

Clouds

Rows and floes of angel hair
 And ice cream castles in the air
 And feather canyons ev'rywhere
 I've looked at clouds that way

But now they only block the sun
 They rain and snow on ev'ryone
 So many things I would have done
 But clouds got in my way
 I've looked at clouds from both sides now
 From up and down, and still somehow
 It's cloud illusions I recall
 I really don't know clouds at all
 [*Both Sides Now*. Joni Mitchell]

The quotations in last week's paper were from audiences with the Shakaracharya in 1974. He talked about how one could go deeper through any of the centres – physical, intellectual or emotional: “To be on the deeper levels is to be in the purified states of these three types of function.” He stressed the importance of the realm of emotion: “For that the meditation has been prescribed.” He also talked of help through faith – Shradhā – “and that is held in the emotional body of the individual.”

But whatever the centre, ‘clouds get in the way’, just as he had described in earlier audiences, in 1963-4.

One must decide certainly to keep this thing in mind, that no System of Knowledge gives anybody Self-Realization, it only leads to Self-Realization. The barrier between you and the realization of Self are the things which we have termed as ‘cloud’. The System and the Knowledge, both, are only aimed at breaking those clouds, and once those clouds are broken and you've become free of them, then everything is left only to you to see, because there won't be anything to hinder you. Nobody in the world, neither Realized Man nor a System, nor any Knowledge, can give you Self-Realization. You will get it all yourself. All this which we try to do is only to remove all those impurities and cloud and sheath and mist, so that you become free. [*Record 8.9.64*]

In meditation he said that three things got in the way:

Mala, Avarana and Vikshepa – Impurity, Cloud and Dispersion. Impurity is that which mixes with the substance and makes it look bad and ugly; the dirt, impure mechanical thoughts surround the mind and hinder meditation. Cloud is like a sheath. This is ignorance, maya, misunderstanding, taking one thing for the other. . . The third [dispersion] is the tension – it is caused by movement (mechanical thinking). [*Record 13.8.64*]

It is the cloud that hides the sun:

The Atman within is the same as that outside, which is the Absolute. It is of course surrounded by wall, cloud, mist or sheath. Once this cloud is dissolved, then the connection within and without will be readily available. The meditation is a means to an end. Once this connection of within to without is realized, the meditation will not be necessary. [*Record 28.8.64*]

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Later, the Shankaracharya went into more detail about clouds or sheaths. According to the Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy, “the individual self is enveloped within five subtle bodies: physical (annamaya), vital (pranamaya), mental (manomaya), consciousness (vijnanamaya) and bliss (anandamaya).

R. quoting from “Crest Jewel”:

“When the five sheaths are removed because of their unreality, I do not see, O Master, that anything remains but universal negation. What then remains to be known?”

H.H. The third section speaks about the five sheaths – Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, and Anandamaya. These are the five sheaths which surround the Self, the Atman. Ordinary men think that this body, which is made out of food, is the ultimate. They try to look after it and have no sense to go further. Or, at the most, they try to take care of the Pranamaya Kosh (sheath) which is supported by air and water. These are the two limits which common men usually find. The third sheath, the Manomaya, is composed of Manas. We find that mind is always changing hither and thither, moving all the time. It is never the same. So it should be concluded that mind cannot be that individual which I am, but it is an instrument to serve that individual. And the same applies to the fourth one – Vijnanamaya – which works on the level of Buddhi. We know that even if one doesn't have Buddhi one still survives, and nobody uses Buddhi all the time. Sometimes it is still; sometimes it is in use; sometimes it is not in use. Then one looks upwards to the fifth sheath, the most subtle of all – the Anandamaya – composed of happiness; but then again, you find that happiness is also one of those elements which comes and you feel one with it, and then the atmosphere changes, circumstances change, and you go back to some other state. In fact, all these sheaths from gross to subtle are not that One who experiences. The disciple asks “What then is it which experiences?” That which is beyond these sheaths, that is Atman. [*Record 27.10.65*]

He remarked that “By meditation and Knowledge we pierce the sheath and cleanse the Being and get nearer and nearer”.

Perhaps the hardest point to grasp is that happiness, even bliss, may be part of the conspiracy that obscures the real self?

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Homework: please read the continuation of the last quotation (27.10.65):

HH (continued). Always and everywhere the Observer is present even if these five sheaths are experienced or not. There are five states of our consciousness – the awake, dreaming, sleep, unconsciousness and Samadhi. In three of those states – Samadhi, deep sleep, and unconsciousness (Moorchha) – there is very little experience. Although the five sheaths exist in these states, practically nothing is observed. Only in the awake (conscious) and the dreaming states do we have direct experience of these five sheaths. In Samadhi, it is only the consciousness in equilibrium that is experienced. Some weak persons experience the unconscious state, but here there is no experience of anything but ignorance. Among all these sheaths and states through which the individual goes, there is only one element which is not involved – the Observer, the Atman – which is Eternal. One should rise and go beyond the sheaths.

R. So Samadhi can come even whether the sheaths are still there? Is that so or not? “That by which everything is known, that which is not known by anything – realize, through the subtle intellect, that knower to be Atman.” (Crest Jewel)

H.H. It is a question of what remains absent in these five states. We are told that when we are awake we see the world made of five elements and our reactions follow accordingly, we go about our business and everything; but when we go into sleep, the dreaming state, then the scene might change. You might be sleeping in your room and you might dream that a tiger is chasing you and you are frightened to death, but when you awake there is nothing like that; or a poor man, dreams that he is getting plenty of money and feeling very happy, but when he gets up he finds nothing, and comes back again into the same miserable situation. These are two different states of our Being, but the experiencer is the same. Both during experiences in the conscious state and in the dreaming state – which are completely different states not related to each other – the experiencer is the same. When you go into deep sleep you remember nothing, you forget yourself completely. A dog or a king in sleep are the same, because a dog in sleep does not know it is a dog, and a king in sleep does not know that he is a king. When they come into consciousness, then they realize one that he is a dog and the other that he is a king. But when you come into the conscious state, you do get the glimpse that there was somebody who was sleeping who does not know what happened during the sleep. The knowledge of the ignorance is there, and there must be somebody to entertain this knowledge. In our unconscious state, which can be sometimes brought about by artificial means such as an anaesthetic under which operations can be done, the man would not experience anything – no pain or any experience at all, no sensation. But when he comes out of it, he knows that he is ignorant of anything whatever that happened in that state. These are the things which prove that in all the different states there is one element which is always there, and that is the element in question that is to be known, and that is beyond all these five sheaths. We are not considering the five sheaths as such; whether they are true or not true is a different subject altogether. Our question is, “What is it which is beyond everything and which has to be known; which seems absent but is always there?”