

FCR 1976-82

Attention

In the eight-fold yoga path of Patanjali, referred to in last week's paper, the sixth stage that has to be mastered before meditation can be commenced is Dharana, single-pointed attention. Through HH we are familiar with the story of the arrow maker, which comes from the Srimad Bhagavatam. Krishna, shortly before his death, imparts his wisdom to his disciple Uddhava. He tells a story about a medicant, identified with Dattatreya, the teacher of Patanjali. In the story, a king asks Dattatreya how he had attained freedom for the self. Dattatreya replies:

'I have taken shelter with twenty-four gurus, who are the following: the earth, air, sky, water, fire, moon, sun, pigeon, python; the ocean, moth, honeybee, elephant, the deer, the fish, the prostitute Pingala, the kurara bird (Hawk), the child; the young girl, arrow maker, serpent, spider and the wasp. My dear King, by studying their activities I have learned the science of the self.'

He then describes what he has learned from each of them; here is a literal translation of what he learned from the arrow maker:

'Thus, when the Chitta, the consciousness, is completely fixed on the Atman, one no longer sees anything inside or outside, just as the arrow maker who was so absorbed in the arrow that he did not even see the king himself, who was passing right next to him.' [SB 11.9.13]



The arrow maker of Dattatreya¹

HH had previously spoken about the difference in the nature of attention in a Realized Man.

. . . the Realised Man having the greatest attention, he can be doing anything in the world, but will have complete Attention. Even if he is in Turiya or in Samadhi he will have complete attention at his disposal . . . The ordinary man has no attention - floating attention - one moment here, next moment there. Neither here nor there. Their attention is always diverted from one point to another, which gives them no result! Without attention, he says, nothing can be done. This is a very, very important factor in the life of any aspirant or disciple . . . The attention of the Realised man is very free; it is not hard or close fixed, it is freely moving; whereas the attention

¹ <http://www.exoticindiaart.com/product/DI22>

of the learner has to be very appropriate; he must pull himself together to attend to the subject. [15.10.62]

Dr Roles spoke of the attainment of the 'third state of consciousness' through attention – a state above the ordinary states of sleep at night and 'relative sleep' by day. He referred to the Dhammapada 2nd Canto of Wakefulness:

Wakefulness is the way to immortality; heedlessness is the way to death; those who are wakeful die not, the heedless are already dead.

Continually increasing is the glory of him who is wakeful, who has aroused himself to vigilance, who performs blameless deeds, and acts with becoming consideration by means of self-restraint.

Let such a one, moving towards wakefulness through self-conquest, make for himself an island which no flood can engulf.

He also quoted from St. Hezychius in the Philokalia on 'Neepsis' which can be translated as 'wariness' or 'wakefulness' or 'attentiveness':

"Wakefulness is a spiritual method which, with the help of God, releases man completely from passionate thoughts and words and from evil deeds. It becomes continuous if practised diligently . . . Attention is a heart-felt rest from all thoughts . . . It is the steadfast fixing and stationing of thought in the door of the heart. It subtly sees and hears the thoughts that come to destroy the mind by fantasy. All these ways (he has described) keep off destructive thoughts as a doorkeeper keeps intruders away.

These seem closer to what we would call self-remembering than just attention?

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What are you supposed to do you do with your attention? How do you attend to the Self?

Q. It seems to be the important thing to have one thought at a time; and I therefore ask: How is it possible to give attention to the task in hand and at the same time to remember oneSelf?

Dr. R. . . . I think this is a mistake – a mistaken way of going about it. You do what you have to do, the task in hand; and you do it to the best of your ability – you do it just as it should be done, and with just the amount of energy required. You don't have to switch part of your attention on to yourSelf in any way. When you have finished the job, and before you plunge into the next job, remember yourSelf, collect your attention. But while you are into the next job attend to it with undivided attention. But just to begin with, for now, do it as well as you can. There is an old mistake that crept into followers and adherents of the System we studied – that you had to divide your attention – one arrow pointing to You and the other pointing to the job in hand. It does not work! In the Meditation you are 100% meditating; doing your job in ordinary life you are 100% doing your job. Is that clear? [78/1]

On another occasion Dr Roles said:

If you are doing nothing and your attention is free and you are silent inside—you are still, you have this stillness—then the Atman may reveal His presence to you. You can't

produce Him; you can't make Him come. But if you fulfil all the conditions, in due course if He thinks it is good for you, He will show Himself to you in some way or another. The thing is to get on really good terms with yourself, because your own Self is called 'the Son of the Father' like Christ in Christianity. And the Father here is called the Param-Atman—the same Self that lives in the hearts of all. [79/32]

Exercise. Next week we will return to self-remembering in the light of the diary exercise and its relation to attention and the Observer. So the suggestion this week is to note what kind of Observer is present, e.g. where physically located, how knowledgeable, and how close it is (or they are) to being an ultimate observer.

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There is little about the neurological basis of attention in Dr Roles's papers of this period, probably because the idea of an 'alerting system' in the brain stem – an idea he was very keen on – became unfashionable in scientific circles. It did, however, come back into fashion in the 1990s and we may deal with it at a future date.