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THE NATURE OF THE SELF

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

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THE SELF**

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The 25th of April 2022 marks the auspicious occasion of the Birth Centenary of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj. To commemorate this sacred occasion, the Headquarters Ashram has decided to bring out booklets comprising the illuminating discourses of Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj for free distribution.

Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj arrived at the holy abode of Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj in 1944, and remained here until his Mahasamadhi in November 2001. Swamiji Maharaj was a master of practically every system of Indian thought and Western philosophy. "Many Sankaras are rolled into one Krishnananda," said Sri Gurudev.

Over the years, Swami Maharaj gave many profound and insightful discourses during Sunday night Satsanga, and on holy occasions such as Sri Gurudev's birthday, Sri Krishna Janmasthanami, Mahasivaratri, etc., and also during Sadhana Week and Yoga Vedanta Courses conducted by the Yoga

Vedanta Forest Academy of the Ashram. Sri Swami Maharaj always spoke extempore, spontaneously, without any preparation, and every discourse was fresh, unique, and divinely inspired. The audience was bathed in that stupendous unfathomable energy that radiated from Swamiji Maharaj during these discourses.

We are immensely happy to bring out some of Sri Swamiji Maharaj's discourses in booklet form as our worshipful offering at his holy feet on the blessed occasion of his Birth Centenary.

The present booklet, **'The Nature of the Self'**, consists of an illuminating discourse by Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj addressed to the students of the Yoga-Vedanta Forest Academy.

May the abundant blessings of the Almighty Lord, Sadgurudev Sri Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj and Worshipful Sri Swami Krishnanandaji Maharaj be upon all.

—The Divine Life Society

THE NATURE OF THE SELF

Inadequate Apparatus Used to Investigate the Self Conditions the Result

The nature of the instrument used conditions the result of the investigation. The more sensitive and accurate the instrument, the more accurate is the observation, and, thus, the result. This is a well-known scientific fact. The world appears to be something to the naked eye, but it seems entirely different with the use of a microscope. The scientist seems to be approaching the truth of the object of his observation with the help of instruments. But the object, somehow, recedes further from his ken. There remains a chasm between the knower and the known. There is a gulf of difference between the subject and the object, between consciousness and matter. Consciousness cannot know matter; mind cannot know any object; the scientist cannot know anything. The scientist has to fail in the end on account of the very method and apparatus that he employs to investigate the nature of things.

The Senses Are Unreliable

One is likely to think that knowing the self is a simple matter. Everyone knows one's own self. Man refers to his own self by his name, by his designation, by his characteristics, by height, weight, width, and social relations. But this is a description of certain phenomena rather than the essentiality. Man, as a part of Nature, forms a content of space and time. Thus, his usual notion of his own self as a human being, as a man or a woman, as a relative of So-and-so, with such physical dimensions, etc., would be to know the self as he knows any other object in the world. Man, when he appears to himself as a physical body, is an object rather than a subject. Nobody looks upon himself as a subject, but sees himself as an object, as he sees a brick or a tree outside, because everyone can 'see' oneself and not just 'be' a pure subject. Everyone can see his body as he can see a building 'outside' 'in space'. So, from the point of view of mere observation through the sense organs, one's own self does not differ much from other objects of sense. The human body is as much an object of the senses as any other object. Thus, to say, "I am So-and-so" in a sociological or a merely physical sense would not be a correct definition of one's personality. When it was said that one has to

know one's own self, it was not meant that one has to know it through the sense organs. The knowledge obtained through the senses, gathered through perception, is limited to the structure of the sense organs. If the organs were to be constituted in a different way, the picture that they would present would be quite a different thing altogether.

If the knowledge gained through the light rays impinging on the eyeballs is to be believed, it would be really a precarious knowledge indeed. The eyeballs are like lenses, and whatever be the nature of the lens that is used, to that extent the observation is conditioned. Man has been made in one way. He has got human eyes, and therefore he sees everything as human. Every human being has a similar set of eyes. But, if he had x-ray eyes, he would see a different world altogether. If it can be imagined that the eyes are made like microscopes, would anyone be able to live in this world? And yet, can anyone say that it would be a wrong perception? Perhaps, that would be a better and more reliable information. But the better perception would make one's life itself impossible as it is lived. In a way, it appears that ignorance keeps one happy. It is evident that it would be futile to depend upon the sense organs to supply correct knowledge. The

sense organs include not merely the eyes, but also the ears, the sense of touch, the sense of taste, etc. None of these can be relied upon totally, because they are conditioned. Nothing can be known by examining the objects through the relative activities of the senses which change according to the spatio-temporal structure within which they function.

