

General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy

Part 11 of 12

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The last two tapes have been introduced as a sort of interlude in the midst of the discussion of the five Realizations, of which four have so far been elucidated. This was done because I was at this time in the midst of study of the *Buddhist Logic* by Stcherbatsky, and it also had a pertinence with respect to the general trend of my own philosophic statement. Here was something that stood in strong contrast to the position which I have all along maintained. My position, let me repeat, is, in the negative sense, strongly anti-materialistic, anti-sensationalistic, anti-irrationalistic, and anti-nominalistic. It therefore stands in strongest possible contrast with the position presented in the *Buddhist Logic* of Stcherbatsky.

And of course the question arises, is the Buddhistic orientation restricted to the position maintained in the *Buddhist Logic*, or can it be approached from a different angle? I asked earlier the question, what is the minimum requirement that a philosophic position should be regarded as Buddhistic? One may hold the Blessed One in the very highest regard, as I myself do; one may approve of the attitude involved in the vow of *Kwan-Yin*; one may agree that at least the wrongness in this world that appears as ubiquitous suffering should in some way be corrected, either by a withdrawal or by an effort to transform the life in *Sangsara* so that it may not be so distorted by an evident wrongness; one may agree with all of the moral precepts laid down by the Blessed One; but, he may not find himself in agreement with all of the philosophic statements put forth by those who have followed in the footsteps of the Blessed One. Are those philosophic statements an essential and ineluctable part of Buddhism? There is a question. I am unable to agree with the radical sensationalism that I find in this book, *Buddhist Logic*. It does not correspond with my experience. It does not correspond with my relative valuations. I am not a sensationalist.

Furthermore, there are certain principles laid down by the Buddha with which I agree, from my own experience, not simply because the Buddha has affirmed them, and that is the principle of law, of interconnection, of that which is called *karma*. This point will become more emphatically emplaced when we come to the elucidation of the fifth Realization. I concur with that principle wholeheartedly. I conceive of the law of *karma* as fundamentally the principle of equilibrium, that this principle is the essence of all law in nature, that it is not merely the corrective with respect to the actions of men, that it is not merely a moral principle, but while it is a moral principle also, it is more than that, it is the principle by which the stars are held in their courses, by which this whole universe is sustained, and it should be the great guiding modulus in all our thinking and in all our action.

I have no trouble with the acceptance of the principle of reincarnation, which in effect is an implication of this law. Because a living entity has set up certain causes in his lifetime, inevitably those causes lead to effects in which he in some way participates again. This inviolability of law is the basis of security. As one reads through the emphasis of the ever-changing point-instants of efficiencies, I find that one derives an impression of great insecurity, that nothing lasts, that nothing is durable. But that is all changed when one anchors himself upon the principle of law, for as I understand it the inviolability of law is as fundamental to the Buddhistic point of view as the principle of everlasting change of the efficiencies.

There is another principle very fundamental and present within all three phases of Buddhistic orientation, and this is known as the principle of *Anatman*, which may be defined in this way: a denial that there is such a thing as a Self, or Soul, or *Atman*, which is persistent throughout all life and beyond the grave. This contrasts with a counterposition maintained by the Vedanta of which one thesis is the *Atma-Vidya*, or the Realization of the Self as in some sense permanent, as that from which one derives ultimate security. As is evident to anyone who has followed the elucidation of the Realizations with which I am familiar, the development, so far, has been in accord with the Vedantist point of view in this respect, and it becomes a fundamental of my philosophy, that *the subject to consciousness transcends the object of consciousness* even beyond the relativity of birth and death. And yet, as will become evident when we have dealt with the fifth Realization, it is not an eternal principle. However, it vanishes from the scene only with the ultimate dissolution of the object; otherwise, it is more persistent than the object. And at this point, it would seem that there is an important incompatibility between my philosophy and that of Buddhism in all the forms with which I am familiar.

