

Yoga and the future Science of Consciousness: some notes

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Knowing through the Mind:

*Koham kathamidam cheti samúsøaramalmøatatam
pravirchøayam prayatnena prøaj-ena sahasøadhunøa*

*Who am I? Whence is this widespread cosmic flux?
These, the wise should inquire into diligently,
Soon nay, now.*

Mahopanishad IV, 21

Am I primarily a body which has, in response to accidental material forces and laws, produced a mind and a sense of self so that I can think and have both self-consciousness and consciousness of other people and things? Or am I essentially something else - variously called spirit, soul, self, Brahman, God, the Buddha Mind, the Very Person - who has taken on a body (including the mind) as an instrument for the purpose of action, love and delight in the world? Does the body have the consciousness or does consciousness have the body? Can the body exist without consciousness, and can consciousness exist without bodily functions?

It is quite clear on which side of these questions lie the responses of yoga and all other spiritual disciplines. The responses of our contemporary science are on the other side. This should hardly come as any surprise, for the very basic assumptions and procedures of modern science preclude knowing anything which is above the level of the mind in the hierarchy of the levels of consciousness.¹ What about the future science of consciousness?

One of the fundamental assertions in the theory and discipline of yoga is that the true knower is not the mind. The real knower - called *purusa*, the Very Person - knows *through* the mind, not *with* the mind.² It is useful to recall a remark of William Blake in this context: 'I see not with the eyes but through the eyes'. What is at issue is a hierarchy of levels of being and therefore of consciousness within a person, and a question about the nature of the person. It is for this reason that in every spiritual tradition, the question 'Who am I?' or some variant on it, is considered the fundamental human question. As a contemporary Zen master in Korea, Chulwoong Sunim, simply said to me, 'Who am I?' is the most essential and comprehensive koan.

It is also a basic question about the nature of the cosmos for we are not apart from it, nor can we have any certainty about the nature and validity of what we know about the cosmos without having some clarity of what in us knows and how.

The Psalmist asks in the Bible (*Psalm 8*):

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*

There is a very important heuristic principle in modern science which interferes with the knowledge of a radically different and higher level. This principle enters as the Copernican Principle in Astronomy and Cosmology and as the Principle of Uniformitarianism in Geology

and Biology, one to do with space and the other with time. According to the former, any point in the universe can be taken to be the centre, for in each direction the universe on the large is homogeneous and isotropic. The latter principle says essentially that the same laws and forces have operated in the past as in the present. Neither of these principles has anything to say about levels of consciousness. But in practice one consequence of these principles has been a denial of a radical discontinuity not only temporally and spatially but also in terms of levels of being among humans. One of the important aspects of modern science, starting with the great scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, has been a scientifically very successful idea that the materials and laws on other planets and galaxies, and in the past and future times, can be studied in terms of the laws, materials and forces available to us now on the earth. But, almost by implication and quite subtly, this notion has done away with the analogical and symbolic modes of thinking according to which a fully developed person could mirror internally the various levels of the external cosmos.

A Science of Consciousness Requires Transformed Scientists:

When the ancients and even the medieval thinkers in Europe or China or India in their sciences of alchemy, astronomy and cosmology spoke of different planets having different materials and different laws, at least in part it meant that various levels of being or consciousness have different laws. And that higher consciousness could not be understood in terms of, and by remaining at, a lower consciousness. The subtler and higher aspects of the cosmos could be understood only by the subtler and higher levels within humans. In this mode of thinking true knowledge is obtained by participation and fusion of the knower with the object of study, and the scientist is required to become higher in order to understand higher things. As St Paul said, things of the mind can be understood by the mind; things of the spirit by the spirit. And the ancient Indian texts say that only by becoming Brahman can one know Brahman. The *Gandharva Tantra* says that 'no one who is not himself divine can successfully worship divinity.' For Parmenides and for Plotinus 'to be and to know are one and the same'.³ This has implications for any future science of higher consciousness which would hope to relate with what is real. Such a science would have to be *esoteric*, not in the sense of being an exclusive possession of some privileged group, but because it would speak of qualities which are more subtle and less obvious; such a science would demand and assist the preparation, integration and attunement of the body, mind and heart of the scientists so that they would be able to participate in the vision revealed by higher consciousness. In the felicitous phrase of Meister Eckhart, one needs to be 'fused and not confused'. *Tatra praj-a ritambhara* (there insight is naturally truth-bearing), says Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* (1.48-49; 2.15; 3.54). This preparation is needed in order to open the third eye, for the two usual eyes do not correspond to the higher vision. It is only the third which can see the hidden Sun, for as Plotinus says, 'to any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did the eye see the sun unless it had first become sun-like, and never can the soul have vision of the First Beauty unless itself be beautiful'.⁴

The important lesson here from the perspective of any future science of consciousness is the importance of knowledge by identity. We cannot remain separate and detached if we wish to understand. We need to participate in and be one with what we wish to understand. Thus Meister Eckhart: 'Why does my eye recognize the sky, and why do not my feet recognize it? Because my eye is more akin to heaven than my feet. Therefore my soul must be divine if it is to recognize God'.⁵ Similarly Goethe:

*War' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,
Die Sonne konnt' es nie erblicken.
Lag' nicht in uns des Gottes eigene Kraft,
Wie konnt' uns Gottliches entzucken?*

