

## THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN EGO

### Multiple Selves or 'I's'

*An 'I' rises forth with every thought and with its disappearance that 'I' disappears too. Many 'I's' are born and die every moment.  
Ramana Maharshi*

- o Most people lack a stable, unified consciousness and are prey to the fluctuations of their minds. “At the mercy of outer and inner impacts, the behaviour of almost anyone will vary in accordance to their mood and their state of health.”
- o It is characteristic of undeveloped humanity to believe that they have a coherent, stabilized personality. In actual fact they have a multiple and changing personality. “You have to know, and to feel, how many ‘people’ there are in you. You may feel like one person, but in reality you are many.”

The Commanding Self is composed of a complex of “selves.” This is the totality of what the ordinary (raw) man or woman considers their personality. It is characterized by a shifting series of moods and personalities whose rapidity of movement gives the individual the impression that his consciousness is constant or a unity. It is not in fact so. (1)

- o One of the starting points in many esoteric teachings is the proposition that there is an absence of unity and a permanent ‘I’ in almost all so-called normal human beings. “You have been continually changing; you are in a state of flux. No identity of yours has remained as a permanent feature.”

In reality there is no oneness in man and there is no controlling center, no permanent “I” or Ego. This is the general picture of man. Every thought, every feeling, every sensation, every desire, every like and dislike is an “I.” These “I’s” are not connected and are not coordinated in any way. Each of them depends on the change in external circumstances, and on the change of impressions. Some of them mechanically follow some other, and some appear always accompanied by others. But there is no order and no system in that.

Each of these “I’s” represents at any given moment a very small part of our “brain,” “mind” or “intelligence,” but each of them means itself to represent *the whole*. When man says “I” it sounds as if he meant the whole of himself, but really even when he himself thinks that he means it, it is only a passing thought, a passing mood, or passing desire. In an hour’s time he may completely forget it, and with the same conviction express an opposite opinion, opposite view, opposite interests. The worst of it is that man does not remember it. In most cases he believes in the last “I” which expressed itself, as long as it lasts: that is, as long as another “I” – sometimes quite unconnected with the preceding one – does not express its opinion or its desire louder than the first. (2)

- o Each individual is composed of countless 'I's' or selves which alternate as circumstances and external conditions change. Any attempt to define a single, unchanging 'I' in the undeveloped human being is fruitless.

*Q: So the individual does not exist as an isolated entity. But does not the personality exist as a unique part of the whole?*

A: The person is really only persona, mask, but it has come to be synonymous with the idea of an individual, separate and continuous entity. The personality is not the constant we imagine it to be. In reality it is only a temporary reorchestration of all our sense, imagination and intelligence, according to each situation. There is no repetition in life and each reorchestration is unique and original like the design in a kaleidoscope. The mistake is to identify with the personality, to conceptualize it in memory and then take ourselves for this collection of crystalized images rather than letting all emotions, perceptions and thoughts arise and die within us. We are in the theatre watching our own play on stage. The actor is always 'behind' his persona. He seems to be completely lost in suffering, in being a hero, a lover, a rascal, but all these appearances take place in global presence. This presence is not a detached attitude, a witnessing position. It is not a feeling of separateness, of being 'outside.' It is the presence of wholeness, love, out of which all comes. When no situation calls for activity we remain in emptiness of activity, in this presence. (3)

- o The many contradictory 'I's' in a person cause all sorts of problems in the everyday life of the raw, undeveloped individual.

Man has no individuality. He has no single, big I. Man is divided into a multiplicity of small I's. And each separate small I is able to call itself by the name of the Whole, to act in the name of the Whole, to agree or disagree, to give promises, to make decisions, with which another I or the Whole will have to deal. This explains why people so often make decisions and so seldom carry them out. A man decides to get up early beginning from the following day. One I, or a group of I's, decides on this. But getting up is the business of another I who entirely disagrees with the decision and may even know absolutely nothing about it. Of course the man will again go on sleeping in the morning and in the evening he will again decide to get up early. In some cases this may assume very unpleasant consequences for a man. A small accidental I may promise something, not to itself, but to someone else at a certain moment simply out of vanity or for amusement. Then it disappears, but the man, that is, the whole combination of other I's who are quite innocent of this, may have to pay for it all his life. It is the tragedy of the human being that any small I has the right to sign checks and promissory notes and the man, that is, the Whole, has to meet them. People's whole lives often consist in paying off the promissory notes of small accidental I's. (4)

- o Allegories are employed in certain spiritual teachings to convey the idea of multiple 'I's' and a lack of overall coordination in most human beings.

