

N. SRI RAM

CONSCIOUSNESS,
ITS NATURE AND
ACTION



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BLAVATSKY LECTURE
delivered at the Annual Convention of
The Theosophical Society in England
at Besant Hall, London
16 May 1964

THE THEOSOPHICAL PUBLISHING HOUSE
Adyar, Chennai 600 020, India • Wheaton, IL, USA

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Publishing House, Adyar

First Edition 2002

ISBN 81-7059-392-1

Printed at the Vasanta Press
The Theosophical Society
Adyar, Chennai 600 020, India

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Man is a being of life and consciousness, and in him consciousness has evolved to a point where it is capable of understanding its own nature and movements, as well as the nature of life as manifested in him. Such understanding, being direct, is the only real understanding. A person can know himself directly. All other things he knows only by impressions produced by them on him. He can know himself by paying attention to what takes place in his own mind, its reactions and relationships.

The essential nature of consciousness, as the word indicates, lies in merely being conscious or aware of whatever exists or takes place in relation to it. Even plants and insects are conscious, in their respective degrees, in ways which for the most part we do not understand. In man, consciousness has a range far beyond that of any animal and, further, he is capable of thought, which is a sort of superstructure raised on the ground of his basic awareness. The activities that

develop in the field of his consciousness, and the various changes that take place therein, eclipse and to a large extent suppress the underlying awareness. We hardly know what it is to be aware without thought, with a consciousness free of superimpositions and at peace with itself. Occasionally perhaps, when we happen to wake up from sleep not disturbed by the slightest trace of a dream, we may experience a state of being aware of what is around, without any thought at all.

In being merely aware there is no exertion of will or effort, but the activities of thought are either initiated or influenced by will, which is the individual's will. All particular acts arise, as we see in the physical world, from an impulse, and will is akin to that impulse; but no particular act of will is needed to be just conscious, that being the very nature of consciousness, just as no particular volition is involved in physical seeing unless one directs it to a particular target. There is only the general will or desire to be awake, to pay attention, to be conscious.

When there is no movement of thought, but only a state of being awake and attentive, whatever comes within that field is reflected automatically in the consciousness as in a mirror. But when there is the activity of thought, it diminishes the attention given to the object perceived, for that activity carries off some part of the energy needed for full attention. The confrontation of any fact, or full attention to it,

demands freedom from distraction, from interference with that process; and thought, which implies moving away from that fact to other things in one's memory, is a distraction. In such confrontation of facts there is objectivity and realism.

When we are completely aware, exposing the whole consciousness to the object that comes within its purview, that is a state of consciousness which might be described as negative, in the scientific sense. Such negativity is a state of pure reception such as that of a photographic plate, which has to be negative to receive impressions. The word negative is to be understood in the sense of being highly sensitive, and not as unsusceptible or indifferent, not as a vacant mind ready to be occupied by any intruder, possessed by any wandering ghost.

In a state of awareness in which all facts register themselves, there is no selection, but in the movements of thought the attention is directed to certain particulars; certain ideas are brought out from memory, and there is a choice of data, which are made the basis of a judgement or reasoning. Our thinking is often based on imperfect data, as also on wrong evaluation. Our consciousness being ordinarily divided, forces in the subconscious mind — that part the operations of which are not perceived — direct the conscious mind, determine its movements and give rise to action of a partial nature, often conflicting with itself. Such forces are our

wants, dislikes and fears and in stronger forms and greater intensity, ambition, envy, greed and so forth. It is only in a purely negative state, without any division caused by such forces, when the consciousness is fully awake, that it is alert and receptive to the full; for then the whole energy is in the reception and the consciousness is in full rapport with the object of its attention. Such a state of mind and heart is open to the actual, the truth. In this state there is no attempt or desire to escape from reality, no subjectivity that spells withdrawal of contact from the actuality of things.