*If the eye were not sensitive to the sun,
It could not perceive the sun.
If God's own power did not lie within us,
How could the divine enchant us?*

In the well nigh universal traditional idea of a correspondence between a human being and the cosmos, the microcosmos-macrocosmos homology, what is easily forgotten is that this idea does not apply to every human being. It is only the fully developed person (mahapurusa) who is said to mirror the whole cosmos. Such developed persons are quite rare. The idea of inner levels of being (or of consciousness) is absolutely central, as is the question of 'What is a person?' It is difficult to convince oneself that the various spiritual disciplines for the purpose of transformation of human consciousness can be dispensed with by developing concepts or instruments from a relatively lower levels of consciousness. But unwillingness or even a refusal of the need for radical transformation is ubiquitous. Even when the idea of transformation has an appeal, one wishes to be transformed without changing - without a renunciation of what one now is and with an attitude of saying, 'Lord, save me while I stay as I am'.

It is important to remark that it is not possible to come to a higher state of consciousness without coming to a higher state of conscience. The general scholarly bias tends to be towards a study of various levels of consciousness - which are much more spoken of in the Indic traditions- and not so much towards various levels of conscience which are elaborated in the Biblical traditions. It would be difficult to make much sense of Dante's *Divine Comedy* without an appreciation of levels of conscience. In many languages, such as Spanish, French and Sanskrit, the word for both conscience and consciousness is the same. This fact alone should alert us to the possibility of an intimate connection between the two. The awakening of conscience is the feeling preparation for an enhancement of consciousness.

The Future Was and Is:

One of the most important aspects of consciousness is its time sense, and an essential feature of high levels of consciousness is a sense of timelessness or a simultaneity of all time. The remark of Jesus Christ, 'the lamb slain from the foundation of the world,' (*Revelation xiii 8*) that 'Before Abraham was, I AM' (*John viii 58*) indicates the freedom from time sequence which is a characteristic of high states of consciousness. Such states correspond to levels which are 'eternal' (which is not the same as everlasting). According to the *Yoga Sutra* (4:33), the sense of time as sequence enters when the level of consciousness falls from the highest. The highest state - that of *kaivalya* - is that of freedom precisely because it is free of the constraints of time. All our scientific measurements quite rightly are in the realm of time. Otherwise, there can be no measurement. One of the root meanings of the word *maya* in Sanskrit is to measure. Thus that which can be measured cannot possibly be real; the Real practically by definition being that which is perceived in the highest state of consciousness. The Real is immeasurable. But It can be tasted, experienced, delighted in.

An important concept related with time is that of 'progress'. It will be silly to deny certain kinds of progress brought about by science and technology. But when it comes to an understanding of higher consciousness, what the great traditions have revealed does not pertain only to the past. Of necessity, the documents and the heroes of the traditions are from the past. But strictly speaking, the major concern of the traditions is the Real, eternally and for ever, neither in the past nor in the future.⁶

The First Person Universal:

In our attempts to find objective knowledge, which is the great aspiration of science, the yoga of the West, we cannot eliminate the person. What is needed in fact is an enlargement of the person - freed from the merely personal and subjective - to be inclusive. In order to comprehend one needs to be comprehensive - not as a horizontal extension of more and more knowledge, but as a vertical transformation in order to participate in the universal mind.

Reverting to the opening idea in this paper, although it is true that we humans know and think, but the question is what or who thinks. During a conversation with the author, J. Krishnamurti said quite simply, 'You know, sir, it occurs to me that K does not think at all. That's strange. He just looks'.⁷ We know from association that K was a short form of Krishnamurti. But what is Krishnamurti a short form of? Of the entire cosmos? Not him alone, potentially so each one of us. If so, what looks and knows through thought rather than with thought?

The yoga of the East is towards the realization of the First Person Universal. Only such a person can know without opposition and separation, freed from any desire to control or to manipulate. Then one loves what one knows.

Endnotes:

1. Please see Ravindra, R. 'Experience and Experiment: A Critique of Modern Scientific Knowing,' *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 55, 1975-76, pp. 655-74. Reprinted as Chapter 7 in *Science and Spirit*; ed. R. Ravindra; Paragon House, New York, 1991.

2. In this connection, please see Ravindra, R. 'Yoga: the Royal Path to Freedom,' in *Hindu Spirituality: Vedas Through Vedanta*; ed. K. Sivaraman; New York, Crossroad Publishers, 1989, 177-91. [Volume 6 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest*]. Also included in Ravindra, R. *Yoga and the Teaching of Krishna*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, India, 1997.

3. Parmenides, Diels, Fr. 185; Plotinus, *Enneads* vi. 9.

4. Plotinus, *Enneads* I. 6. 9.

5. Quoted by Klostermaier, Klaus K. in his *A Survey of Hinduism*, State University of New York Press, 2nd ed., 1994, footnote no. 20, p. 533.

6. Please see Ravindra, R. and Murray, P. 'ÔIs the Eternal Everlasting?,' *The Theosophist*, v. 117, 140-46, 1996. Also included in Ravindra, R. *Yoga and the Teaching of Krishna*, Theosophical Publishing House, Adyar, India, 1997.

7. See Ravindra, R. *Krishnamurti: Two Birds on One Tree*; Quest Books, Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A., 1995, p. 77.

