

THE NEGLECTED PART OF MAN

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WHAT is the idea that we have of man? Usually it is that he belongs to a certain race, a particular country, a certain religion, a distinct community and so on. He is also known to be wise or dull, active or lazy, healthy or diseased, young or old, virtuous or wicked, suffering pain or enjoying pleasure and so on. Here the common man's idea about a human being reaches the blind alley, as it were. What is beyond that he either does not strive to know, or is ignorant of it.

Now, let us analyse this view: race, health, disease, youth, old age — all these — what do they represent? What do they indicate? A little thought will show that all these distinctions can be only of the body. Again, the country, indicates the situation of the body, and wealth and property bring to our mind material possessions. So in all these descriptions we think of man as a creature made of sinews, bone, flesh and blood and we add some more earthly goods, when we think of him as possessing wealth.

However, when we think of him as enjoying pleasure or suffering pain, when we impute to him wickedness, dullness or laziness or when we ascribe to him virtue, activity, or wisdom, we, of course, to a certain extent do not think of man as made only of the body. We unconsciously acknowledge something more in him. For instance, when we say that a certain act of a person pains one it is not the physical pain that is meant, but the feelings of the person. We can understand it better if we substitute the word grief or sorrow in place of "pain". Similarly pleasure is felt only in the mind. It is also a feeling. Likewise the feelings, compassion, hatred and so on, cannot be of the body but of something else; some will say that it is of the heart, whereas others will posit it as of the mind. Then there are the faculties of thinking and willing. Now, wherever these feelings may be located, it is conceded that there is something which is other than the body which resides in it and which does this feeling, thinking and willing. Thus far all agree; though some materialists may still persist that all feelings are also due to the changes in the brain cells. However what puzzles the materialist is that the body, though its brain cells remain intact, fails to respond to the stimulus however strong from outside, when that vital power, life, has left it. On the other hand, this gives the believer the idea that there is something

else even beyond the body, the senses and the mind, which dwells in the body, and makes it live and move.

Now, how can a common man know that there is something which is beyond the body and mind? Vedanta gives us the answer. It analyses man's states of consciousness. Mostly man is satisfied with his waking experiences. And most of the intellectuals even do not care to know about the sub-conscious which is active in the dream state and subtly forms man's character in his waking. It is like a store-house. The impressions that are received in the waking by thought, word and deed of a man go to make this store. And whenever occasion arises that particular impression springs forward and presents itself compelling man's attention to itself. And if man succumbs to these impressions repeatedly it forms into a habit and habit becomes nature in no time. So it is necessary that we should know about our own sub-conscious state as well. It is here that we should be careful, for this sub-conscious forms the basis, the foundation, of man's character. Patanjali says that when one's mind is not devoid of waves, modifications, the mind becomes of the nature of the modifications.¹ The importance of the subconscious in the formation of character, as well as in mental and physical ailments, to a certain extent, has now come to be recognized by the Western psychologists too. But this is sadly neglected by most, even among the intelligentsia.

There is another state says the Upanisad, which it calls *susupti*, where man does not desire anything, does not dream anything,² that is where not only his body, but all the senses along with the mind take rest.³ This is deep sleep. In this deep sleep man is not conscious of anything but after waking up he becomes aware that he had passed through a state which was 'blissful and where he did not know anything'. Let us probe a little into this experience which is every man's estate. When man says he was 'blissful and did not know anything', two experiences are perceived to go into the formation of that state, one as a corollary of the other. There is bliss and there is ignorance. Ignorance of what? Of the world. People are afraid when it is said that there is ignorance in this state. Even the advanced student of religion finds it hard to acknowledge this. In the Upanisads we find students even after living long under a teacher when asked to analyse this state have put forth their genuine doubt as to whether such a state can really be welcome, whether there is anything at all existing in that state. In the *Chāndogya Upanisad*, for instance, when Indra was taught, 'When a man is asleep, with senses withdrawn and serene and sees no dream — that is the Self',⁴ he was confused. He thought over his experience in that state and came back scared to the teacher and said, 'Venerable Sir, verily, in this state the Self does not know itself as "I am this", nor does it know these creatures. It

¹ Yoga Sutras; I.4.

² Mandukya, 5.

³ Chandogya, VI, viii.1.

