THE SEARCH FOR REALITY

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA
The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India
Website: www.swami-krishnananda.org

What is Reality? Reality is that which never changes, which is absolute, unlimited, and is never contradicted by any other thing or experience. How is it known that Reality is changeless? Well, then, let us take for granted that Reality is changing, that Reality is that which changes. Now, what is change? Change is a modification of something from one condition to another condition. The death of one condition of a thing and the birth of another condition is what is meant by the change of that thing. Now, does the thing itself change, or is it something else in it that changes? If the thing itself, in its essence, changes, the death of one of its conditions would mean the death of its essence or existence itself, so that there would be nothing left in it to undergo the experience of another subsequent condition. If, in change, there is absolute death of a thing that changes, then what is there to be called a change? The very phrase 'change of a thing' signifies the existence of a continuous thing, even under different and varying conditions, forms or modes. If there is no continuity of substance, there cannot be change of that substance. Unless there is something

which does not move and which is different from movement, there cannot be any such thing as movement. All actions presuppose an actionless being. How does one know that there is change in anything? The consciousness of change means the consciousness of the death of one condition of a thing and of the birth of its other condition. That means, the knower of change exists even when one condition of that changeful thing ceases to be, and it exists also when another of its conditions rises or is given birth to. The consciousness of the distinction between one condition and another condition of a thing is not possible unless the consciousness itself is not thus divided, and does not change with change or die with death. The knower of change does not change. If the knower of change changes, there can be no such thing as knowledge or awareness of change. The changeless consciousness, which is the unaffected and undivided witness of all change, is the Reality. Thus it is proved that Reality is changeless.

Now, can Reality be known? If it is known, what is its nature? What is the conclusion of physical science regarding the nature of the Reality? Do the ultimate particles called protons and electrons to which the whole universe is reduced by science constitute the ultimate Reality? Is one particle different from another particle, or not? If one is different from the other, what is that which exists between two particles? If that is something which is different from these particles, these particles cannot be the ultimate Reality, for, then, there would be heterogeneity in existence, and not unity or undividedness. If there is no distinction among the particles, there can be no particles or protons and electrons, but there can only be a huge mass of

energy which is indistinguishable. Is this ultimate homogeneous energy, to which science reduces the whole universe, static or kinetic? If it is kinetic or dynamic it means that energy is in motion, and motion is impossible without division or spatiality. If the energy is motionless and changeless, then, what has science to say about its essential nature? Is it conscious or inert? Is the scientist who is the knower of the existence of this energy made up of this very same energy, or not? Certainly, if the whole universe is but this one energy, the scientist who is the knower of this energy cannot be excluded from it or be outside it. If this energy is inert in its nature, the knower of this energy, also, should be inert, for the knower is a part of Reality, which is this energy, according to the scientist. The final conclusion therefore is that if knowledge exists in the knower, this energy must be knowledge in its nature, so that the ultimate Reality becomes not an inert mass of energy but indivisible consciousness.

The position that consciousness is only an offshoot of physical energy is untenable. Is consciousness identical with this energy, or is it different from it? If it is different from it, consciousness cannot be the effect of material energy. If it is identical with energy, how can the two be different in their characteristics? How is it possible to maintain that intelligence is the result of the transformation of an inert matrix? How can something come out of nothing? What is the basis for consciousness? If consciousness is to proceed from matter or energy, the essential nature of this matter or energy should be consciousness or intelligence. Rarefied matter cannot be intelligence; subtlety is not the only condition to be fulfilled

in order to obtain consciousness. Illumination, understanding, constitutes the essential nature of consciousness. And this quality cannot be attributed to material energy, even if it be highly rarefied or made transparent in the process of evolution. If the very existence of consciousness is denied, and if only the existence of matter is asserted, we say that this contradicts the very basis of the argument, for, without consciousness, not even matter can be posited. Matter becomes a myth when it is bereft of relation to consciousness. Consciousness is the fundamental being which can never be gainsaid at any time.

Now, does the scientist admit the existence of an ultimate Reality? He does, and he should, if his statements should be reasonable or tenable, and be based on direct experience. No doubt there are some who claim to have no knowledge of anything except of phenomena; but they, obviously, cannot say that this knowledge should be valid, ultimately. But, if the scientist is to admit that there is a Reality, how can he defend himself? How does he know that Reality exists? He knows this through observation and experiment. His experience consists of the knowledge which he derives as a result of observation through the senses. That means his knowledge of the Reality is what is given to him through the senses. Now, can Reality be known through the senses? If Reality is accepted to be changeless – and we have already proved it to be such – it cannot be known through something which is changing. If Reality can be known through the senses, the senses should be changeless, even as Reality is. But, are the senses changeless? Definitely not. The senses are instruments of knowledge, and it is well known that the nature of the

instruments influences and determines the nature of the knowledge of the Reality which is their object. If the instruments which are used in observation are defective, the knowledge which is received through them cannot be perfect. The senses have a particular constitution, they have a particular make-up, and if this constitution or make-up is changed, the knowledge which is received through them also will change. Our eyeballs are something like lenses, and we know what kind of knowledge of the objects in the world we would get if we are to wear different spectacles with lenses of different constitutions or make-up. It is possible for us to see a square object otherwise, a round object as something else, a green object as of some other colour, height as depth, and depth as height, etc., if only we have different glasses to see through. The senses are of such a nature that the knowledge which is given to us through them cannot be relied upon as something eternally changeless. The senses are changing, and therefore Reality which is changeless cannot be known through the senses. Even the changeless, when it is seen through the changing, will appear as changing, for the object of knowledge always partakes of the qualities of the means of knowledge. The senses cannot give us Reality. As the man of physical science has the senses as his sole means of knowledge, he cannot know Reality with his knowledge.