When the mind is conditioned, as the minds of all of us are by various influences that play upon us from childhood, it is not in what we might call its own pure or natural state; it becomes quite different. The *Gītā* speaks of 'the field and the knower of the field'. Consciousness is obviously a field, an expanse or continuum like space, but instead of remaining homogeneous and smooth, it becomes, when worked upon by various forces, crumpled and distorted, stained and coloured, broken up in different ways, and then the pieces are put together by various forced adjustments. It then exhibits the nature of the forces that operate, not its essential nature, and their action is not the action of that nature.

Just as a person's physical vision can become terribly distorted, quite out of focus, and show colour-blindness, the mind can become distorted and

coloured, can imagine what does not exist, see facts out of perspective, and act unnaturally, which action is really various reactions. This is a condition in which it moves away from facts as they are, in which it sees only what it wants to see and believes what it wishes to believe. It is only when there is no distortion whatever, when the consciousness is in its unmodified state, that it can perceive what actually is, whether outside itself or within itself. Distortion of physical sight or of mind is a cause of illusion, though illusion lies also in accepting as a true representation a mental image different from but in some respects similar to the actual phenomenon, as in seeing a mirage in a desert or mistaking a rope for a snake.

The conditioning that the mind undergoes becomes the ground from which its ideas or projections arise, and it also produces the will or inclination to believe in their reality. Seeing rightly is seeing without any tinge of what is not, nothing entering into the process of perception extraneous to the object, and without thought modifying that process. In the case of clairvoyance, for instance, any subconscious idea or inclination will surely alter and colour what is seen. The mere effort can be distorting and alter the mechanism of seeing, for behind effort there is generally a motive and direction towards a predetermined end, of which the person may be quite unconscious.

The Samskr̥t word *ṛshi* used in India, means a seer. In ancient India the *ṛshi-s*, at least some of them, were said to be 'seers of the essence of things', the word essence here meaning that inner quality of a thing, the soul of it, which makes it what it is and different from everything else, not its mere appearance or form.

Life is nothing but consciousness completely conditioned by the organism it uses. In each organism it is a succession of states in which there is both experiencing and action, the capacity to experience and act being limited by the nature of the organism. In the early stages of development, experiencing consists only of physical sensation in great variety, along with the registration of pleasure and pain; later there are the psychological states based upon it, but even physical sensation is a form of cognition.

If the universe is regarded as consisting of Spirit-Matter, as a product of their interrelationship, of a certain polarity between them, both consciousness and life, which is a stream of conscious energy, have to be considered as existing potentially in Spirit and as derived from it, Matter being the means of their expression. The only relationship of Spirit, which is so subjective, is with the consciousness that apprehends it or lends itself to it in some manner. H. P. Blavatsky referred to this truth in the statement that consciousness is potentially spiritual. This is a

metaphysical view, which does not accept the conditioning which takes place as the basis of all reality. It is only in a consciousness entirely unconditioned that the nature of the Spirit can be known or realized.

When we form an idea of Spirit — or God — the image of it is a projection from our particular conditioning, a mind that has been shaped in a certain way, whether by the influences and ideas of a particular religion, by society with its particular beliefs and traditions, or by propaganda of any sort. The image consists of material already in the mind as ideas or experiences and is shaped by the forces that operate in it. When we postulate the existence of something we call Spirit, from which life and consciousness stream forth, it must be a living Spirit, life in a condition we cannot imagine, the very essence of life or livingness, also of the nature of consciousness, at that level unconditioned, and in a state of absoluteness.