Eastern teachings contain various allegorical pictures which endeavor to portray the nature of man's being from this point of view. Thus, in one teaching, man is compared to a house in which there is a multitude of servants but no master and no steward. The servants have all forgotten their duties; no one wants to do what he ought; everyone tries to be master, if only for a moment; and, in this kind of disorder, the house is threatened with grave danger. The only chance of salvation is for a group of the more sensible servants to meet together and elect a *temporary* steward, that is, a *deputy steward*. This *deputy steward* can then put the other servants in their places, and make each do his own work; the cook in the kitchen, the coachman in the stables, the gardener in the garden, and so on. In this way the 'house' can be got ready for the arrival of the real steward who will, in his turn, prepare it for the arrival of the master.

The comparison of a man to a house awaiting the arrival of the master is frequently met with in Eastern teachings which have preserved traces of ancient knowledge, and, as we know, the subject appears under various forms in many of the parables in the Gospels. (5)

### Language and 'I'

- o The structure of the English language strongly emphasizes the sense of a personal 'I' whose existence is responsible for our thoughts, emotions and actions.

Of the many devices employed by Ego to keep us in his power, none is more effective than language. The English language is so structured that it demands the repeated use of the personal pronoun "I" for grammatical nicety and presumed clarity. Actually this I is no more than a figure of speech, a convenient convention, but we talk and act as though it were real and true. Listen to any conversation and see how the stress invariably falls on the "I" – "I said . . ." "I did . . ." "I like . . ." "I hate . . ." All this plays into the hands of Ego, strengthening our servitude and enlarging our sufferings, for the more we postulate this I the more we are exposed to Ego's never-ending demands. (6)

- o Not all languages are constructed in such a fashion as to reinforce the notion of a separate self acting independently and autonomously.

In our culture, the sense of "me and my," of "I-ness," is so strongly emphasized. It is amazing, really, how often the word *I* is used in our speech. The English language is constructed in such a way that 90 percent of English sentences require the personal pronoun. There are other languages that don't require it at all; Japanese is one in which 90 percent of the sentences can be made without using a personal pronoun. In English, we would have to say, "I'm going downtown today." A Japanese would say, "Downtown going today." There's no personal pronoun; it's implied. The English language is structured this way because of our minds. If you teach your children, and yourself, to try to avoid the word *I* when it's not really necessary, not simply avoiding the word *I*, but avoiding the expression of self that the use implies, it can be helpful. If we keep saying "I, I, I . . ." unnecessarily, it tends to reinforce an idea of a separate self. (7)

- o An exercise which is employed in some spiritual schools is to try to be aware of how often we use the word 'I' and attempt to reduce its automatic usage.

It is a good exercise to spend a few hours or a day using the word "I" as sparingly as possible, or even not at all. One feels as if one is giving up some addiction. "I" is so important that people will kill others, or even themselves, in its defense. "I" is one of the most mysterious words and one of the most expensive. The Indian teacher Ramana Maharshi used to refer all comers to the question "Who am I?" This question also plays a significant role in the Sufi tradition and in Zen. (8)

### **The Ego Is an Illusion**

- o For most people the sense that they are a separate individual distinct from other people and surrounded by a world external to themselves is a self-evident truth. "We usually think of the ego as a kind of constant, unchanging entity. In fact, however, it is simply a succession of physical and mental events which appear momentarily and as quickly pass away."

The ego-I can be defined as the sense of oneself as an isolated being set apart from other selves – in other words, the unshakable belief that "I am here and the world stands outside me." But this notion of oneself as a discrete individual is a fiction produced by our senses and bifurcating intellect. (9)

- o In traditional spiritual teachings the existence of the ego is regarded as an illusion created by dualistic thinking. "What we think is our self is just a collection of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousnesses that are constantly revolving around and around and around."

According to Buddhism, the notion of an ego, that is, awareness of oneself as a discrete individual, is an illusion. It arises because, misled by our bifurcating intellect into postulating the dualism of "myself" and "not-myself," we are led to think and act as though we were a separated entity confronted by a world external to us. Thus in the unconscious the idea of "I," or selfhood, becomes fixed, and from this arise such thought patterns as "I hate this, I love that; this is mine, that is yours." Nourished by this fodder, the ego-I comes to dominate the personality, attacking whatever threatens its position and grasping at anything which will enlarge its power. Antagonism, greed and alienation, culminating in suffering, are the inevitable consequences of this circular process. (10)

- o The ego is sustained by memory and habit and has no independent or continuous reality. "Thoughts, feelings and actions appear and disappear indefinitely, creating an illusion of continuity. The idea of being a person, is nothing other than an image held together by memory."