⁴ Chandogya, VIII, xi.1.

almost amounts to annihilation. I do not see any good in such a state'.⁵ Yet who does not know that a dreamless sleep is the best invigorator for the body and mind, that it is the real restful state! Man also knows that there is bliss in that state. Yet, says the Upanisad, that is only the nearest approach to man's real nature that can be made by any living being. The real is far far above that. And that is the Atman. And that is to be seen.⁶ When man knows his real nature, when he realizes who he really is, he forgets all the world. So we see that real bliss is not in accumulating treasures here but in giving them up, in forgetting all about the world and being one with the Self. As in deep sleep, we have not a care, not the slightest worry, not any hankering, so when man realizes his real Nature he becomes perfectly care free, like a child. Now we may ask why is it then that it is equated to *susupti*? No, there is no question of bracketing the two. As an experience that is in the easy reach of every man, the state of *susupti* is cited as an example where there is no desiring, no dreaming, just as in the true nature of man in order to give an inkling into the nature of the latter. *Susupti* is also a state where unalloyed happiness exists — a happiness which is not induced by something from outside of the Self. But there the comparison ends. In *susupti* there is ignorance of both the world and of one's own true nature.⁷ But in the *turiya*, the fourth state, as the sages call the super-conscious state, there is knowledge and illumination. Ignorance has dropped off and that makes a great difference, as vast as between light and darkness. This fact should not be forgotten. If it is forgotten then we are certain to confuse the issue. The difference between the two, viz. deep sleep and the super-conscious is well brought out by Swami Vivekananda when he said: 'The super-conscious state cannot be described, but we know it by its fruits. An idiot, when he goes to sleep, comes out of sleep an idiot or even worse. But another man goes into the state of meditation, and when he comes out he is a philosopher, a sage, a great man.'

II

Now this part in us, the spiritual element, the soul, the Ātman, is totally neglected by us. We take care of the body, of our health. Even from our childhood that has been done for us by our parents. They might have passed sleepless nights at our bedside on occasions, they have also taken precaution to cultivate our mind. For no parent likes to leave his child to develop into a dunce. No effort, within their means, will they spare to prepare the child to face the world. And when grown up we also try to keep ourselves abreast of the developments that are taking place around us, so that we may not be termed backward. Nevertheless, all this is done to face the world, the outside world alone. The inner man's

⁵ Chandogya, VIII, xi.1.

⁶ Brihadaranyaka, IV.v.3.

⁷ Kaivalyopanishad, I.13.

hunger is not appeased. Rarely do we come across people who think of the welfare of their children from this spiritual point of view. The thought of the life's purpose is not inculcated in children, as it should be, with the result that a great void is left. Further, life in the present times has become mechanical and it swiftly rushes through as if on a supersonic aircraft. Man is aimless today. He has not the courage to face the consequences of failure in the world, nay he trembles at the very thought of it. Poverty even for the sake of religion he dares not accept. And this keeps him clinging to some source of income or other till his end. Naturally in this stormy weather it is impossible that man could devote his time to think of things higher. And to make life more complex, man's necessities go on increasing at a telescopic rate; luxuries become necessities overnight, and therefore to keep up with the tempo of the increasing wants, man's life is spent in ever more servitude till the call of death snatches him away. Where then can he find time to devote to his spiritual exercises?

However, man forgets that nothing real can be achieved without sacrifice. Young men nowadays go on adventurous expeditions. They climb hazardous steepes of the mountains, cross difficult terrain, face worst weather, frost, gale and all. Are not many lives lost in such expeditions? Are not some permanently disabled or disfigured during these adventures? If we look at this phenomenon, we cannot say that the spirit of adventure has been lost, only it has been misapplied, misdirected. They do not pause to think, 'What after all is our gain in these expeditions?' A little fame, a great ovation for once, or at the most a living for life. But then is that all that we came for into this world? Is that the aim of human life? Sri Ramakrishna says it is not. The aim of human life, he says, is God-realization, to know God; to see him; to see him not only in the Image but also in our very being, to be aware of His presence always, first in ourselves and then in everything. 'Only he who sees Me in everything and everything in Me, he does not lose My presence nor do I lose sight of him',⁸ says Sri Krishna. What is the meaning of God losing sight of us? It means that we do not put any barrier between the Lord and ourselves. Though it is not possible that we can hide anything from God yet we can hoodwink ourselves by ignoring His presence. That is what most people do. They ignore that Divine Being who resides in their hearts, and thus lose sight of Him. But when they get the vision of God back, there is no more delusion for them. That is what Sri Krishna means in this verse. The next sloka makes this clear, 'One who worships Me residing in all beings in a spirit of unity lives in Me, whatever be his mode of life.'⁹ Such a person is always conscious of his true nature, conscious of God's presence; then he loses his identity in God.