In life as we see it in living organisms there is the movement of desire, the seeking of experience and a tendency to appropriate and use whatever is needed to maintain itself and to give it a sense of expansion. All this happens mechanically and characterizes the mind in its unawareness. There is in the nature of the mind, as we find it in ourselves, a seeking of fulfilment, which implies the existence of a void within itself which is sought to be filled. We seek the

stimulus of experience because there is a lack in ourselves which spells discontent and disturbs our condition. When we refer to life in its pristine state unconditioned by any process of time, we have to think of it as not seeking anything, as being fulfilled in itself but without being limited by that fulfilment. There is stagnation when the fulfilment is not in a spontaneous flow but in a saturated state, like the condition of a person when he is thoroughly satisfied. The nature of a mind attached to matter and sensation is poles apart from that pure awareness which is the intrinsic nature of consciousness and its action from that state.

Consciousness, as we may observe in ourselves, can be limited or extensive, superficial or deep, partial or total; we judge it by what we see of its nature in ourselves, but are ignorant of its real capacity. In the field of concrete things there can be awareness not only of those things, but also of the relations between them. These relations are physical, but there can be relations also between impressions or images in our minds. When we compare a certain phenomenon to another physically unrelated, as for instance lightning flashes to the branches of a tree, the relationship is created in the mind. It does not require thinking to take in the relation between things which are perceived as a totality; for the relationships are implicit; when we see the things, we see also the relation between them.

Awareness in Depth

There can be sensitiveness of a more subtle or deeper nature, such as to beauty, harmony, proportion, the expression on a face, and generally the significance that is deep in the nature of things. All this may be described as awareness in depth, and it is not the product of thought. When we argue about the beauty of a thing, the argument is generally confusing and turns into a matter of opinion. Ordinarily we are aware only of a few things superficially, and let others pass by. We are not in contact with this world and its riches, except partially. We have the capacity to be aware, but it is given little scope. We do not notice the beauty of a cloud or the movements of a leaf or bird and many other things of that sort. An artist is needed to paint a picture and point out the beauty. Even then we appreciate the picture more than the thing itself, the cleverness displayed in painting a sunset rather than the sunset itself. The negativity needed is a lending of one's heart and interest, but such negativity is not there when the mind is occupied with a process of thinking, with various comparisons and judgements, with what is said in the descriptive catalogue. Awareness in depth is only in silence of mind, a scintillatingly keen and sensitive state over which there are no clouds, no surface movements to and fro.

When we use the word depth in a psychological sense it refers to the experience of a response in ourselves. The feeling of depth lies in deep receptivity and action from the depths of consciousness and not merely from its surface. In listening to music there has to be physical silence to take in every note. But even more, there has to be silence in the consciousness that registers the notes. It is only in such silence that the significance of a note in relation to others is experienced. But it often happens that just a few notes or a certain phrase will recall something in the memory, and then the mind wanders off, as it usually does, by a series of associations; then the beauty of the music, its essence, is lost. If it is really beautiful music, one has to give one's heart to it and the heart must move with the notes.

We often regard the heart as the seat of the emotions, of personal reactions, but in another sense, as when we say that great thoughts spring from the heart, it signifies the deeper consciousness, the response of which is a revelation of beauty, also love. Training in music and mastery of technique do not by themselves evoke the sensitivity that belongs to those depths where there is a condition of silence. This condition is also poise, receptivity and tranquillity, and is needed to understand the complexities in ourselves as well as consciousness in its fundamental state. When the whole consciousness is like water

that reflects the landscape, clear and unagitated, then it is possible to see right to the bottom.

Consciousness is sensitiveness itself. We know it only under heavy limitations. It is obviously limited by the brain, but also by its own activities, the way it acts in its ignorance. This ignorance is of its own nature, of what happens to it when it is not awake, what it becomes, and is not of the external world. It is said of *ākāśa*, the Samskr̥t term generally translated as ether, that it is like space — it may be space itself — an all-pervading homogeneous substance unlike any other substance subtle and so extraordinarily sensitive as to be impressed by everything that has existence and everything that takes place, including the slightest movements of thought and feeling. More than this, it retains the record for ever. No one can reasonably say that such an all-pervading expanse or substance cannot exist in this miraculous universe.