*Q: If the ego is not real – that is, autonomous and continuous, what is it that functions in everyday life?*

A: The ego has no concreteness, no substance, no continuity. It is a collection of thoughts held together by memory. The person appears when you think of it. When the body wakes up in the morning, awareness is already there. You may not have noticed it but it is so. This awareness is not a thought, not a subject, nor a feeling. It finds no concretisation. Moments later, habit associates awareness with a body and a personality. Then you say, 'I am this. I am that.' (11)

- o Our states of mind are in constant flux and forever changing. A permanent unchanging self does not exist except conceptually.

Each of you has different roles in this life, each of you wears many different hats, but are you fundamentally aware of your own true person? Who is the real you? There is no unchanging ego, there is no entity called a soul. Everything is constantly changing in the stream of cause and effect. What has appeared vividly one moment is gone the next. Moment after moment, it streams along. Beyond this coming and going, this appearing and disappearing, there is nothing else. Phenomena are coming and going, and when you ask what is real, you have already missed it. It's gone. We pass from one conditioned state of mind to another. (12)

- o The belief in a separate ego creates a false duality which masks the underlying unity of all existence.

The image of ourselves that grows out of our time-and-sense bound consciousness is, in an ultimate sense, unreal. In fact, all of our self-limiting activities grow out of this false picture of ourselves. As a result of this false picture, we postulate a dualistic world of self and other, of things separated and isolated, of pain and struggle, birth and death, killing and being killed. This picture is untrue because it barely scratches the surface. It is like looking at one eighth of an iceberg above the water and refusing to acknowledge the seven eighths underneath. For if we could see beyond the ever-changing forms into the underlying reality, we would realize that fundamentally there is nothing but harmony and unity and that this perfection is no different from the phenomenal world of incessant change and transformation. But our vision is limited and our intuitions, weak. (13)

- o Thoughts, emotions and perceptions exist as a constant stream projected onto the field of awareness. The content of the mind is ever-changing, but the sense of awareness or presence is timeless and changeless.

*Q: You cannot possibly say that there are no differences between people. I have my character and capacities just as others have theirs.*

A: You live in contraction, thinking of yourself as an individual. Where do the terms 'me' and 'mine' find meaning? When you really look into yourself you cannot say that the body belongs to you. You are the result of two people and each parent had two parents and so on. All humanity is in you. You are what you absorb. You eat vegetables, fish, meat, and these are dependent on light,

the sun, warmth. There is nothing personal in us. The body is in organic relationship with the universe. It is made of the same elements as everything else. The composition of the elements varies but this variation is almost negligible in human beings. There may be differences in structure and colour but the constitution and functioning are the same in us all. There is nothing personal in the heart, liver, kidneys, the eyes, ears or skin, not in the elements which build patterns of behaviour, thinking, reactions, anger, jealousy, competition, comparison, and so on. These are the same emotional states. The body-mind functions in a universal way and the care that has to be taken is the same in all. (14)

- o Behind the illusion of separate egos lies the timeless background of pure awareness. “The ego functions as the knot between the Self, which is pure Consciousness, and the physical body, which is inert and insentient.”

As long as we imagine ourselves to be separate personalities, one quite apart from another, we cannot grasp reality which is essentially impersonal. First we must know ourselves as witnesses only, dimensionless and timeless centers of observation, and then realize that immense ocean of pure awareness, which is both mind and matter and beyond both.

*Q: Whatever I may be in reality, yet I feel myself to be a small and separate person, one amongst many.*

A: Your being a person is due to the illusion of space and time; you imagine yourself to be at a certain point occupying a certain volume; your personality is due to your self-identification with the body. Your thoughts and feelings exist in succession, they have their span in time and make you imagine yourself, because of memory, as having duration. In reality time and space exist in you; you do not exist in them. They are modes of perception, but they are not the only ones. Time and space are like words written on paper; the paper is real, the words merely a convention. (15)

### **The Self-Enclosed Ego**

*As long as you take yourself to be a person, a body and a mind, separate from the stream of life, having a will of its own, pursuing its own aims, you are living merely on the surface and whatever you do will be short-lived and of little value, mere straws to feed the flames of vanity.*

*Nisargadatta Maharaj*

- o Most of our relationships with other people and with our environment are based on a sense of separateness, thereby blocking the perception of wholeness and the unity of all existence.

