

Absolute Consciousness

Part 1 of 2

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This tape will be called “Absolute Consciousness.” This term, as presented in the index, is employed eleven times in the first volume of *The Secret Doctrine*. We will make an exploration of these various references. In this case, I am using the pagination of the third edition, which differs from the pagination of the first and second editions.

The first employment of the term occurs in the “Proem” and is on p. 32. I shall quote the sentence in which it occurs:

It is the ONE LIFE, eternal, invisible, yet omnipresent, without beginning or end, yet periodical in its regular manifestations—between which periods reigns the dark mystery of Non-Being; unconscious, yet absolute Consciousness, unrealizable, yet the one self-existing Reality; truly, “a Chaos to the sense, a Kosmos to the reason.”¹

In as much as I shall ultimately produce a cross correlation between statements in *The Secret Doctrine*, *The Mahatma Letters*, and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a consideration of the status of *The Secret Doctrine* is pertinent here. It is said to have been authored by three individuals, namely, the following: the one known as Koot Hoomi, the one known as Morya, and by H. P. Blavatsky. It is further said that this is material that forms a small portion of the esoteric teachings of Buddhism, but also is oriented to an esoteric side of Vedanta, and draws upon the esotericism of the Kabbalah, with references to other, more or less, arcane sources. The authors were formally Buddhists, therefore a quotation from Buddhistic sources such as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and *The Mahatma Letters* is pertinent here. In the “Introduction,” the writer of the book, H. P. Blavatsky, speaks of herself not as the author but as the writer; however, we have these statements, that she was, in fact, in part the author—the author of the third section of each volume and of footnotes—that the main text was authored either by Koot Hoomi or Morya, who classify themselves as Buddhistic.

Now, concerning this quotation, we will note this fact: that Non-Being is “unconscious, yet absolute Consciousness.” On the surface it looks like a contradiction, but if we assume that the material of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* has basic authority, we have a key in that book for the clarification of this apparent contradiction. In *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, there is a distinction made between two forms of consciousness, namely, *Rig-pa* and *shes-rig*. *Rig-pa* is represented as a primary consciousness which is not a consciousness of phenomena; on the other hand, *shes-rig*

¹ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 1 (Adyar: The Theosophy Company, 1888), 32.

is a consciousness that is aware of phenomena.² If, then, we regard the first reference to this ultimate principle, called in the sentence quoted “the ONE LIFE,” as being unconscious, if we view that unconsciousness as related to consciousness as *shes-rig*, this is perfectly comprehensible. While at the same time, it is absolute Consciousness in the sense of *Rig-pa*. In that way, we have emerging a picture of a Root Consciousness, a Field Consciousness, namely, *Rig-pa*, that persists during the sleep of the All; whereas, consciousness as *shes-rig*, which operates during the periods of manifestation, would be unconscious on this level. As I have pointed out elsewhere,³ *shes-rig* corresponds to what I have called subject-object consciousness, which contrasts, in my system, with Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject. Here, then, I think we have a basis that would be valuable for us. Is absolute Consciousness the same as Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject? If it were consciousness with a subject, then it would be the consciousness of an entity; but, in that case, it would not be absolute, inasmuch as it would be relative to an entity, and in the philosophic sense, absolute means non-relative and non-conditioned. In addition, it would not be consciousness of content because, in that case, it would be conditioned by the content. Therefore, I think we are justified, preeminently, in viewing absolute Consciousness as a consciousness unrelated to a cognizing subject, or entity, and not concerned with content or phenomena.

