

THE MENTAL PRINCIPLE

Questions have arisen among students as to the meaning of terms such as 'higher' and 'lower' mind, 'intellect', 'intelligence' and 'brain'. I will endeavor in the present instruction to clarify the various meanings. It is not possible to give clear-cut categorical definitions and at the same time give the significance attached to these terms by the various writers whose works may fall into the hands of the student. The subject is unavoidably involved and nothing of true understanding will be effected by a false simplicity.

In the first place, the meaning of terms in a living language is primarily determined by what is known as best usage in the current sense. As every living thing changes, so the meaning of terms in a language is not fixed. Only in mathematics do we have clear and therefore unambiguous definitions. Mathematical thinking is the only kind that is really easy; the reason it seems practically universally difficult lies in the common habit of confused thinking. The clearer one's thinking becomes, the easier he finds mathematics. But as the use of terms outside mathematics is more or less confused and unscientific, the result is that clear cut definitions do not accord with actual usage. The best course we can follow is to find the way in which terms are employed by the most competent writers and then follow their usage as far as possible.

In looking up a word in an unabridged dictionary, one of the first things given is the etymology or derivation of the word. This gives the meaning of the term or terms from which the word was derived, but actual current usage often departs radically from the primary meaning so it is not enough to merely know what the word once meant. However, if among a number of meanings given to a word, some are closer to the original, it is good practice to take such definition as primary, at the same time remembering that the author that we may be reading is possibly employing the term in a looser sense. We cannot get away from the necessity of employing much intuition and discrimination in our reading. In our own usage of terms, I most emphatically recommend the highest possible degree of accuracy as thus only can we attain any effect simplification, but so long as we speak the actual language of the world about us, we have to make the best of highly inaccurate and confused usage.

These introductory paragraphs are intended to warn the students against taking the following discussion in a dogmatic sense. I do not pretend to give sharp definitions as that would but produce a false simplicity.

A very important fact is that the term 'mind', as understood in native western thought, has by no means the same significance as manas, either in the sense of "higher" or "lower" manas. It is true that writers in the theosophical fields have generally translated 'manas' as "mind." If, then, the students look up the latter term in some authoritative source, such as Baldwin's Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, he will find a significance which practically covers Atma, Buddhi, Manas, Kama Manas and Kama Rupa, for the western use of 'mind' is often synonymous with "Consciousness." The meaning of Manas, however used, is far narrower than this. Hence I recommend the practice of using term 'manas' without translating it, or else if "mind" is employed, use compound forms such as 'higher mind', 'lower mind', 'desire mind', etc., but never 'mind' by itself.

Manas is not consciousness but a vehicle of Consciousness. But this is also true of Buddhi, hence it becomes necessary to differentiate the sense in which Manas differs as a vehicle from Buddhi. Buddhi is a passive vehicle and is absolutely universal.

Thus Buddhist consciousness separated from Manas has nothing to do with a self-conscious knower. It is non-egoistic or Nirvanic consciousness. It is the formless Light of Atma in the form of pure Intelligence. It is non-evolving and eternal. This gives us, I think, the distinguishing significance of the term 'Intelligence'. It is the primary Light of Consciousness in its most fundamental enrobement, i.e., Buddhi. It is thus possible for immature forms, such as animals and children, to reflect Intelligence. Manas involves the principle of Egoism, whether in a higher or lower sense. There is no such thing as individual selfhood that is distinguishable from the selfhood of others without Manas. Thus Manas is an absolute essential of self-conscious knowledge. We might thus say that Manas polarizes the Light of Consciousness to a specific knowing center of consciousness. Thus Manasic consciousness is the consciousness of somebody and not simply Consciousness in general. Only through Manas is it possible to attain individuality.

Manas is Consciousness in form. It is absolutely the only form of consciousness that can be spoken or thought. Hence, since the manifested universe is, for the occult [hidden] standpoint, the expression of the unmanifest Logos, it has become possible only as the thought of Mahat or Universal Mind. Without Manas there would be no Universe, but merely the void of unseen fullness.

Man stands between Spirit and Matter, and at the present stage he is drawn both ways. The result is that Manas appears as dual, in a higher and a lower aspect. The higher aspect is Manas as drawn toward Spirit (Atma-Buddhi), while the lower aspect is the same principle drawn toward matter. These two aspects correspond to and in fact are the very essence of higher and lower egoism. Spirit is impersonal and universal, hence that aspect of human thought which is most impersonal and universal centers in higher Manas. On the other hand, matter is the source of concreteness and particularization. Hence, thought which centers is personal self-interest is of the nature of lower manas. Obviously most current thinking is of the latter variety. So long as any one is dominated by the thought of what he is going to get out of it, with respect to any given situation, he is primarily on the level of lower manas. This is scarcely one in a million who have transcended this consciousness and all our hope of Liberation rests upon the fact that this small percentage does actually exist.

The pragmatic theory of knowledge which defines knowledge as being purely instrumental to the attainment of the objects of desire fits very well with the function of lower manas, but misses entirely the significance of higher Manas. The standpoint that views knowledge as a means to Truth-realization or as an end in itself represents higher Manas. From this standpoint, all of the concerns of sense and personal desire are themselves instrumental to knowledge instead of bearing the reverse relationship. Thus from the spiritual standpoint experience is not the end of life, but rather experience is simply the means of awakening Knowledge to individualized Consciousness. Our current tendency of placing the emphasis one experience rather than knowledge reveals the predominance of Kama Manas.