

THE JOURNEY

2. Ladders and snakes

What exactly is 'the journey'? There are many accounts of spiritual journeys: the Desert Fathers and later monastic traditions had their own approach of conquering the body, then the mind, and after that, in isolation, of finding God in deep prayer. There is the Yoga way—the eightfold path, specifying a sequence of actions, control of the body, then breath, then mind, then meditation. The Nyaya ladder of self-realisation is different from these in that it described the attributes of the seeker at the different stages rather than prescribing the methods. Here is a reminder of the first 5 steps:

1. SHUBHEKSHA A pious desire, longing, auspicious urge. The desire for liberation or unity by one who has some degree of attention as a result of his unselfish deeds and discipline in his life up to then. The manifestation is the start of an enquiry into one's own Self - a search for the Atman.

H.H. says: "This is the good intention, the rising up of right desire. This is the start which leads to:-

2. SUVICHARNA [Suvicara, right enquiry] good reflection, thought, investigation, circumspection. The act of investigation and thinking about all that one has gathered concerning the desire (1) for liberation or unity.

H.H.says: "The coming to a decision by which rationally (by reasoning) he comes to the point where he can go further without doubt. The Way appears to be in line with his intention and his conviction.

3. TANUMANSA [Tanu manasi, thread like attention] lessening of outward mental movements. Entry into the knowledge of Self. Regular practice in experience of the Unity of Self and Atman and righteous living leads the mind to go naturally inward rather than outward.

H.H.says: "When the particles in the body start the striving towards Sattva."

4. Fourth Stage or SATTVAPATTI - the dawn of true Self; having gone inward he comprehends his Self as it really is. The doubts and reflections cease and the real Self with right knowledge begins to appear.

5. The Fifth Stage, ASAUSHAKTI [ASAMSAKTI, detached insight: complete non-attachment to worldly objects], loss of attachment. After regular glimpses of the Real Self, the attachment of self to body or possessions fades away. At this point there remains no identification, association or attachment of self to anything else. [(also ASAKTA, unattached)]

About this H.H.said: "This stage denotes that the man starts looking at things as they are. He gets right values for everything; he realises about things what they are, how they are constituted, what their properties are. The fifth stage is that in which the person ceases to consider all that is in the world as outside himself. He starts getting glimpses of the fact that he and the "outside world" are one thing.

It is quite possible, even before the fourth stage, to have glimpses of the next stage ahead, but, as in ordinary education, you have to pass from Primary to Graduation stage by stage, just so you have to take these steps. Unless you pass one, you cannot go on to the next. Thus the completion of the fourth stage determines that the disciple does not turn back or leave the Work. The Realization of the fifth stage gives a feeling of unity with the material world - unity of spirit with materiality

This describes the journey on the scale of a lifetime, though of course it would be possible for a rare individual to climb the ladder in a short space of time. One big question is: how much of this has applied to us in our own lives? In a busy life, with all its thrills and spills, it feels at times as if one is on a snake rather than a ladder, and one may have to start again, just dependent on the throw of the dice of fortune. Though there never is a real new start, it seems more like a memory of the first time.

How much of it is ascribable to our efforts and how much is given to us by 'grace', the transcendent? Looking back, the first step at least seems to be a gift, often following a struggle.

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Some of us are nearer the end of our life's journey than at the beginning. There is perhaps a different experience from what was felt in our earlier life. There is not the same excitement, the same energy. On the other hand, if one is very quiet, there is the feeling that just over there, just the other side of the picture we see with our everyday eyes, is a vast ocean, and sometimes we are in it and we swim in the waters for a while and we know that it is reality.

The end of the Ibsen play *Peer Gynt* has a flavour about it of coming home, but to a home transformed. Peer Gynt, the perpetual wanderer, who seems to have no centre to him, after all his adventures at last returns to his true love, now blind, who has waited for him a whole lifetime:

PEER Lost! Unless you can answer riddles.

SOLVEIG Tell me them.

PEER Tell them! Come on! To be sure! Can you tell where Peer Gynt has been since we parted?

SOLVEIG Been?

PEER With his destiny's seal on his brow; been, as in God's thought he first sprang forth! Can you tell me? If not, I must get me home - go down to the mist-shrouded regions.

SOLVEIG Oh, that riddle is easy.

PEER Then tell what you know! Where was I, as myself, as the whole man, the true man? Where was I, with God's sign upon my brow?

SOLVEIG In my faith, in my hope, and in my love.

So, is there a real journey?

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