I direct your attention to one phrase in the sentence quoted, namely, as follows: “. . . yet absolute Consciousness, unrealizable, yet the one self-existing Reality . . .” Combine this statement or contrast it to the first fundamental of my own system, where I say: Consciousness is original, self-existent, and constitutive of all things. Self-existence concerning Consciousness-without-an-object-and-without-a-subject is also here affirmed of absolute Consciousness. There is, however, a word that appears in this phrase just quoted that needs some special consideration; it is the word “unrealizable.” Now, in *The Mahatma Letters*, the one known as Koot Hoomi has stated that they are not allowed to use speculative constructs, but that the knowledge must be based upon a principle involving certainty. This kind of knowledge, as represented by Sri Aurobindo, is indicated by the word ‘Realization’. In Buddhism it is indicated by the word ‘Enlightenment’. If it is not realizable in this sense, then the question would arise, “How is this level of that, in its phase which is called Non-Being, in any sense known?” It cannot be a speculation. It must be knowledge, therefore, in some sense realizable. But this apparent problem is, I think, resolved if we say it’s unrealizable in the sense of *shes-rig*, but realizable in the sense of *Rig-pa*. This, I think, will help us to reconcile the apparent contradiction in this case.

There is a word in the quotation which calls for some special attention. It is, namely, the word ‘Non-Being’. At first, Non-Being would suggest something that is nothing at all, and yet this is evidently not the meaning intended. In this connection, I direct your attention to a quotation from the “Tenth Letter” of *The Mahatma Letters* found on p. 54 of the latter book: “According to logic “nothing” is that of which

² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 96.

³ See the audio recordings “The Tri-Kaya,” part 2, “Postscript to the Tri-Kaya,” and “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 12.

everything can truly be denied and nothing can truly be affirmed.”⁴ Yet certain things are affirmed of the Non-Being that appears in our text; therefore, it is not to be viewed as nothing at all. I think this can be resolved by considering the term ‘Being’ as referring to being manifested, being apparent before consciousness, and therefore an object; whereas, Non-Being is a real somewhat which is not truly an object before consciousness. Therefore, there is no contradiction involved here. It’s just a question of the use of terms.

The second reference to absolute Consciousness appears on p. 43 of the text and is as follows:

Parabrahman, the One Reality, the Absolute, is the field of Absolute Consciousness, *i.e.*, that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence, and of which conscious existence is a conditioned symbol.⁵

But this quotation occurs in the discussion which follows the first fundamental of *The Secret Doctrine* and forms part of the most profound metaphysical portion of the whole doctrine. This is the very essence of the basis with which we are concerned in this text, and for that reason I propose to quote the whole of the first fundamental and the discussion which follows it preceding the second fundamental, and thus lay the whole picture before ourselves at the present time. The quotation begins on p. 42 and is as follows:

The SECRET DOCTRINE, establishes three fundamental propositions:

1. An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless and Immutable PRINCIPLE, on which all speculation is impossible, since it transcends the power of human conception and can only be dwarfed by any human expression or similitude. It is beyond the range and reach of thought—in the words of the *Mandukya*, “unthinkable and unspeakable.”

To render these ideas clearer to the general reader, let him set out with the postulate that there is One Absolute Reality which antecedes all manifested, conditioned Being. This Infinite and Eternal Cause—dimly formulated in the “Unconscious” and “Unknowable” of current European philosophy—is the Rootless Root of “all that was, is, or ever shall be.” It is of course devoid of all attributes and is essentially without any relation to manifested, finite Being. It is “Be-ness” rather than Being, Sat in Sanskrit, and is beyond all thought or speculation.

This Be-ness is symbolized in the *Secret Doctrine* under two aspects. On the one hand, absolute Abstract Space, representing bare subjectivity, the one thing which no human mind can either exclude from any conception, or conceive of by itself. On the other, absolute Abstract Motion representing Unconditioned Consciousness. Even our Western thinkers have shown that consciousness is inconceivable to us apart from change,

⁴ A. T. Barker, ed., *The Mahatma Letters* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1923), 54.

⁵ Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 43.

and motion best symbolizes change, its essential characteristic. This latter aspect of the One Reality, is also symbolized by the term “the Great Breath,” a symbol sufficiently graphic to need no further elucidation. Thus, then, the first fundamental axiom of the SECRET DOCTRINE is this metaphysical ONE ABSOLUTE—BE-NESS—symbolized by finite intelligence as the theological Trinity.

It may, however, assist the student if a few further explanations are here given.