When we live free from all ideas and projections, we come into real contact with our surroundings. Practically speaking, therefore, before we can be related to our environment we must first know how to be related to that most near to us, body,

senses and mind. The only hindrances to the clear perception of our natural state is the forceful idea of being a separate individual, living in a world with other separate beings. We have an image of ourselves. This image can be maintained only in relation to things and thus it makes objects of our surroundings, friends, children, spouse, intelligence, bank account, etc., and enters into what is called a personal relationship with these projections. The fanciful idea of a self is a contraction, a limitation of wholeness, real being. (16)

- o In many traditional spiritual teachings the human ego is identified as the major impediment to self-realization. The illusion of a separate 'I' or ego disconnected from the rest of life and the universe causes ignorance and suffering.

The Bliss of Self is always yours and you will find it if you seek it earnestly. The cause of your misery is not in your outer life; it is in you, as your ego. You impose limitations on yourself and then make a vain struggle to transcend them. All unhappiness is due to the ego. With it comes all your trouble. What does it avail you to attribute the cause of misery to the happenings of life when that cause is really within you. What happiness can you get from things extraneous to yourself? When you get it how long will it last. If you would deny the ego and scorch it by ignoring it you would be free. (17)

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The moment you awaken from sleep you seem to know the whole world. This passing show, which is in a state of flux the whole time, is thrown like a picture on your beingness. Through an illusion we are thinking that "I" have a separate personality, that "I" am a separate self. The consciousness which is all-pervading does not have this feeling of limited beingness. This all-pervading consciousness has no ignorance and no knowledge, but ignorance and knowledge take birth in it. (18)

- o Buddhist teachings assert that the fundamental cause of human suffering is the sense of a separate self. Human beings are prisoners of their egos, which creates a false duality of self and others.

Your mind can be compared to a mirror, which reflects everything that appears before it. From the time you began to think, to feel, and to exert your will, shadows are cast upon your mind which distort its reflection. This condition we call delusion, which is the fundamental sickness of human beings. The most serious effect of this sickness is that it creates a sense of duality, in consequence of which you postulate "I" and "not-I." The truth is that everything is One, and this of course is not a numerical one. Falsely seeing oneself confronted by a world of separate existences, this is what creates antagonism, greed, and, inevitably, suffering. The purpose of Zen is to wipe away from the mind these shadows or defilements so that we can intimately experience our solidarity with all life. Love and compassion then naturally and spontaneously flow forth. (19)

- o The sense of a personal existence ('I-am-so-and-so') obscures the changeless state of pure awareness, producing alienation and suffering. "The fundamental error of our lives is the build-up of an ego which believes itself to be distinct and separate."

*Q: What is the real cause of suffering?*

A: Self-identification with the limited. Sensations as such, however strong, do not cause suffering. It is the mind, bewildered by wrong ideas, addicted to thinking: 'I am this,' 'I am that,' that fears loss and craves gain and suffers when frustrated. (20)

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*Q: Why is there so much suffering in the world?*

A: Selfishness is the cause of suffering. There is no other cause.

*Q: I understood that suffering is inherent in limitation.*

A: Differences and distinctions are not the cause of sorrow. Diversity in unity is natural and good. It is only with separateness and self-seeking that real suffering appears in the world. (21)

### **Ego and Suffering**

- o The dominant role of the ego gives rise to all the myriad problems of life. Until we clearly observe the workings of the ego, real human transformation is an impossibility.

Ego is the unobserved mind that runs your life when you are not present as the witnessing consciousness, the watcher. The ego perceives itself as a separate fragment in a hostile universe, with no real inner connection to any other being, surrounded by other egos which it either sees as a potential threat or which it will attempt to use for its own ends. The basic ego patterns are designed to combat its own deep-seated fear and sense of lack. They are resistance, control, power, greed, defense, attack. Some of the ego's strategies are extremely clever, yet they never truly solve any of its problems, simply because the ego itself is the problem. (22)

- o Human suffering arises from the creation of a separate self which is a mere fraction of our real nature. "Our most beloved construct is the separate entity called "myself," "me." The deeply conditioned belief in the true existence of this "self" and the attachment to it turn out to be the root source of our unhappiness and isolation."

Seeing ourselves as an autonomous entity, an individual, is the basic error of our conditioning. This fractional viewpoint makes understanding an impossibility. It is a fictitious concept, totally lacking in substance and independence, just like the images that appear in dreams. Everything we do on the level of the concept

“me” is intentional and implicated. Any action influenced by the concept of the individual I, traps us in a vicious circle. In these circumstances we are the doer, the thinker, and are chained in a psychological relationship to the act or thought. (23)

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*Q: Isn't the personality also a part of biological survival?*

A: You bring with you into the world certain characteristics that belong to your biological survival in this existence. But what we call the personality is acquired early in life. It is an accumulation of experiences and information born from your interaction with society. We are the result of our surroundings. We have believed what we have been told, crystallized it and identified with it. But the apparent continuity of the personality is only memory reinforced by society. See that the personality can be perceived like anything else. The perceiver is your wholeness, consciousness. The personality is only a fraction of what we really are. A fraction can only see a fraction. It can never be harmonious. All acting which comes out of the fractional point of view is reaction. (24)

- o Human unhappiness is largely self-created and a reflection of the workings of the ego. “Refuse to think of yourself in terms of this or that. There is no other way out of misery, which you have created yourself through blind acceptance without investigation.”