The question arises: is there a valid Realization or deep insight into truth to be found in the Advaita Vedanta, which is not only affirmed by Sri Shankaracharya but also in our day by Sri Aurobindo? My Realizations have strongly confirmed this up to a very lofty stage, but do not affirm it in an eternal sense, as will be evident later. In the end, I do arrive at a position that is in conformity with *Anatman*, but this is not at the beginning of the philosophy, whereas, in traditional Buddhism it is an initial doctrine formulated by the Great Buddha in his career even before his Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. One might even suggest that my position here is something like an inverse Buddhism, but no matter what the vision, or insight, or Realization of others may be, the Buddha, or Shankara, or Sri Aurobindo, I must be guided, as I said before, by the Realizations that I know. Perhaps Ultimate Truth is not contained in any formulation that man has been able, so far, to produce, that we are seeking, progressively, for something which can be only conceived after a long evolution in our power of conceiving.

Now, let us return to the elucidation of the Realizations. I find that one effect which grew out of the fourth Realization has not been noted, and yet this is something that is of particular importance in connection with producing evidence that something happens in consciousness when there is a Realization which can be detected by those who are, as William James said, “outside”¹ the circle of this type of imperience. I did

¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), 331.

refer to the fact that there was something which I called a butterfly valve which could be flipped at will when in certain states of calmness, or which spontaneously flipped itself, and that some individuals are able to recognize when this happens even though there has been no warning; but this is experienced, or rather imperienced, only by a relatively few individuals.

There was another by-product of the imperienced that came to me as a considerable surprise since I'd never heard of it at that time, and this was something much more widely experienced by persons who were present than that of the simple flipping of the butterfly valve. After the imperienced of August 7, 1936, I found that those who listened to what was written or what was said reported, frequently, an experience of heat, and it was evident often in audiences which I was addressing. I've seen persons faces become red, perspiration flow down their faces, and they have frequently removed their coats. This never happened within my experience upon the lecture platform prior to August 7, 1936. We called it a "psycho-physical heat." It is not a normal experience that when one hears a general secular philosophic discourse that he tends to experience a sensation of heat—heat that was tangible enough even at times to make the individual uncomfortable—yet this was frequently experienced after that date and to this present day. Later when I became acquainted with the volume edited by Evans-Wentz called the *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrine*, I did find reference to a psycho-physical heat and did find *sutras* oriented to the development of this heat as a capacity having practical significance in a very cold climate; however, I did not have interest in this from that particular point of view as characteristically we did not have to use such methods actually to keep warm. It was something added on and its relevance produced a problem—why heat? For myself, only on a few occasions have I experienced this myself, and on those few occasions I found that when in the lucid state it should so happen that I was in a state of affect also that then, and only then, did I experience it as heat; otherwise, it was a sort of intangible experience of something subtle flowing through.

It was early suggested to my consciousness that there was here a certain correlation with a certain phenomenon familiar in the field of electricity. If an electric current is made to pass through a filament that affords resistance, the current will produce heat; and this principle is employed in electric ranges and electric heaters in a practical way. From this came the suggestion that if there is in the individual something that is akin to a resistance to what we called the "current," for thus it seemed to be, then there was experienced this subtle heat. And when the resistance was reduced, one could have passing through him or into him something like this current without the experience of heat. This was something experienced by many individuals—individuals that were not responsive in the way of receiving an authentic induction, as was referred to in an earlier tape—but by the vast majority of persons who were present.² And this was valuable in the sense of evidence that here, as a phenomenon in consciousness, was something that did not belong to our ordinary consciousness. It is thus evidence, in the external sense

² See the following earlier audio recordings for a reference to 'induction': "Induction Talk," "On Tulku," part 2, and "General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy," part 8.

within the range of the ordinary observer, that Realization is an event that produces experienceable effects, and thus is strong evidence of its actuality.