Herbert Spencer has of late so far modified his Agnosticism, as to assert that the nature of the “First Cause,” which the Occultist more logically derives from the “Causeless Cause,” the “Eternal,” and the “Unknowable,” may be essentially the same as that of the consciousness which wells up within us: in short, that the impersonal Reality pervading the Kosmos is the pure noumenon of thought. This advance on his part brings him very near to the Esoteric and Vedantin tenet.

Parabrahman, the One Reality, the Absolute, is the field of Absolute Consciousness, *i.e.*, that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence, and of which conscious existence is a conditioned symbol. But once that we pass in thought from this (to us) Absolute Negation, duality supervenes in the contrast of Spirit (or Consciousness) and Matter, Subject and Object.

Spirit (or Consciousness) and Matter are, however, to be regarded, not as independent realities, but as the two symbols or aspects of the Absolute, Parabrahman, which constitute the basis of conditioned Being whether subjective or objective.

Considering this metaphysical triad as the Root from which proceeds all manifestation, the Great Breath assumes the character of Pre-cosmic Ideation. It is the *fons et origo* of Force and of all individual Consciousness, and supplies the guiding intelligence in the vast scheme of cosmic Evolution. On the other hand, Pre-cosmic Root-Substance, (Mulaprakriti) is that aspect of the Absolute which underlies all the objective planes of Nature.

Just as pre-Cosmic Ideation is the root of all individual Consciousness, so pre-Cosmic Substance is the substratum of Matter in the various grades of its differentiation.

Hence it will be apparent that the contrast of these two aspects of the Absolute is essential to the existence of the “Manifested Universe.” Apart from Cosmic Substance, Cosmic Ideation could not manifest as individual Consciousness, since it is only through a vehicle, in Sanskrit (*upadhi*), of matter that consciousness wells up as “I am I,” a physical basis being necessary to focus a Ray of the Universal Mind at a certain stage of complexity. Again, apart from Cosmic Ideation, Cosmic

Substance would remain an empty abstraction, and no emergence of Consciousness could ensue.

The Manifested Universe, therefore, is pervaded by duality, which is, at it were, the very essence of its EX-istence as “Manifestation.” But just as the opposite poles of Subject and Object, Spirit and Matter, are but aspects of the One Unity in which they are synthesized, so, in the Manifested Universe, there is “that” which links Spirit to Matter, Subject to Object.

This something, at present unknown to Western speculation, is called by Occultists Fohat. It is the “bridge” by which the Ideas existing in the Divine Thought are impressed on Cosmic Substance as the “Laws of Nature.” Fohat is thus the dynamic energy of Cosmic Ideation; or, regarded from the other side, it is the intelligent medium, the guiding power of all manifestation, the “Thought Divine” transmitted and made manifest through the Dhyan Chohans, the Architects of the visible World. Thus from Spirit, or Cosmic Ideation, comes our Consciousness, from Cosmic Substance the several Vehicles in which that Consciousness is individualized and attains to self—or reflective—consciousness; while Fohat, in its various manifestations, is the mysterious link between Mind and Matter, the animating principle electrifying every atom into life.

The following summary will afford a clearer idea to the reader:

(1) Absoluteness: the Parabrahman of the Vedantins or the One Reality, SAT, which is, as Hegel says, both Absolute Being and Non-Being.

(2) The *First* Logos: the impersonal, and, in philosophy, Unmanifested Logos, the precursor of the Manifested. This is the “First Cause,” the “Unconscious” of European Pantheists.

(3) The *Second* Logos: Spirit-Matter, LIFE; the “Spirit of the Universe,” Purusha and Prakriti.

(4) The *Third* Logos: Cosmic Ideation, Mahat or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul; the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter, the basis of the intelligent operations in and of Nature, also called Maha-Buddhi.⁶

I have produced a considerable commentary based upon this very section in a tape that was in answer to a question propounded by Dr. Rein⁷, but this particular area in the text is of such profundity that it may be well-nigh inexhaustible, and I think it will profit us to go into it in larger degree.

