

TRUTH FROM WITHIN

by N. Sri Ram

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THERE are people who think that the ancient teachings which some of us regard as constituting a body of ageless wisdom cannot interest the modern man because he has moved into a sphere of expanding knowledge and action, with which all his ideas and interests are very closely bound. There is obviously some truth in this view, but what kind of knowledge is the question. The proper inference from the above observation is that we should meet him where he is, examining his ideas and understanding his problems and difficulties. These problems are created very largely by his absorption in those very ideas and interests. Obviously he is neither at peace with himself nor in a happy relation with his fellows; and there can be no cure for this condition in any kind of a philosophy which merely rationalizes the ideas he entertains or appeals to the very interests which constitute the limitations of his mentality.

The grave perils in the present world situation as well as the causes of the inner discontent and restlessness which we find in so very many people spring from the conditions of the present highly complex and weighted world to which their mind lends itself without an understanding of itself. The world is no longer a simple place to live in. It is heavily [Page 212] weighted with diverse interests which have their physical base and reflection in the structures with which we are covering the earth, the sky-scrapers and heavy installations, the organizations for diverse purposes and their ceaseless activities. Everything that has mass exercises gravity; in this case it is exercised on a mind that is unable to remain self-contained and free, but is impressed, influenced, pulled and pushed, this whole process intensified by the deadly competition between individuals, groups and organizations for gains of various sorts.

The new conditions have been created by man himself and are evidence of his success in certain directions which he has followed; but this success threatens to prove his undoing. The forces that act upon him from different points on the circumference of his life, in many cases a zig-zag line with nooks and corners, are not counterbalanced by any from within that can keep him in a state of internal harmony and well-being. Thus there is an increasing tendency to disintegration in society as well as in the individual, as shown by statistics of neurotic and mentally ill people.

Because the interests and pressures are so divergent, especially in those areas where the competition is keenest, there are divisions in the body politic. There is no principle of coherence in society as a whole at present, except various forms of self-interest which bind as well as divide and the common need for security. In Rousseau's phrase there is a social contract, and this contract is constantly sought to be modified in one way or another by the parties to it in order to advance their sectional interests. When there is nothing central to one's existence and fundamental, accepted by the individual as a basis for his own action and conduct, the motives that prevail are those of expediency and no deeper than those that obtain in a marriage of convenience; and society, which is a collection of individuals, remains in a [Page 213] condition of precarious co-existence of the various divisions created in it by the forces at work according to their varying strength.

There are any number of people — and their increasing number is becoming a serious problem in countries which are in the vanguard of technological developments — who are wholly at the mercy of external forces, every passing breeze and every freak idea, because they lack the fundamentals of self-understanding, having never been taught to stop and examine their fancies and impulses. The world becomes for people bent on mere excitement, pleasure and gain, a fair full of noise and bustle, with many booths, each of which promises some bargain or some form of enjoyment or attraction. When the mind is constantly drawn hither and thither, arid simultaneously, by many forces, it soon becomes disoriented, discomposed and unable to rest in anything for any length of time. When this is the condition, even in dreams one does not experience peace.

The two world wars caused of course an enormous upheaval of society and uprooted its previous foundations. The changes that have followed in their wake have made evident the hollowness of many of the assumptions and ideas which constituted the basis of the old social and international order. The uprootment has given individuals and groups all over the world the feeling of a new freedom which is good in itself and has led them to form their own ideas and conduct in relation to the new circumstances. But then man needs not only freedom from artificial restrictions and conventions but also understanding and wisdom to guide himself rightly. This is a truth which is completely overlooked in our present civilization.

If we pause to consider what are the matters with which the old books or teachings were concerned, we will find that they were mainly concerned with the principles that should be the basis of one's life, the phenomena pertaining to it, the [Page 214] problems of his relationships and conduct and also questions philosophically related to all this, such as the nature of man's as well as life's origin, course, culmination and so forth. The interest in such questions and the thought bestowed on them by the thinkers and philosophers of old can be explained by the fact that men lived in conditions which did not permit any extensive study of the outer physical world or excursions into it. That would seem to us a limitation and it was in one sense, but significantly enough it gave rise to certain other developments as a compensation. Not being in a position to go far out of where they lived and come into contact with a wide variety of conditions and objects, as we do today, people were thrown largely upon themselves and forced to discover whatever they could discover of value by themselves and in themselves.