The cause of your misery is not in the life without; it is in you as the ego. You impose limitations on yourself and then make a vain struggle to transcend them. All unhappiness is due to the ego; with it comes all your trouble. What does it avail you to attribute to the happenings in life the cause of misery which is really within you? What happiness can you get from things extraneous to yourself? When you get it, how long will it last? (25)

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All your problems arise because you have defined and therefore limited yourself. When you do not think yourself to be this or that, all conflict ceases. Any attempt to do something about your problems is bound to fail, for what is caused by desire can be undone only in freedom from desire. You have enclosed yourself in time and space, squeezed yourself into the span of a lifetime and the volume of a body and thus created the innumerable conflicts of life and death, pleasure and pain, hope and fear. You cannot get rid of problems without abandoning illusions. (26)

- o The ego is constantly reacting to other people and events, blocking and distorting the natural flow of life.

The ordinary man's activity is made up of reactions which are the expressions of his egotistic makeup. He is a self surrounded by pleasant and unpleasant, friendly or hostile objects, and everything which impinges on him incites him to react according to his desires and his fears. Consequently, all his reactions are false, fragmentary, inadequate, because they are rooted in his egotistic outlook which is born of his delusion that he is a separate self. All the traditional doctrines

teach us methods by which we may come to discard this state of reaction and reach an ego-less state where all reactions cease to be, giving place to impersonal actions which are true, impartial and adequate. (27)

- o Memories of past events leave traces which act as conditioning elements and reinforce the self-centered activity of the ego.

The problem arises only when the memory of past pains and pleasures – which are essential to all organic life – remains as a reflex, dominating behaviour. This reflex takes the shape of ‘I’ and uses the body and the mind for its purposes, which are invariably in search for pleasure or flight from pain. When you recognize the ‘I’ as it is, a bundle of desires and fears, and the sense of ‘mine,’ as embracing all things and people needed for the purpose of avoiding pain and securing pleasure, you will see that the ‘I’ and the ‘mine’ are false ideas, having no foundation in reality. Created by the mind, they rule their creator as long as it takes them to be true; when questioned they dissolve. (28)

- o In order to embark on the journey of self-transformation, it is necessary to examine and question why we think, feel and act as we do.

Why is there this strong identification with *this* person I call “me,” this mind with its remembered history, its self-images, and this body I call “my own”? Why this tremendously strong identification and attachment to it all? Is that worth questioning? Is identification with and attachment to this mindbody the very root source of fear? Without attachment to ourselves, what would there be to worry and tremble about?

What are we so identified with our life story? Why not just let there be simple awareness of what’s happening – happy moments, fearful thoughts, angry feelings, sad memories, work well done, mistakes made – without weaving it all into more story? Thought is always stepping into the picture as “me,” the main character – damming up the stream of events with self-reference, reacting and commenting and emoting about “myself” – becoming attached to what is experienced and felt as “good me,” and rejecting of what is judged as “bad me.” We are clinging, denying, or escaping from ourselves all the time. (29)

- o The operation of the self-centered ego is the chief obstacle to wholeness and self-realization.

As long as the egoic mind is running your life, you cannot truly be at ease; you cannot be at peace or fulfilled except for brief intervals when you obtained what you wanted, when a craving has just been fulfilled. Since the ego is a derived sense of self, it needs to identify with external things. It needs to be both defended and fed constantly. The most common ego identifications have to do with possessions, the work you do, social status and recognition, knowledge and education, physical appearance, special abilities, relationships, personal and family history, belief systems, and often also political, nationalistic, racial, religious, and other collective identifications. None of these is you. Do you find this frightening? Or is it a relief to know this? All of these things you will have to relinquish sooner or later. (30)

## **Estrangement From the Source**

*'The holy Grail legend, the Gilgamesh epic, the travail of the Wandering Jew – all these allegories vividly portray man's alienation from his True nature and his quest for wholeness.'*  
*Philip Kapleau*

- o Traditional spiritual teachings speak of a forgetting or turning away from the Self or ground of Being, leading to a sense of alienation and suffering. “We are completely unaware of our true nature because we constantly identify ourselves with our body, our emotions and our thoughts, thus losing sight of our unchanging center which is pure consciousness.”