The more the universe has been investigated, even in its physical aspect, the more complex and subtle it has proved to be. It is much more mysterious than it seemed even to Sir James Jeans when as Astronomer Royal of England he wrote *The Mysterious Universe*, in which he points out its resemblance to a mathematical thought. After all, there may be more things in heaven and earth than our philosophers dream of. It may be that in the fundamental, original state called *ākāśa*, matter and consciousness are one and the same; that the characteristics of both belong

to one substance, using this word, substance, in its literal sense, as what underlies the differentiations that develop in subsequent states. In this view this expanse is also the basis of our individual constitution.

These statements cannot be proved by any methods of science, but have to be considered on the basis of their plausibility, consistency with other facts of knowledge, and value in explaining the nature both of ourselves and the universe. Perhaps everything that has touched us in some manner is recorded deep down within us, just as so many impressions are recorded in our brains but we are unaware of them. There may be an underlying sensitivity masked by a surface mind that has become roughened and indurated.

The ordinary biologist regards consciousness as well as life as a product of matter or molecular combinations, but in a deep view the appearance may, in this case as in the case of many other natural phenomena, be contradictory to the truth. If life flows as individual streams, and each passes through and uses a succession of forms in the evolutionary process, then there can be an essentially unbroken evolution of individualities. The evolution of life is really an evolution of consciousness plus the evolution of the organization or form needed for its action, for the expression of what it holds within itself, its character. Without an organization which serves as a medium

there can be no action or expression; the energy must remain potential. The form has a significance of its own, apart from the organization, which is perceived by the artist.

It is a well-known saying that the eyes are the windows of the soul. One can see something of the nature of a person, his mood and his feelings, in his face, in the tone and inflections of his voice, his demeanour and movements. One's thoughts and feelings over a period of time, and even immediately if they are intense enough, change one's expression. Form is to some extent a revelation of the nature of the indwelling life and consciousness, which adapts itself to the form, yet changes it. Evolution is usually interpreted on the basis of biological changes, which are one aspect of the whole process. But in another and a more inward view of what takes place it can be seen to be the evolution of individuality, relationships and order, of capabilities, intelligence and sensibilities, of harmony and beauty, every aspect of the complex changes giving the process an increased significance.

We may think of life as essentially the same kind of energy wherever it operates, but it has this remarkable characteristic that it always flows through a definite channel, assumes an individual form, and is individual in expression and action. When the expression or form achieves a quality of beauty, the individuality manifests a new order of significance. A beautiful thing stands out and apart

from everything else. It has a quality that is brought out by its construction, a significance more than physical, whether it is a living form, a picture, a form of words or anything else.

If we can achieve a communion with the consciousness of the living things around us, even to a slight extent, feel it, be open to it, negative to it, as people do sometimes in primitive communities not intellectually developed, we shall realize the truth in Wordsworth's words that 'every flower enjoys the air it breathes'. Everything alive in Nature has different experiences but shows markedly the joy of living which comes from a flow of vitality, from movement and the exercise of its faculties. It has an intelligence which adapts itself to and operates in the particular conditions in which it exists. Its action and responses are based on instinct, not on thought, as is the case with us. We waver between one idea and another, but the instinct is fixed and sure. Every living thing, whether it is a tree, an insect, a bird or animal, has its own psychic nature or quality of consciousness, the word *psyche* being appropriate as denoting something individual and definite. It has been called the animal or *kāma-manasic* soul, to use the Samskr̥t terms which exactly describe its nature, *kāma-manas* being intelligence moved by desire or appetite. H. P. Blavatsky, in a footnote in *The Voice of the Silence*, speaks of three souls: the animal soul, the human soul, and the spiritual soul as aspects of one soul, or

as three different conditions in which what is called soul may exist. Consciousness in all living things, and in man up to a point, is swayed by appetites and desires.