I now direct your attention to the specific sentence in which the term ‘Absolute Consciousness’ appeared; a portion of it is as follows: “Parabrahman, the One Reality, the Absolute, is the field of Absolute Consciousness . . .” There are two possible meanings that may be attached to the word ‘field’ here. We may think of the field as a

⁶ Ibid., 42-44

⁷ See the audio recordings, “On Space,” parts 1 and 2.

zone in which the operation of Absolute Consciousness takes place; but, it also—and I so regard it as the valid interpretation in this form, namely, the field which is Absolute Consciousness. So, in other words, Absolute Consciousness might be called Field Consciousness—the vast zone within which all the drama of existence takes place.

Now, there is another point that needs our attention particularly. Consider the words, “. . . Absolute Consciousness, *i.e.*, that Essence which is out of all relation to conditioned existence . . . “and along with that an earlier statement in the total quotation, the words running, “. . . without any relation to manifested, finite Being.” Here we have a fundamental problem. We have the Field Consciousness, on one side, and the manifested universe, with all of its details in particularized consciousness, on the other, and it states that they are without relation to each other. This produces a certain degree of difficulty. If the conditioned universe is dependent upon this Parabrahman, or Absolute Consciousness, how can it be without relation to it? That gives us some considerable difficulty; and yet, on a microcosmic level, I have had the experience, or *imperience*,⁸ such that, from the standpoint of the Awakened Consciousness looking back at the domain of phenomena, the domain of action, the *Sangsara*, or the universe of objects, it seemed totally irrelevant and as though unrelated. It even seemed to disappear, or start to disappear, from the Awakened Consciousness and even from memory; and, as I have stated elsewhere,⁹ I proceeded to stop that disappearance from memory. How is it possible that there can be an existence dependent upon a Root without there being any relationship between them? This is probably a question of terminology.

But before we turn aside from this particular discussion, I wish to call your attention to another phase or aspect of this problem. This I shall introduce by a quotation from the so-called third volume of *The Secret Doctrine*—incidentally, not the true third volume. This is in the general discussion of “The Mystery of [the] Buddha” and is under the general heading “The Doctrine of [the] Avatars” and specifically is from p. 264. And the quotation is as follows:

Gautama BUDDHA was born an Avatara in one sense. But this, in view of unavoidable objections on dogmatic grounds, necessitates explanation. There is a great difference between an Avatara and a Jivanmukta; one, as already stated, is an illusive appearance, Karmaless, and having never before incarnated; and the other, the Jivanmukta, is one who obtains Nirvana by his individual merits. To this expression again an uncompromising, philosophical Vedantin would object. He might say that as the condition of the Avatara and the Jivanmukta are one and the same state, no amount of personal merit, in howsoever many incarnations, can lead its possessor to Nirvana. Nirvana, he would say, is actionless; how

⁸ For the definition of ‘imperience’, see the audio recordings “General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy,” part 10, and “On My Philosophy: Extemporaneous Statement.” In speaking of introceptual knowledge, Wolff says, “The third function therefore gives you imperience, not experience. It is akin to sense perception in the sense of being immediate, but is not sensuous.”

⁹ See the audio recordings “Further Thoughts on the Relation of Buddhism and Vedanta with Special Reference to the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo,” part 3, “On the Tri-Kaya,” part 3, and “Abstract of the Philosophy,” part 3.

can, then, any action lead to it? It is neither a result nor a cause, but an ever-present, eternal *Is*, as Nagasena defined it. Hence it can have no relation to, or concern with, action, merit, or demerit, since these are subject to Karma. All this is very true, but still to our mind there is an important difference between the two. An Avatara *is*; a Jivanmukta *becomes* one. If the state of the two is identical, not so are the causes which lead to it. An Avatara is a descent of a God into an illusive form; a Jivanmukta, who may have passed through numberless incarnations and may have accumulated merit in them, certainly does not become a Nirvani because of that merit, but only because of the Karma generated by it, which leads and guides him in the direction of the Guru who will initiate him into the mystery of Nirvana and who alone can help him to reach this abode.¹⁰