Then, what is Reality, and how can one know Reality? What means of knowledge has man got, other than the senses? The only means which remains to be considered is the mind. But this is beyond the region of the physicist or the scientist. This is the region of philosophy or metaphysics. Can the philosopher know Reality with the

help of his rationalistic mind? For this, the mind itself has to be examined. What are the powers of the mind? To what extent can it comprehend Reality? Is the mind changeful or changeless? It may be noted in this connection that the mind, as a means of knowledge, is not much better off than the senses. The mind changes from one person to another person, and from one condition to another condition even in the same person. The stronghold of the mind is reason, logic and argumentation. But the mind works within the realm limited by its own constitution built up by the hypothetical notions of space, time and causation (quantity, quality, relation and modality). These categories which constitute the nature and the workings of the mind limit its operations, and thus it cannot have a changeless knowledge of Reality as such, independent of its modes. Therefore, the philosopher who is totally dependent upon the workings of the schematising mind, too, cannot know Reality. The mind is an individualistic principle, and so it is changeful. The mind works in the waking and the dreaming states. Can one know the Reality in the waking and the dreaming states? The Reality cannot be known in these two states, because here the mind is functioning with its categories, and as long as this mind is the means of knowing Reality, one cannot have perfect knowledge of Reality as such.

What is the means to the knowledge of Reality as it is in itself? If it is not the mind and the senses – the causes of the experiences of the individual – then what other state of experience does a person pass through, unaffected by the modifications of the mind and the senses? There is one more state left, than the waking and the dreaming states. It is deep sleep. In deep sleep there is no action of the mind

and the senses. Therefore the individual in the state of deep sleep is not obstructed by the categories of the mind and the limitations of the senses. Therefore, perhaps, there is a possibility of knowing Reality as such in the state of deep sleep. But, unfortunately, one does not have experience of consciousness in the deep sleep state. In this deep sleep state also, Reality cannot be known, for, when there is no conscious experience at all, there can be no knowledge of Reality. And all people have the experiences only of these three states, and nothing else. Hence no man on earth, who is limited to these three states, can know Reality as such.

Now, does a person exist in the state of deep sleep, or not? Certainly he does not die, but does exist in the state of deep sleep. It is evident that the senses do not exist as conscious agents in deep sleep. But the person exists. Therefore, the real person is different from the senses. The mind also does not function in deep sleep. But the person lives. Therefore, the real person is different from the mind. Then, what does exist in the state of deep sleep? It is ignorance that exists there. Then, is the real person who exists in the deep sleep state identical with this ignorance? If it is so, who knows that this person is identical with ignorance? That knower cannot be ignorant, for knowledge and ignorance are opposites of each other. How does a person know that he did exist in the state of deep sleep? This he knows by remembrance, in the waking state, of his having had the experience of deep sleep. Is remembrance possible without a preceding conscious experience? Memory is the effect of impressions left of a past immediate experience. There is a common consciousness which is the link connecting the three states of waking, dreaming and

sleeping. But for this one consciousness there would be no continuity or survival of personality. Therefore there should have been the consciousness of existence in deep sleep, even if it appeared to be covered by ignorance. As everything – ignorance, change, objectness and every phenomenon – is known to a conscious subject, and nothing prior or antecedent to knowledge or consciousness is ever possible, the essential existence of the knower should be pure consciousness or knowledge itself.

Now, is consciousness limited, or not? All objects in this universe are limited by space and time. Is consciousness also limited in this way? If it is so, it follows that consciousness knows that limitation – that it is limited by something outside it. In order to have a consciousness of something outside consciousness, consciousness should exceed itself. In other words, consciousness should extend beyond its limitation. That is, consciousness should be unlimited. The essential existence of the knower, therefore, is unlimited knowledge – absolute consciousness. Only this can be the Reality. Here, the object and the subject coalesce and become one existence. The knower and the known are one. The universe is not objective, not a phenomenon outside. Consciousness is not inert, not divided, not a mass of particles called atoms, protons and electrons, not waves of probability, not an indistinguishable, indeterminable, dark mass of energy, but pure consciousness – indivisible, infinite, immortal, eternal, absolute. This is the only Reality, and it is identical with pure experience as one with itself, not to be known by any other – known as itself by itself, as existence, consciousness and bliss in one, independent of body, senses, the vital energies, mind, intellect, ignorance,

cause, effect, and all relative phenomena. Consciousness as such is Reality. It is realised through deep meditation, in direct experience.