The Mind Is Conditioned by Space-Time

Space and time are supposed to be one complex whole. They are proved to be not two different things in the end. The objects, including human bodies, being placed in the context of space-time, are conditioned by the nature of the space-time complex. If man were to be living in a different order of space-time, he would certainly not be a human being as he is now.

But, man is a greater mystery and secret than can be observed on the outer surface. The analysis that Indian philosophers have made here is astounding. The study of philosophy in India began by a study of the nature of man. However, philosophy in the West, in its empirical meanderings, was confined to the study of the human individual as a subject from the point of view of experiences available in the waking life. Everyone, in the waking condition, is

aware of the presence of the world outside, through the operation of the sense organs. What does man learn when he is awake? He sees a world. But how does he see a world? He is aware of the existence of the world by means of various factors that work together in bringing about this knowledge. Space and time are the primary factors. If space and time were not to be there to distinguish objects from one another, it would not be known that things exist at all. The conditioning influence of space and time is such that nothing can be known except as being present in space and time. Even if one closes the eyes and imagines the existence of an object, it would be a presence conceived in space and in time. Even if one tries to abolish the notion of space and time in imagination, one would be doing this act of abolishing the concept of space and time by being in space and time only. One cannot go out of this circle. It means that the mind is involved in the notion of space and time. All objects are spatio-temporal, including one's own self as an observed subject. Inasmuch as the mind is conditioned in this manner, one cannot hope to have an unconditioned knowledge of anything. The instruments of perception are restricted by the operation of space and time.

The Mind Is Conditioned by Logical Limitations

Not merely that; man is limited in many other ways. One's own reason itself is a limited faculty. There are certain mathematical and set ways of thinking which go by the name of logical affirmations. Logic is an instrument that the mind has manufactured out of the mathematical compulsion inflicted upon it by the operation of space and time. Two and two have to make four, and no one can think this in any other way. But one cannot rationally explain as to why two and two should make four. It has to be taken for granted that it must be like that, and no question can be raised about it. This is to give an example of how the mind functions peremptorily. It is such a type of conditioning that any question about it cannot be raised by the mind. The mind will regard any further question in regard to mathematical laws as absurd. The three angles of a triangle have to make two right angles; they cannot make more or less. Arithmetic, algebra, and geometry are fixed sciences. They are born out of certain intuitions cast in the mould of the operation of space and time in a given manner. Therefore, no one can gain insight into the nature of space-time or of the world which is conditioned by space and time. The logical approach, whether inductive

or deductive, assumes certain premises which are incapable of logical demonstration. It does not carry one very far. An able and reliable guide in the world of space-time that it certainly is, it cries a halt and says, "Thus far, and no further."

The Self Overcomes all Conditioning

There is something in man which rises above the limitations of mathematics and logic. One knows one's own self in a way that cannot be explained in terms of logic. Everyone knows that he exists. The fact, "I exist," need not be known by seeing with the eyes. Even if the eyes are closed, the ears are plugged, and the other natural senses do not operate, one can know that one exists. How does one know that he exists? This knowledge arises not by logic, nor by mathematics. It is not by a philosophical calculation that man comes to know that he is. The "I exist", or "I am", seems to be the only indubitable knowledge that can finally survive all tests and conclusions. The only infallible knowledge announces itself as the knowledge of the self, and every other knowledge is liable to further amendment, as, for example, in the advancement of the methods of science. Nature has been defined in hundreds of ways by scientific observations. What today is an infallible truth for

science becomes tomorrow an outgrown, outmoded knowledge, to be supplanted by another observation altogether. Science goes on repeating its experiments and discovering newer and newer phenomena. What was truth yesterday is not necessarily so today. Science has not yet come to a conclusion as to what the ultimate truth is.

These questions relating to the nature of externally observed truths do not arise in regard to one's own self, because there is a faculty within man which cannot be identified with mental operation, or rational study, or sense activity. "I know that I am," is a revelation rather than a logical deduction. Intuitively one knows that one exists. Man's knowledge of his own self is indisputable, inviolable, and certainly true, and no one doubts one's own existence.

Doubt Cannot Be Raised Concerning the Self

The great philosopher of India, Acharya Sankara, and another reputed philosopher of the West, Rene Descartes, thought on equal terms at different times in regard to the nature of the self. The doubting of the existence of one's own self has been regarded as impossible, because scepticism, while it can be applied to the nature of things outside, cannot be

applied to the conclusions arrived at by the sceptic himself. The doubting of everything is an acceptance of the doubtless position which the sceptic maintains. The conclusions of a sceptical argument are not subject to the very same scepticism to which other things are subject. "I cannot doubt that I am doubting." This is the basic conclusion one finally lands upon. One can doubt everything but cannot doubt that one is doubting, because if one doubts the doubting, such doubting would have no sense. There is some peculiarity in man which defies the grasp at ordinary logical analysis. And this was the stand taken finally by most of the Indian philosophers. This mystery, this secret, may form the key to unlock the secrets of all Nature.

