I SAW.

"I understood for a moment things that I have now forgotten, things that no one could remember while retaining sanity. The angle was an obtuse angle, and I remember thinking as I woke that had he made it a right or acute angle, I should have both suffered and 'seen' still more, and should probably have died.

"He went on and I came to. In that moment the whole of my life passed before me, including each little meaningless piece of distress, and I understood them. This is what it had all meant, *this* was the piece of work it had all been contributing to do.

"I did not see God's purpose. I only saw his intentness and his entire relentlessness toward his means. He thought no more of me than a man thinks of hurting a cartridge when he is firing. And yet, on waking, my first feeling was, and it came with tears, 'Domine non sum digna,' for I had been lifted into a position for which I was too small. I realized that in that half hour under ether I had served God more distinctly and purely than I had ever done in my life before, or than I am capable of desiring to do. I was the means of his achieving and revealing something, I know not what or to whom, and that to the exact extent of my capacity for suffering.

"While regaining consciousness I wondered why, since I had gone so deep, I had seen nothing of what saints call the *love* of God, nothing but his relentlessness. And then I heard an answer, which I could only just catch, saying, 'Knowledge and Love are One, and the measure is suffering'--I give the words as they came to me. With that I came finally to into what seemed a dream world compared with the reality of what I was leaving..."

Quoted from William James, *The Variety of Religious Experience*