Life is always dynamic. It grows, reproduces and evolves. There is change in every living organism from moment to moment, and according to the law of cause and effect. The energy that is life is behind this change. This energy flowing through an individual channel and, being of the nature of consciousness — for life is a stream of sensitivity and action — becomes tinged with the influence of the experiences it meets and develops habits of reaction to them. We see this in Nature. That nature which we call psychic in ourselves also acquires its colours and develops habits similarly. Evolution is as much of the psyche, which is an individualization of consciousness with a particular form and character, as of the body or organization.

Invisible Archetypal Form

The law of cause and effect is strictly deterministic. It underlies every change in Nature, yet in the universal process something new — new types, new species, new faculties — come into existence. Nature constantly improves upon an existing pattern; she surpasses herself. How is this achieved? The only satisfactory explanation for the appearance of something new which is outside the

capabilities of forces operating in a closed system — which every living organization is at its own level, in spite of its interchange with the external world — is that there are or must be other energies infiltrating or pouring into that system, of a nature calculated to produce that new quality or form. The concept of a Divine Idea — Divine in the sense of having already the nature of the perfection-to-be, a loveliness that seeks expression — of an invisible archetypal form through which the energies belonging to that Idea flow as they can into the existing form (meaning by form, also organization and pattern) seems to me to be most illuminating. The Idea, one of an infinite number, may be thought of as hovering over the processes in the evolving organization, or as embedded in it as a spiritual nucleus.

Look at a rose, which is so extraordinarily beautiful. It was not always the same pattern or quality of rose; perhaps in the processes of evolution there may be in future a more extraordinary rose. How does this approximation to a certain perfection, which is so noticeable, take place? The perfection is already there; it presides over the whole process in that organization. Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā*, speaking as the Divine Being immanent in all things, identifies himself with this perfection, referring to numerous different instances or types of it.

Life is an energy, obviously, operating at whatever level. There is the movement of life from

one condition to another. When we contemplate the consciousness of a living creature, its psyche, there is motion or change there too. The change in it can be traced to a psychic impulse or cause. In the realm of consciousness, what causes motion is either desire or love. We might say it can be will, but the will is generally the assertion of desire, a resultant from various forces of attraction, repulsion and modification operating in a complex manner in the ground from which the impulse or will arises. It is said in the ancient Indian books that in the beginning, that is, at the very origin of the cosmos, desire arose in the dawning Consciousness or Being which was the only One present. Desire always arises from memory of a previous experience, but when that dawning was the first event, when nothing had happened till then and there was no previous experience, how could desire arise? We have to understand *kāma*, the term used, as a certain movement akin to desire, but with no previous background, therefore spontaneously with no motive or consciously projected end.

Perhaps the word Eros originally had this meaning. When the consciousness, which consists in being just conscious, is moved by desire which springs from attachment, it assumes or creates the nature of the psyche. But if it is moved by love without any taint of self or desire, not based on a centre of egoism, then it is soul in the spiritual sense,

the soul having an unconditioned nature but charged with the pure realizations and responses that constitute its awakening and unfoldment.

Although life and consciousness are in essence the same, there is an important difference between them, as between water and air. Both are plastic; life adapts itself to the body as water adapts itself to the configuration of a river bed, a simile used by Bergson, but loses its freedom in doing so; consciousness is infinitely more plastic, not bound to the organization as life is. In us consciousness merely uses the organization, namely, the body and the brain, as a basis. It can assume any form, mould itself into any image. Basically it is like *ākāśa* or is one with *ākāśa*. The consciousness of an evolved human being can be so extraordinarily sensitive, subtle and swift in action, with a quality of loveliness and also a tension that is capable of resonance, that it either has the same nature as *ākāśa* or assimilates itself to it. Curiously enough, it can also show the characteristics of earth, water, air and fire, the other 'elements', using the word element in the sense of something of a distinct and fundamental nature or category in the constitution of the universe, as used in the ancient philosophies.