This "I am," or "I exist" is uncontradictable, undeniable, and is infallible knowledge. Everything else is liable and prone to modification, or even contradiction. But, the knowledge of "I am" is mystical; it needs the support of nothing else.

Is this the Reality that man is searching for? Does this stand the test of truth?

Human existence is characterised by a series of experiences, all of which may be classified into the state of waking, dream and deep sleep. The conclusion, or knowledge of "I am" is obtained in

the waking state. Does man, the "I", exist in the other states? Can one conclusively say "I am", with reference to all these states? The question appears superfluous, and the answer is self evident, because, if these states are states of experience, as mentioned, there must be an experiencer, the self, the "I". So, the answer is "I exist". Thus, if the "I exist" can be emphatically said to be true for all states of experience, how does the "I" exist in these states? What is the true nature of the self which affirms "I am" and which passes through these states?

The Self in Dream

There are occasions when man passes through states which are different from the waking one. Man is not always waking; he is in other conditions also, when he still exists. Dream is one instance. Man exists even in dream; he is not dead. But here the waking consciousness does not operate; the senses are not active. One does not see with the eyes, does not hear with the ears. If a sound is made near the ears when one is dreaming, he may not hear it; if a particle of sugar is placed on the tongue, he may not taste it. A mechanism operates even in the state of dream. And, "I dreamt yesterday," is what everyone generally says when one wakes up from dream.

Did "I" exist in dream? Yes, "I" did exist. In what condition did "I" exist? Not as the body, for the body was inactive. One was not aware of the existence of the body. One could not identify oneself with the body. Man was not the body at all, for all practical purposes, in his dream. What was he, then? Well, one may say, "I was only the mind." The mind was operating; the mind was existing; the mind was functioning; the mind was experiencing the whole phenomena of what could be regarded as a dream life.

So, man can exist even without the body. This is strange. Did he not exist in dream without association with the body? Though it is true that in the waking condition an association with the physical body is absolutely essential, in other conditions, like dream, one does exist without the body. There are, then, states of consciousness when one can exist without association with the body. If man can exist without the body, his real essence cannot be the body. Dream is an example, numbness is an example, and swoon is an example, to prove this fact.

The Self in Sleep

Deeper still, there is a state called sleep. What happens in sleep? Even the mind does not operate

here. This is important to note. The intellect, feelings, volitions, and sense organs all cease to operate. But does man exist in sleep? Yes, he does exist. In what capacity? What is man then? "I am" is the assertion that everyone generally makes on waking. But in what way was one existing? In what state was this "I", the self? In the state of deep sleep the "I" did not exist as the body. It did not exist as the intellect which was then not functioning. There was no psychic operation of any kind in the state of sleep. When there is no body, no mind. what remains in man? Nothing remains; it is a vacuum, as it were. Man was in an inexplicable darkness, which is identified with sleep. No one knows anything in sleep.

What does everyone say about sleep when one wakes up in the morning? "I knew nothing; I had a good sleep." But when one says, "I knew nothing, I had good sleep," one is making a self-contradictory statement. If nothing was known, how could one know that one slept well? It is not true that one does not know anything, though it appears there is no object of consciousness in sleep.

One does not know anything in sleep, because there is no external object there. Whenever one speaks of knowledge, one always refers to a

relationship between the subject and the object. One connects one's mind with a content which is outside it. As there was no object outside the mind in the state of sleep, one says, "I had no knowledge." But, it is not true that there was no knowledge of any kind. There was some kind of knowledge. The Vedanta analysis is interesting. It asks, "My dear friend, you said that you slept yesterday. How did you know that you slept yesterday? Who told you this?" Everyone makes this statement for himself. Again, one says, "I knew nothing." If he knew nothing, how could he know that he slept?

Here is a subtle point on which one has to bestow some thought. It is impossible to remember that one slept, unless one had an experience. Memory, remembrance, is a function which follows as a result of an experience that one had earlier. If one did not have an experience before, one cannot have a memory thereof later. The memory of having slept is a necessary consequence of one's having had an experience of sleep.