Here again we have that barrier, which elsewhere I have called a discontinuity.¹¹ I know indeed, as a matter of experience and imperience, that it is possible to be on one side of that discontinuity, and then to pass over to the other side, and to return. But the discontinuity strikes one as a sudden lapse of consciousness. He is on one side, on one moment, and then on the other, on the next moment. He can remember what is true of the side from which he has departed; he can compare the two, and they seem unrelated. From the higher consciousness, the lower seems quite irrational; whereas, the higher consciousness seems the epitome of reasonableness. Yet, when returning to the lower state and looking back at his memory of that higher state, it, in its turn, seems unreal. The discontinuity, thus, seems to be a fact; we might call it a blind spot. And it would appear, as said in the text just quoted, that causes set up in the lower, *sangsaric* consciousness can never lead to an entrance into the higher consciousness, since the effects of causes set up in the *Sangsara*, the universe of objects, or the evolution, produce consequences only within that *Sangsara*. One may reach to lofty heaven worlds by reason of his merit, but that would still be a *sangsaric* state; *Nirvana* is much more than a heaven world. In the text it's stated that the way the operation of merit functioned was this: that it brought the seeker to the attention of the guru who could initiate the seeker into the *nirvanic* state. This implies, then, that the guru, in some way, exists on both sides of the discontinuity, or the blind spot. The essential function of the guru would not be instruction, although there might be such; it would be essentially a catalytic function which might be effectuated by a mere touch, a single word, or simply by being present within the *sangsaric* domain. This discontinuity is a vast mystery, and I would say it is wrong, or a mistake, to use the expression, "attainment of *Nirvana*." *Nirvanic* Realization is possible only because in a hidden sense, somehow, we dwell both there and here; and that what is done is simply the Awakening to an eternal fact. What is true of the macrocosm is also true of the microcosm; and within the microcosm, by penetrating into it through self-analysis, we can find the key to the truths that are valid for the macrocosm.

¹⁰ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. 3 (Adyar: The Theosophy Company, 1897), 364-365.

¹¹ See the audio recordings "General Discourse on the Subject of My Philosophy," part 8, and "Three Fundamentals," part 1.

The next reference to absolute Consciousness appears on p. 72, and I shall again introduce it by a quotation in which the term appears:

Whatever plane our consciousness may be acting in, both we and the things belonging to that plane are, for the time being, our only realities. But as we rise in the scale of development, we perceive that in the stages through which we have passed, we mistook shadows for realities and that the upward progress of the Ego is a series of progressive awakenings, each advance bringing with it the idea that now, at last, we have reached [the] “reality”; but only when we shall have reached absolute Consciousness, and blended our own with it, shall we be free from the delusions produced by Maya.¹²

Here, again, is brought forth the fact that in a certain stage of consciousness, the entities that appear at that stage, alone, seem real; but as we pass from a lower to a higher stage, the earlier realities take on the character of mere shadows. And it’s indicated here that there is a series of stages through which all must pass and that there is no terminus until absolute Consciousness is attained, or rather, finally, we have Awakened to it; when, I may add, we no longer are a multitude of entities, but are fused in an infinite whole.

The following quotation is on p. 78 and is related to the ninth sloka of stanza one of *The Book of Dzyan*. The stanza is as follows: “But where was Dangma when the Alaya of the Universe was in Paramartha and the great wheel was Anupadaka?” The footnote is as follows: “Absolute Being and Consciousness, which are Absolute Non-Being and Unconsciousness.”¹³ The point here is that absolute Consciousness is identical with absolute Unconsciousness—an abstruse statement.

As in the preceding case, the clarification of the meaning here is found in approaching a certain subject matter from different perspectives, viewpoints, or systems of reference. From the standpoint of the relative subject-object consciousness, or *shes-rig*, absolute Consciousness appears as absolute Unconsciousness; but from its own standpoint, it is fully conscious; but conscious in the sense of not being a function of an entity or being, but as a field of pure, self-existent Consciousness that can be known as consciousness by the pilgrim only when he has passed through the journey of necessity. It is a basic principle that to assert being or existence in a sense which is totally unrelated to consciousness in any sense is completely meaningless. All assertions of existence are assertions in and for consciousness.

But now, as almost an hour has elapsed, there will not be time to take up the further references to absolute Consciousness. They may be considered later.

¹² Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, 71-72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.