We come across people whose minds are flint-like, so rigid that one can make no impression on them. Even without developing such extreme hardness, there can be fixations in the mind hard to

remove. Consciousness which is fluidic acquires, by a process of continuous attachments when in a state of unawareness, a rigidity which is alien to its own fundamental nature. Instead of flowing like water, it becomes frozen like a block of hard ice. It absorbs ideas, contracts habits, and these create a certain structure, which we call the mentality of a person. The structure is really a frame within which there can be a certain fluidity which can transmit pressure like water. If a person is pressed in one direction, he can take it out on another. He may be insulted by his superior in office and, being unable to retaliate, he vents his anger on a subordinate or on the child at home. Of course, this is totally irrational, but it takes place mechanically, without any free intelligence coming into the picture. When a person cannot have one kind of satisfaction, he can find compensation in another, as is also well known. Consciousness can also be subtle as the air, or glow like fire with love or enthusiasm. All this shows its protean nature, corresponding in its different moods and actions to different conditions and phenomena of matter.

Further, it can enlarge and contract, be open completely to everything or include many things, or concentrate on one thing. There is in it a dual direction. It can turn outward to things of the external world, or inward to its memories, ideas and emotions; in other words, be objective or subjective, and the two movements are related. A person may seem to be

wholly outward-turned when there is an unconscious subjectivity which builds up and causes the outward-turned movements. It is attachment to and the influence of one's memories which cause both desire and fear. Desire is the demand for repetition of certain experiences, and in its general form of thirst for sensation or experience it is the driving force behind reincarnation. Fear, even when it seems like fear of the unknown, is really a reflection or projection from something known, already in one's experience.

According to my understanding — I have to speak in this qualified manner, as I am merely attempting to understand — memory is not a faculty, which is capacity for action in a particular mode similar to a technique; it is the very nature of consciousness itself. Consciousness is such an extraordinary thing, neither like matter nor like Spirit — both of which are perceived or realized only in one's consciousness — but it can partake of the nature of either. It is like Spirit in essence and in its knowingness, like matter in assuming form and retentiveness of impressions. In its pristine nature, which does not lend itself to any outer influence, no action from without can cause any change that is not assimilable with that nature.

Life, when seen as a succession of states bound by causation, a law that rules in the field of matter, shows the nature of a modified continuity. Life has to go along with matter, but consciousness, being

inherently free, can either be swayed by matter, that is, by conditions of matter, or be free of it, which freedom may be thought of as affiliating itself to the Spirit. Consciousness, though itself formless, is like matter, in so far as it has the nature of a substance that is capable of being moulded by outside influences when it is not awake to that process. We are all so influenced. A child becomes eventually a Catholic, a Communist or something else, according to the influences to which he has lent himself. He is so much clay to be moulded, when in a state of unawareness, when he allows himself to be involved in a mechanism of reactions, his free intelligence not coming into play. Real freedom is stepping out of this mechanism, the automatism established in the process of our thinking and emotions, in our relationships with things and persons. This automatism is action in a dream-like state.

Consciousness can be in one of three states: waking, sleeping in which there is dreaming, and deep sleep in which there is no dreaming at all. In dreaming it is what is imprinted on the brain or on the consciousness which comes into play irrationally, because it is not sufficiently awake to be cognizant of the logicity, the appropriateness of things, of how things take place actually. When we are awake, the impact of the objective world around us keeps our thinking in a state of general conformity to it; we

cannot act as though we are in the world of *Alice in Wonderland*. But in so far as the automation of one's psychological state, the very centre of which is the 'self', comes into play, it is a condition of dreaming which obtains in the midst of the waking. If the person is not fully awake, the action is from the imprints. It is what the world has put into him by ways brutal, seductive and subtle which is in action, not that pure consciousness which knows the imprints for what they are, mere recordings, and sheds them by not being attached to them. The memories are still there, but they do not dominate or enclose — which enclosure is the 'self' — they are no longer the shades of a prison-house but turn into an open landscape. We think what is in the mind is subjective, but the images in the mind are also objective. All thought is image-making, object-building in the field of the pure consciousness which, divested of everything except its own nature, is the pure subject.