We live in a world of objects which are forever changing. Even our mind is in a state of perpetual change. We have an impression of universal becoming. This is because we have completely forgotten that the Self (the supreme subject) underlies the ego and the world of which it is an unmoving motive power and the ultimate knower. *Sadhana* [spiritual practice] is nothing else but a return to the consciousness of the unmovable and blissful Self which is the root of ourselves and all objects. This losing sight of the consciousness of Self is described in the Vedantic tradition as a process of identification with objects. It is a kind of forgetfulness, of fascination, of attraction. The myth of Narcissus is a perfect illustration of this fall into the object, the seeming absorption of the Self into the wave of Samsara. From this moment onwards, the Self has forgotten itself, paradise is lost and an ego arises, an ego which says: “I do this, I suffer, I think.” By virtue of this identification, what is impersonal becomes mistakenly personal. The search for happiness becomes a desperate search, for the ego – having lost its consciousness of the Self, of perfect bliss – now seeks happiness in finite and passing objects. Sooner or later however, the ego will be impelled to see the impossibility of finding true happiness in objects and in separate beings. (31)

- o The major obstacle to self-realization is the habitual identification of the mind with the experiences and phenomena of life rather than the underlying source of all existence.

There is the body and there is the Self. Between them is the mind, in which the Self is reflected as ‘I am.’ Because of the imperfections of the mind, its crudity and restlessness, lack of discernment and insight, it takes itself to be the body, not the Self. All that is needed is to purify the mind so that it can realize its identity with the Self. When the mind merges in the Self, the body presents no problems. It remains what it is, an instrument of cognition and action, the tool and the expression of the creative fire within. (32)

- o Analogies are sometimes employed to emphasize the self-imposed limitations or ‘blindness’ which masks perception of the fundamental Source or Self.

A woman wore a necklace around her neck, but forgot it. She began to search for it and made enquiries. A friend of hers, finding out what she was looking for, pointed out the necklace round the seeker's neck. She felt it with her hands and was happy. Did she get the necklace anew? Here again ignorance caused grief and knowledge happiness. Similarly also with an individual and the Self. There is nothing to be gained anew. Ignorance of the Self is the cause of the present misery; knowledge of the Self brings about happiness. (33)

- o Buddhist teachings point to the separation of human beings from the greater dimensions and significance of the One Reality as the fundamental cause of suffering.

Our estrangement from the real Self is reflected in the unsatisfactory quality of our life – the pain, the existential anxiety, the unfulfillment. This human predicament can be compared to a wheel not running true on its axle and thus grinding. Fragmented and frustrated, we long for wholeness and freedom.

We are split off from our true Self in yet another way. Even as we exist in time and space, in a world that is finite, impermanent, and material, *simultaneously* we inhabit a world that is infinite, eternal and formless. Owing to our bifurcating intellect, which divides and separates, we are alienated from our Essential-mind. This Mind cannot be perceived until we are in an awakened state. Thus we are the flawed children of Mother Earth and Father Spirit. Living in our temporary home, the biosphere, with its pain, its beauty, its joy, we are estranged from our permanent abode, the Void. (34)

- o The phenomena of the natural world provide many examples of separation and eventual return to the source of life. “As long as there is the sense of separation there will be conflict. If the original source is regained and the sense of separation is put to an end, there is peace.”

Consider what happens when a stone is thrown up. It leaves its source and is projected up, tries to come down and is always in motion until it regains its source, where it is at rest. So also the waters of the ocean evaporate, form clouds which are moved by winds, condense into water, fall as rain and the waters roll down the hill in streams and rivers, until they reach their original source, the ocean, reaching which they are at peace. Thus, you see, wherever there is a sense of separateness from the source there is agitation and movement until the sense of separateness is lost. So it is with yourself. Now that you identify yourself with the body you think that you are separate from the Spirit – the true Self. You must regain your source before the false identity ceases and you are happy. (35)

- o When ignorance of our real nature is dissolved in the light of understanding, the sense of separation from the Self or Source vanishes.

*Q: How shall I reach the Self?*

A: There is no reaching the Self. If the Self were to be reached, it would mean that the Self is not now and here, but that it should be got anew. What is got afresh, will also be lost. So it will be impermanent. What is not permanent is not worth striving for. So I say, the Self is not reached. You are the Self. You

are already That. The fact is that you are ignorant of your blissful state. Ignorance supervenes and draws a veil over the pure Bliss. Attempts are directed only to remove this ignorance. This ignorance consists in wrong knowledge. The wrong knowledge consists in the false identification of the Self with the body, the mind, etc. This false identity must go and there remains the Self. (36)

- o There is really nothing to add to our lives, only self-imposed obstacles to be removed in the realization of true Being or the Self.