The old teachings in such books as were considered the most authoritative or important — not the later expositions and commentaries — were not argued out at length. They were obviously the products of insight and therefore it was thought that he who received them with an undivided mind and meditated on them could instinctively perceive their truth. Even when the old books and teachers spoke of such matters as soul, liberation, human destiny and so forth, which we would call transcendental, they were referring to matters the truth of which could be discovered within oneself. When a man's face is turned towards the ground, as it mostly is in climbing a mountain side, he does not see the heights and the sky. These being out of sight might be considered transcendental by him and he might say that the ground on which his attention is centred is the only real thing. But that will not alter the facts of existence. The sky and the heights are as real as the trodden ground.

In any case, the knowledge of external things cannot be a substitute for a knowledge of oneself, which knowledge must [Page 215] include what we are deep down in ourselves under the superficial and transient changes. Our attention is now engaged by the new conditions and the experience thereof; therefore we no longer spare attention for those matters which attracted interest at other times. A child may be absorbed in his toys for the moment; he may be running after his kite or wheel; but that does

not mean that he will not have other matters to deal with as he grows up or there are not other matters of importance appealing to him even in his childhood.

What man needs today is not more of what he has and enjoys — although there are large parts of the world which have yet to be provided with the basic needs of existence — or the kind of thinking that is built upon his reactions to things but an understanding that can see through such reactions and create freedom within himself and peace. His greatest need was expressed by Jung in the title of his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, the soul being essentially identifiable with a nature of understanding and peace, a nature free from reactions and also from pressures.

The mind which is active at present has developed in certain ways but the kind of thinking in which it excels is thinking which it is able more and more to hand over to a computer. Of course it has the imagination and ability needed to design the computer. Calculations, which would previously have required a team of men working for weeks or months, are now being made in a few seconds by a machine constructed for the purpose. But the fact that a machine can take over large parts of a man's thinking shows the general nature of his thought. A computer, although it sorts out the data that are fed into it and gives the answer almost instantaneously, yet cannot go beyond the mechanical limits of its design. The human brain also has apparently a similar capacity, although it is brought out only in exceptional cases.[Page 216] For instance, there was in Madras recently a girl with a computer-like mind. One could put to her a complicated arithmetical or mathematical question. She could give the answer in a few seconds. She was asked how she was able to do so. She said, “God gives me the answer”, God being obviously for her the unknown. She did not know or understand what was taking place in herself. Man usually invokes “God” to explain whatever is unexplainable by him. Without following this line we may presume that at some level within herself, of which she was unconscious, there was at work a computer-like mind. Mr. Ramanujam, also of Madras, the brilliant mathematician, had the faculty of being able to tell the result, the final equation, without working out the steps. But I think in his case it was the action of an intuitive sense of what would be the answer in the fitness of things.

What we are cultivating in these days is a mind which can accommodate many things and function with mechanical efficiency. But a computer has its limitations. It cannot feel, it cannot imagine, it is incapable of love or knowing beauty or poetry, although if poetical words and phrases are put into it, it can synthesize them mechanically. It cannot go beyond the word, the letter and the figure, but life means ever so much more.

One of the Adepts referred to a “Law of Compensation”, as obtaining everywhere throughout the universe. According to this law we seem to be paying for our present advances in certain directions by failing in other ways. A man who has a quick, active, cunning mind and can argue as suits his purpose often gets into a tangle in his own life, besides doing harm to others. Such a mind is prone to deceive itself. But a mind which is uncomplicated, quiet and open, negative as we would call it, often perceives things much more truly and clearly, without deceiving itself. [Page 217]

It has been said in the ancient Indian books that the individualized Spirit is in its essential nature a poet and a seer, its poetry being the poetry of truth, in other words, response to the beauty that is in truth. But as it falls into conditions of space and time, extension and succession, it manifests an intelligence suited to those conditions, that is, a mind that is capable of surveying and confronting facts outside itself, of defining, of precise movements, logic, and so forth. The best aspects of our modern culture display the latter qualities but without the other sense, its extraordinary delicacy, sensitivity and beauty. We are discovering more and more of the pattern of things and the processes

included in it or which give rise to it but miss their meaning, the life and the beauty concealed therein. Our expansion has been horizontal but at the expense of depth, the expansion being related to all things that are without and the depth belonging to that which is within. The depth that is in us, that is, potentially in our nature, does not come into play, because we are so absorbed with things on the surface. The absence of that depth creates the void in our lives, giving rise to discontent and dissatisfaction, which no amount of analysis and explanations is able to cure because they do not go to the heart of the problem.

All true philosophy can have only one end: that is, to enable man to find within himself the joy and the love and the freedom and the peace that he seeks outside himself. All this is part of the meaning of the depth that is in himself. The whole of the ancient teaching in its broadest aspect converged towards this central truth.