I give a lot of attention to these collateral evidences because in the system of philosophy I am here presenting, the primary epistemological base lies in this series of Realizations. I'm facing the difficulty of drawing upon material which is not part and parcel of common experience, and therefore it becomes especially necessary to build the supporting evidence for the actuality of the inner events known as Realization. I find no way whereby one can build the case for an inner knowledge by drawing upon principles that are merely necessities of thought or upon the resources of common experience. Here is something not in common with the experience of the mass of human beings, yet of the highest importance for a knowing of something approaching Ultimate Truth. I've referred to the fact that Plato in his "Seventh Letter," toward the end, acknowledged such an imperience but felt it should not be given expression. I was not at all surprised, for there seemed to be in him something that implied such an experience as guiding his thought. How many others have been guided by this and tried to establish their thought upon a basis which made no reference to it I do not know, but it seems to me that it becomes necessary to place the evidence for this other way of cognition as fully as possible before the eyes of the reader or the ears of the hearer so that he may be able, more intelligently, to evaluate the material.

Is the Realization of August 7, 1936, identifiable as a form which is known in the literature? With respect to this, I can say that it fits very closely the specifications Sri Aurobindo gave in *The Synthesis of Yoga* concerning the more introverted form of Realization. He gives there three forms: one which is based upon the principle of *neti-neti*—a systematic negation of all objects whatsoever; a sort of saying, I am not this, not this, not this, going through the catalogue of all possible objects of consciousness, both gross and subtle, until by some fortunate circumstance he attains that which is never an object before consciousness but only the pure subject. He gives in that same place a converse form of Realization which proceeds by what is called the *iti-iti* principle—a universal inclusiveness of every possible object whatsoever—as a sort of complementary form of Realization; quite obviously the form that is more characteristic of the *Bhakti* and involves an orientation to something which might be called the ultimate object, and which in Aurobindo's system would be called, or is called, the Divine. There is there also a third form which transcends both these two and which has certain features more characteristic of the fifth Realization which I am about to delineate. This, then, might be a sort of identification.

How does it compare with the state of *Nirvana*? Something in the state itself suggested that it was the threshold to *Nirvana*, that state which can be experienced preliminary to final withdrawal. And this was confirmed by the one whom I called the Sage. I will not be dogmatic about this. I'll leave it to other experts to determine. And in the light of the question as to whether *Nirvana* is to be identified exclusively with what Northrop calls the indeterminate aesthetic continuum, a question arises as to whether this might be something different from the patterns known to the East. Certainly, it was not exclusively aesthetic; although the aesthetic element was in it, there was also that which answered metaphysical questions, and therefore met the needs

of the theoretic component. But leaving aside the question of identification, in point of fact, I treated this Realization as marking the point where one, in conformity with the directions in *The Voice of the Silence*, led one to the Renunciation so that further work could be done; at any rate, I so treated it. And then I looked forth to a rather grim future in which that of supreme delight and value should stand as an event in the past voluntarily forgone for reasons that seemed adequate. This made things look rather grim for they speak of unnumbered *kalpas*—renunciation without compensation, so it is said in *The Voice of the Silence*.

But the Sage, of whom I spoke, said to me: keep alert for a cycle involving the number thirty-three. It so happened that that cycle proved to be thirty-three days. And there were certain important differences between the event which occurred sometime during the night between the eighth and ninth of September 1936; there were differences that stand out very strongly. It was characteristic of the imperience of August 7 that one had to move in his consciousness with great subtlety; that even the reaching out and welcoming of the imperience had the effect of tending to drive it away. There had to be, as it were, established as well as could be, a state of subtle flexibility, of no enthusiasm, of stillness, so that a very subtle consciousness could take over. It was very different indeed in the case of the fifth Realization where a Force suddenly came that was commanding and even required the resistance of an active mind to maintain a certain balance, or capacity to maintain one's own entityhood, as it were, against a Force that could dissolve it.

In conformity with a suggestion which came originally from the Sage, I had been for three weeks writing up the experience that was precipitated by the event of August 7. There were developments from day to day and night to night that came at times more rapidly than I could cast them into formulated form. It so happened that the writing on the eighth of September was more extensive than the writing of any day before. There were covered on that date the following items: "The Record Continued" as forty-eight, the "Sleep and Death" as forty-nine, and finally, a more or less poetic form, "The Well of Ignorance," and a brief section entitled "Beyond Genius." As I retired that night my mind was still in the active phase induced by more than usual composing functioning. It was active, and I was not seeking anything further for the simple reason I had no idea of anything further. No further possibility had been in my mind, when there walked into my consciousness the greatest event of all. It just took me over. There was no subtlety in my consciousness, but a rather intense state of mental activity, yet this that walked in, walked in with *power*; and, indeed, is the one Realization of the five in which the principle of power is accentuated. I do not find anywheres in the other four Realizations any reference to this; but here it was quite dominant—the power principle as distinct from simply the knowing or the feeling principles. It, in fact, completes the picture.