Truly there is no cause for you to be miserable and unhappy. You yourself impose limitations on your true nature of infinite Being and then weep that you are but a finite creature. Then you take up this or that *sadhana* to transcend the nonexistent limitations. But if your *sadhana* itself assumes the existence of the limitations, how can it help you to transcend them?

Hence I say know that you are really the infinite, pure Being, the Self Absolute. You are always that Self and nothing but that Self. Therefore, you can never be really ignorant of the Self; your ignorance is merely a formal ignorance.

Know then that true Knowledge does not create a new Being for you; it only removes your “ignorant ignorance.” Bliss is not added to your nature; it is merely revealed as your true and natural state, eternal and imperishable. The only way to get rid of your grief is to *know* and *be* the Self. How can this be unattainable? (37)

### **Transcending the Ego**

- o The misconception that human beings are separate and distinct is conveyed through our subjective perception of the phenomenal world of space and time.

As human beings we see life by means of certain sensory apparatus and because people and objects seem external to us, we experience much misery. Our misery stems from the misconception that we are separate. Certainly it *looks* as though I am separate from other people and from all else in the phenomenal world. This misconception that we’re separate creates all the difficulties of human life.

Now the truth of the matter is that we’re not separate. We are all expressions or emanations of a central point – call it multidimensional energy. We can’t picture this; the central point or energy has no size, no space, no time. I’m speaking metaphorically about what can’t really be spoken of in ordinary terms.

Following this metaphor, it’s as though this central point radiates out in billions of rays, each thinking that it’s separate from all others. In truth, each of us is always that center, and that center is us. Because everything is connected in that center, we’re all just one thing. (38)

- o Our self-image is based on memory and conditioning and thereby lacks spontaneity, flexibility and creativity.

Don’t localize yourself in the idea of a personality. It’s nothing but memory. When you live from moment to moment without memory, the real personality has the opportunity to emerge. It appears in emptiness, is perfectly appropriate

to each situation and the moment the situation ends it dissolves back into emptiness.

For example, if you locate yourself in the image of a woman you begin to try to meet all that this image implies. But it's only when the image is dropped that the real woman lives. So situations occur where the woman *in* you appears, but you are not the woman.

There is only consciousness, which you have in common with all living beings. In this silent awareness, distinctions certainly arise but there is no separation. (39)

- o When we cease to identify with the ego we are open to the light of conscious awareness and presence. "Free from the I-image and psychological memory, we are open to intelligence, to a purely functional memory, a cosmic memory, a universal memory."

*Q: What is this self? Who am I?*

Your real nature is stillness, light, expansion, without center or periphery. It is unconditioned being, love. But you do not see it for you are a prisoner of your imagination and of second-hand information. You have enclosed yourself in a universe of concepts and beliefs. The ego is only a function, and to identify with it is a lack of true vision. Thoughts, feelings and actions appear in succession before the witness, leaving their imprint in your brain. Recalling them makes you believe in a continuity which is actually non-existent. But memory is a present thought, thoughts of the past occur in the present. In reality there is only presence, non-dual consciousness. We mistakenly take ourselves to be this or that, but there is only the true "I am" beyond time and space. (40)

- o The absence of an ego or self-image allows a deeper intelligence to emerge which responds skillfully to the changing situations and challenges of everyday life. "The true personality appears and subsides the moment that situation ends. There is no fixation for it is completely open to all that is."

We project an image of being somebody and identify with this. And as long as we take ourselves to be an independent entity, there is continual hunger, a feeling of incompleteness. The ego is constantly searching for fulfillment and security, hence its perpetual need to become, to achieve, to attain. So we never really contact life, for this requires openness from moment to moment. In this openness the agitation aroused by trying to fill an absence in yourself comes to an end, and in the remaining stillness you are pointed back to your completeness. Without a self-image you are really one with life and with the movement of intelligence. Only then can we speak of spontaneous action. We all know moments when pure intelligence, freed from psychological interference, arises, but as soon as we return to an image of being somebody we question this intuition by asking if it's right or wrong, good or bad for us, and so on. Whatever we do intentionally belongs to the "ego-I," and though it appears as action, it is really just reaction. (41)

- o In order to live in a state of open awareness we need to let go of the conditioned ego which binds us to the past.