Now, again, let us go a little deeper into this point. Does one have a memory of having slept? Yes. Now, if memory is a result of an experience that one had, would that experience have been an unconscious experience? A stone does not remember

anything. The stone does not say, "I slept yesterday." The memory of a past experience—here, in this case, memory of sleep—should imply the presence of some sort of a consciousness. If the consciousness was completely obliterated in sleep, one would not remember that one slept. One would be like a stone, and a stone says nothing.

There is a strange mystery within us. Man is a miracle. He is not an ordinary individual as he thinks he is. Man is not a Tom, Dick, or Harry, as he appears. Every human being is a wonder in himself, or herself, and it is the study of deep sleep that unravels the mysteries of man. In other conditions, man knows very little about himself.

Most of the philosophers of the West confine themselves to the waking experience. Thus, there were agnosticism, scepticism, empiricism, and other "isms", which cropped up as a consequence of the study merely of the waking condition, as if man is only in the waking state and nothing else is in him. The Vedanta tells us that in the state of deep sleep one does not die, one lives, one exists, and this fact is known by the memory that follows subsequently. Memory is not possible without a previous experience, and that experience has no sense if it is not attended with a kind of awareness. So, in

the state of deep sleep there was consciousness. It was covered over with some peculiar obstacle. Like a cloud covering the sun, one's consciousness in sleep was covered by certain impressions of desires unfulfilled. When the sun is hidden by the thick clouds, no one says that the sun is non-existent. Sometimes, there is an eclipse of the sun, or there are dark clouds covering the sun in the rainy season. It would then look as if midday is like midnight. But nevertheless the sun is there.

This analysis would reveal that the essence of the self, the "I", in the state of deep sleep is not one of a total abolition of existence, but an existence pure and simple, a featureless transparency, consciousness proper. The "I" had no body, no mind, no psychic functions, no relationships, no friends. no enemies. The "I" was neither a father, nor a mother, nor a man nor a woman, nor a king, nor a beggar; nothing of the kind was the "I" in the state of deep sleep.

What a wonderful state! Anyone can imagine what one was. Nothing conceivable was man; but he did exist. He was levelled down to the condition of that in which everything exists finally. Man was in a state of pure existence wholly, and nothing else. One was not even a human being, not rich, not poor, not healthy, not unhealthy, not thirsty, not hungry;

nothing could apply to that state of being. But one existed, still.

The Self Is Sat-Chit-Ananda

Everyone was in the state of deep sleep, in a condition of pure being—impersonal, featureless, indeterminate awareness associated with existence. What was everyone in the state of deep sleep? Only existence which is associated with consciousness in an integral manner. It was not existence and consciousness. It was existence which was consciousness, Sat-Chit. The Vedanta philosophy uses the word “Sat-Chit”, which means Existence-Consciousness. The difficulty of language is such that no word can be used at all to designate what Sat-Chit means. They are not two different things or states. It is Being which is Consciousness, or Consciousness which is Being. Being is Consciousness, and Consciousness is Being. So the hyphen is used, Existence-Consciousness, because no other way is known to write it down. Everyone is only Existence-Consciousness in the state of deep sleep.

If the Self is Consciousness, naturally it cannot be divisible. It is not partite, it is impartite. If one imagines a division of Consciousness, theoretically

at least, or academically, one has to imagine a space between two parts of Consciousness, because what distinguishes one thing from another thing is space, or time. Now, can one imagine that there is space between two parts of Consciousness? If there is space, who is to be aware of this space? The Consciousness itself has to be aware of the space that is imagined, as if existing between two of its parts. Consciousness should be present even in that middle, the so-called imagined space. It is impossible, therefore, to imagine a division in Consciousness. It is indivisible; hence, it is not finite; therefore, it is infinite.

Existence which is Consciousness is of the character of Bliss. Why is it Bliss? Because, all suffering and finitude, every difficulty and penury of any kind, is the result of the finitude of one's nature. When one has become the infinite, all desires are fulfilled. The desires are not abolished or destroyed in the infinite, as people may imagine. All wishes are totally fulfilled in their reality. We enjoy at present dream objects, a shadow of the substance, as it were. But there, one becomes the archetype or the original of things, as if one in dream rises into the waking life and beholds the reality of things as they are. Even this Bliss is not separate

from Existence-Consciousness. Existence, which is Consciousness, itself is bliss.

If the Self is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss in deep sleep, can it be otherwise in the waking and dream states? No, because it is indivisible, thus, infinite; it would be the same always. Thus, essentially, the Self is Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. Here Infinity and Eternity get blended into All-Being.

But, no one wakes up from sleep as infinite being. The waking experience is always the same story of finitude and all its resultant sorrow. The glory discovered by a probe into sleep vanishes in mortal waking. Where is the solution to this elusive problem?

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