And now a question arises: how does this happen? Is this something spontaneous from out the Beyond, something that is there for everyone who happens to go this way? Or was it in some way a placing face to face, as the Tibetans say, with this other Consciousness by the action of someone unseen? I had no awareness of such an entity, if such was there. Because the action was so flexible and adjusted to my consciousness that I was not in any way aware of the presence unseen of some other intelligence, yet there

are logical reasons, when one knows the literature, for inferring that such an intelligence may have been active behind the scenes.

I had retired when there began to develop in my consciousness a sense of a most utter satisfaction, as it were, a recapitulation of the delight which was so characteristic of the fourth Realization. And here is a characteristic which I find present in all the Realizations: that it was the quality of delight, not something that was delightful, but delight as a self-existent quality. In most of the thinking with which I had been familiar before, I'd leaned to the point of view, practically, even though not theoretically, that qualities inhered in a somewhat which might be called a substance. Those who are familiar with the story of Western philosophy will immediately recognize a characteristic of both the rationalistic philosophers from Descartes to Christian Wolff and of John Locke—a standpoint that seemed to be natural enough and was quite other than that which was later been known as Positivism. But these experiences, or imperiences rather, tend to substantiate a view, which is characteristic of Buddhism, that the qualities do not need a substance in which to inhere; that they are self-existents; something like a quality which could be bestowed upon the neutral world of things and to there be brought to inhere upon that neutral world although it had not been there before; a quality which could be shared by projecting it rather than something inhering in an unknown something else. The quality of satisfaction was not a specific satisfaction because of the possession of a thing or an idea; it was simply being filled with the fullness of satisfaction.

And then next, this transformed itself into something that seemed like almost the diametric opposite, a state which I called "indifference." And here a problem has arisen. I entitled the whole experience the High Indifference, but I find that this term tends to be misunderstood. It's not indifference in the sense that one thereafter stands aloof from all the problems of man. No, it's an indifference of attitude, a sort of a rising above preference for either of the pairs of opposites, a capacity to look upon each member of every pair of opposites with a like attitude. Specifically, in that pair of opposites which is called "delight versus suffering," one looked alike upon both and could turn either way unaffected by the state. It was a state of transcendence of qualified states. In its own immediate *quale*, it might be called colorless, but capable of proceeding in the direction of any coloring. It seemed as though both *Nirvana* and *Sangsara* abided below and that one could enter either the delight of *Nirvana* or the suffering and turmoil of *Sangsara* with equal attitude. I'm not saying that this is a personal state of consciousness which abides with this personality as a mere human being. I do have my preferences. I prefer delight to suffering. But when taken up into this state, it was possible to look alike upon both, and to move either way, and yet superior to both the *nirvanic* and the *sangsaric*. Thus, the idea of the equipollency of *Nirvana* and *Sangsara* became quite evident.

This is virtually an inconceivable condition from the ordinary human point of view, I am well aware. Nonetheless, I know it exists and it is possible to become fused with this state as though it were one's ordinary normal state. And beyond this, the state deepened. I seemed to be One with a more than cosmic power, greater than the powers wielded by the Caesars, and the men of money, and of the political domain; a greater power, for it moved in the domain of the very roots of Consciousness itself and could, presumptively, undermine all other powers, or reinforce them. And that beyond this there

came a time when the whole object of consciousness—which means the world about, the total universe of all possible objects—dropped away and I, the Self, dropped away, and only the ETERNAL, or the unchanging, underlying Consciousness, remained. And beyond this, I was enveloped in Darkness where I plumbed to depths where darkness merely became a greater and greater darkness of non-cognition, and returned again to outer life. And at that point, and not before, I took to myself the doctrine of *Anatman*.