As long as you take yourself for an independent entity, you are bound to the ego. The presence that is silence, stillness, is only in the absence of the person. So it is this deep-rooted idea of being somebody which takes you away from stillness, from silence. Practically speaking, familiarize yourself with listening, looking, hearing, without letting conceptualization interfere. Look, listen, without naming, judging, comparing, evaluating, justifying and so on. Simply live in perception without conceptualization. Because in pure perception there is no room for the person, the "I." (42)

- o The existence of the sense of a limited ego prevents a direct, all-embracing intuitive awareness of reality. "The egocentric self creates its own world instead of perceiving the world as it really is. The aim of spiritual training is to see into the ultimate unreality of the ego-I and transform the confused and unenlightened mind into enlightenment, or a selfless-I."

Because the ego-self stands apart from all other selves, it considers itself the unique center of things. In reality it is merely an objectified self and not the true, living, unconditioned Self, which underlies and unifies all existence. This latter cannot be objectified or be known through reason or conceptualization, for it is inconceivable and unimaginable. It is the elusive, unnameable actor always behind the scenes. Thus all attempts to know our original Self through intellection and imagination are doomed to failure.

Actually there is no personal self: the entire universe is the Self. Not knowing we are this majestic Self, we imagine ourselves to be no more than this puny body, just a speck in the universe. Thus we mistakenly postulate an other, imagine a gulf between self and other where none exists, and then exalt ourselves and put down others. This is the basic delusion of sentient beings. (43)

- o Interpersonal relationships provide many opportunities for transcending the ego if one remains in open awareness without reacting automatically to the manifestations of others.

Nonreaction to the ego of others is one of the most effective ways not only of going beyond ego in yourself but also of dissolving the collective human ego. But you can only be in a state of nonreaction if you can recognize someone's behaviour as coming from the ego, as being an expression of the collective human dysfunction. When you realize it's not personal, there is no longer a compulsion to react as if it were. By not reacting to the ego, you will often be able to bring out the sanity in others, which is the unconditioned consciousness as opposed to the conditioned. At times you may have to take practical steps to protect yourself from deeply unconscious people. This you can do without making them into enemies. Your greatest protection, however, is being conscious. Somebody becomes an enemy if you personalize the unconsciousness that is the ego. Nonreaction is not weakness but strength. Another word for nonreaction is forgiveness. To forgive is to overlook, or rather to look through. You look through the ego to the sanity that is in every human being as his or her essence. (44)

- o By not identifying with the "I-image" we are free to deal with the experiences of life in a much more spontaneous and effective manner. We then use the personality as a functional tool.

When you need the personality, it comes to you. It is the situation which asks for it. But it is a completely transparent personality. You need it, you use it, and you forget it. There is no memory in it. Identifying with the personality must come to an end, and in this absence there is presence. The personality is psychological memory. How can you face life through memory? Life never repeats; it is always new. It is only psychological memory that maintains the “I-concept.” In living free from memory there is spontaneity, and in this spontaneity you are completely adequate to every situation. (45)

- o Many spiritual teachings stress the importance of “letting go” and merging with pure awareness and being. “When you have stopped thinking of yourself as a separated individuality and have realized the Oneness of all existence, you have dealt your ego a mortal blow.”

To awaken to pure awareness is to die to the awareness of “I am a human being,” or “I am something.” In the same way to die to pure awareness is to awaken to “I am a human being.” To come home to ourselves as pure awareness means that we have let go of all the thoughts, ideas, memories, and constructs that we have about ourselves. But essentially, it means that we have let go of the idea of “I,” “I am something separate,” “I am a unique, separate, individual, isolated, special being.” (46)

- o Simple awareness and mindfulness is the key to transforming the ego. “The moment you become aware of the ego in you, it is strictly speaking no longer the ego, but just an old, conditioned mind-pattern. Ego implies unawareness. Awareness and ego cannot coexist.

To become free of the ego is not really a big job but a very small one. All you need to do is to be aware of your thoughts and emotions – as they happen. This is not really a “doing,” but an alert “seeing.” In that sense, it is true that there is nothing you can do to become free of the ego. When that shift happens, which is the shift from thinking to awareness, an intelligence far greater than the ego’s cleverness begins to operate in your life. Emotions and even thoughts become depersonalized through awareness. Their impersonal nature is recognized. There is no longer a self in them. They are just human emotions, human thoughts. Your entire personal history, which is ultimately no more than a story, a bundle of thoughts and emotions, becomes of secondary importance and no longer occupies the forefront of your consciousness. It no longer forms the basis for your sense of identity. You are the light of Presence, the awareness that is prior to and deeper than any thoughts and emotions. (47)

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