It is the pure subject, having nothing in it of the past, nothing due to the processes of time, not desiring, not seeking, not projecting, which alone knows the Truth. An opinion or view is not the truth. On the question of beauty, for instance, there can be two opinions as to whether a thing is beautiful. The opinion depends upon or is influenced by what gives pleasure and stimulation, or on one's conditioning. One's taste in the matter of eating is according to

one's conditioning. But is there not such a thing as true beauty, irrespective of opinions which are shaped by so many adventitious factors? It is that pure subject, its pure nature, which knows unerringly what is truly beautiful. It has in itself the test or touchstone of truth, of true virtue, true morality and all other things which are beautiful in more than the physical sense. In one aspect it is a pure expanse, the mirror of truth, but in another it is a dimensionless point, the centre of the spiritual individuality, from which radiates at each moment action of a specific nature or in a specific direction, according to the nature of the object or situation that challenges its attention. I am using the word action to include thought, feeling, love, whatever change is caused in any relationship, the electric flow which connects two such points.

This dimensionless point is not a centre of attachments, it holds nothing, it is not the 'self' which describes a circle around itself, separating itself from others. It is nothing in itself except that which springs from it as a creation or as forces capable of creation. It is a centre for the outflow of life as a pure energy, branching out from that point as from an unseen root into a world of truth and beauty. The consciousness in its aspect of a pure expanse turns into a medium or becomes the body of the Spirit. The individuality, the very substance of which is consciousness, becomes a tree of life and wisdom,

or we might imagine it as a blossom from the unknown Root. All these similes are but suggestions to our understanding.

The nature of pure Being — the word implies both life and consciousness — or *a* pure being such as the Buddha, is such an unearthly flower, so sensitive, beautiful and perfectly composed, and at the same time a being of truth, life and wisdom, which is the literal meaning of the word Bodhisattva. Such a nature is worlds apart from that of the mind as it operates in us. This mind is really adapted to deal with the world of matter and the differences which exist there. Its attention is directed to particulars and it understands them as they are in relation to one another, by comparison. The mind is *manas*, as distinguished from *buddhi*, which is usually translated as spiritual intuition.

Buddhi: The Instrument of Spirit

Manas and *buddhi* are regarded in Indian philosophy as two distinct principles in the constitution of man, though what *buddhi* exactly signifies has been interpreted variously. *Buddhi* may be regarded as the medium or instrument of Spirit, the word Spirit meaning not something which one can identify, but something that sums up an infinity of aspects and expressions. *Manas* thinks, reasoning step by step, however swiftly, moving through a series of images that take shape from instant to

instant from the material of memory. It knows things only from a distance, by the translation of vibrations into sensations and feelings, by interpretation, using the symbols of images or words as a substitute for facts. It thus knows only the appearance or form of things, and can know the nature of life only by comparison, inference and imagination. We observe the movements of a living creature and attribute to it certain feelings or motives by imagining the feelings or motives which in us would prompt such movements. The mind has constantly to suppose, to hypothesize, in order to bridge the gap between the facts it observes. Modern science bases its achievements almost entirely on calculations in terms of symbols. From its point of view, the universe as experienced by us is incidental to its equations, its symbolic language. The mind only moves towards truth; it is not actually on the spot and one with the object to know it in truth. Because it is not the *whole* being, but only an instrument, there is not in the movement of thought from one fact to another, in linking them up, that feeling of reality which belongs to the action of the whole being — mind, heart and everything else in it — which we experience at rare moments in our lives.