But man is afraid of attaining oneness with God. He is perturbed when he thinks of losing his identity, his separateness. Sri Gaudapāda,

⁸ Gita, VI.30.

⁹ Ibid., VI.31.

the grand-teacher of Sri Sankara, declares, 'Even advanced souls, yogins, are afraid of this *asparśa* yoga, which is difficult of attainment, for they see fear where there is really fearlessness.'¹⁰ So strong are our inherent tendencies, *samskāras*, that it is very difficult and painful to loosen our ties to this world, this body and the ego. Nevertheless, it is a fact that unless we cultivate a taste for the higher things these tendencies will bind us more and more and make us increasingly miserable. If, therefore, man wants to be rid of miseries he should strive to know his true nature.

How can it be done? The *Brhadāranyaka Upanisad* gives us the direction: 'Hear about it, cogitate over it, and meditate upon it.'¹¹ Another Upanisad says, 'Many have not the opportunity to hear about this. Many even after hearing do not understand it. Wonderful is the teacher of that *Vidya* (knowledge). And rare indeed is the student who grasps it when taught by a wise person'. That this is actually so we can know from the state of affairs in the world, not only of today but from the history of all ages and of all climes. How this is too true can be known from some incidents which Sri Ramakrishna used to narrate. People used to come to the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and among them some would go and stay to hear Sri Ramakrishna. But others, who accompanied them, after a time would begin to nudge their companions and ask, 'when will you go?' The devotees who were all attention to the Master would just sign to them to sit quiet. But after some time they would again prod and then would say to them, 'You can come when you like, we shall wait for you in the boat'. Does it not look strange? But that was what actually happened. So deep were the tendencies, that they could not bear even talk about spirituality. And if such *samskāras* are to be uprooted, it should be done when people are still young, when habits have not yet been formed, when resolution and strength can be utilized to curb their taking any ugly form. Then only can one be sure of detaching oneself from one's desire for mundane things and attending to one's Ātman. It is like the bending of a supple bamboo pole, when tender, to the required shape. It can easily be done. But once the pole matures you can do nothing with it except use it as it is. It is hard to master these tendencies, and very difficult it is to know our real nature. Does not Sri Krishna say, 'Among thousands of men one possibly endeavours for perfection, and among those that endeavour (one perchance becomes perfect) and even among the perfect, one possibly knows Me in My true perspective'?¹² Sri Ramakrishna used to sing a song, of a Tantric mystic, Ramaprasad, very expressive of the situation:

*'In the world's busy market place,
O Shyama, Thou art flying kites;
High up they soar on the wind of hope,*

¹⁰ Mandu

¹¹ Br.Up., IV.v.3.

¹² Gita, VII.3.

*held fast by Maya's string.
Their frames are human skeletons,
their sails of the three gunas made;
But all their curious workmanship is merely
for ornament.
Upon the kite-strings Thou hast rubbed
the manja-paste of worldliness.
So as to make each straining strand
all the more sharp and strong.
Out of a hundred thousand kites, at best
but one or two break free.¹³*

You may be wondering what the neglected part of man has to do with God! It has everything to do with Him. If you are a dualist you are His servant and therefore remembering the Lord makes you conscious of your spiritual entity. If you are a qualified monist you are a part of the Lord, remembering the Lord you remember also your real relation to Him. Lastly, if you are a non-dualist you know that Ātman and Brahman are non-different and remembering about Brahman you know about the Ātman.

Therefore, as we tend our bodies, and cultivate our minds, take care of our wealth and do all other things in the world outside, so must we also look after our inner Being. For it is the source of all virtues. Grounded in it the virtues do not fail us. Apart from it, though we may develop some good qualities, when faced with tribulations the seeming virtues will wear off like the coating of a gold-plated ornament. Man today feels forlorn because he has neglected his inner Being. Let him try to remember his Self and work on, he will then find everything falling into its proper place again.

¹³ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p.64.