Buddhi, as I understand it, acts entirely differently. If there is an intuition of truth or beauty, how does it arise? There must be some action in the entirety or body of consciousness preceding its

emergence. As the working of *buddhi* is the action of the whole consciousness, we might imagine the whole, which is the totality of one's sensibilities and capability for action, as a perfect and translucent sphere. This is a material simile, but one has to understand the action of *buddhi*, which is essentially formless, in terms that will explain it to the mind. Since the action is by the whole consciousness, let us imagine each point of the sphere, each a point of sensitivity, as moving towards the centre but each only a certain distance up to a certain point, and that all the points together then make round the centre a figure of absolute beauty. This figure is a creation of the whole consciousness. This form may be altogether invisible. There may be present only the beauty of it, the feeling which pervades it, the soul or essence of that form. The whole creation must be imagined as taking place in a flash and with the utmost spontaneity. It is not a process of assembling parts laboriously, but an instantaneous creation by an intelligence pervading the whole sphere and having the quality of a master artist. The movements are of lightning speed because of the extraordinary sensitivity; there is nothing to impede the action, there being no blockage, no tension, no fear, no attachments, no whirlpool of agitation, in that sphere. The movement is a movement in freedom.

It may be asked whether there can be really the possibility of such action within the nature of man.

There is a poor analogy in a phenomenon that we can notice in the human body. There are so many processes of the most diverse sorts taking place in it every instant, but all these are perfectly coordinated by an electronic intelligence which is not ours but Nature's, acting in and pervading the body. It is intelligence of the nature of an instinct. The action is precise, measured and mechanical, and results in the perfect well-being of the body. The intelligence which is *buddhi* produces not mere coordination, but harmony, which is of an altogether superior significance. It also acts with swiftness and precision, but with the sense and judgement of a master artist who knows without any thinking what is perfect beauty.

Intuition is not a hunch, not wishful thinking, but a faculty. It is like instinct, but there is a vast difference between them. Instinct is fixed and acts only in certain situations. It works mechanically. Its action is blind, elemental and repetitive. But *buddhi* is ever free; it moves in no fixed grooves. It is intelligence unconditioned, and creates newly every time. The development of thought in man has suppressed instinct. But when the whole mode of thinking becomes different, when it ceases to divide, to shape and alter the underlying consciousness, then the instinct of the earlier stages reappears with a superior nature as a capacity to know the truth and create the image of truth. When *manas* regains its

undivided state, it automatically integrates itself with *buddhi*, because there is only one consciousness in man, though it has these two modes of action. It is then a new consciousness, which has in itself the nature of truth and in its actions expresses the beauty of that truth. The newness has always been there, waiting to be uncovered.

In one of the ancient Sanskr̥t hymns, Purusha, the universal Spirit, is described as being in a state of ever being born and ever about to be born. Thus, it is indicated that its nature is the nature of creation and of the newly born, untouched by changes of time. The consciousness that realizes this nature retains its newness. It reflects the truth, it responds with the fullness of itself and is unageing. The change that has taken place is that it now stands in its own nature, having shed once for all whatever it had absorbed, contracted, built up and imagined in its ignorance. In the process of time it was continually acted upon and never itself. Now it is truly itself, fully awake and free, with a freedom that is the realized nature of its being.



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Man's consciousness has evolved to a point where it is capable of understanding its own nature, as well as the nature of life around it. We can also observe in ourselves that consciousness can be limited or extensive, superficial or deep, partial or total. But most of us are ignorant of its real capacity.

In this lecture, Mr N. Sri Ram, known for his deep understanding of philosophical questions, explores how consciousness loses its sensitivity and gets obscured, but has the potency of awakening into the full light of wisdom. He says: 'We do not notice the beauty of a cloud or the movement of a leaf or bird and many other things. An artist is needed to paint a picture and point out the beauty.'

How can we achieve communion with the living beings around us, and even to a slight extent be open to the truth and beauty which are inherent and omnipresent in life? This book offers insights into how the quality of our consciousness can be transformed so that it is constantly renewed, remaining open to the truth of life as it reveals itself.



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