

ASPECTS OF THE HIGHER EVOLUTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Lecture 85: Individuality, True and False.

Friends,

The Universe is one gigantic process; we may say that it is a process of becoming, a process of attaining new and ever new levels of existence and of organisation. In other words, the Universe is an evolution. And in this process, in this evolution, man too is included, man too evolves. We may say that man has evolved, we can say that man will evolve or rather, that he can evolve if he makes the effort.

Biologically speaking, man has evolved from lower, simpler forms of life. Anthropologically speaking, he has evolved from savagery and barbarism to civilization and culture, while psychologically, he has evolved from unconsciousness to what we term simple consciousness, and from simple consciousness to the rudiments at least of what we term self consciousness. By simple consciousness we mean bare perceptual awareness, that is to say awareness of sensations experienced through the sense organs as a result of contact with the external world. By self consciousness we mean that one not only experiences sensations, experiences feelings, emotions, thoughts, volitions and so on, but is also, above that, conscious of oneself as experiencing them. Now this whole process, this process of human evolution biological, anthropological, psychological, all this has taken many, many, millions of years. And altogether, taking it as one process, it constitutes what we call the lower evolution. And this part of the process we know is collective.

The future evolution of man will be mainly, if not exclusively, psychological and spiritual. We say future, but the process has in fact already begun. The Higher Evolution, at least to some extent, perhaps even a considerable extent, has been achieved by a few outstanding figures of the past: for instance by founders of religions, by great artistic geniuses and so on. But we have to pass from our rudimentary self consciousness to perfect self consciousness, so far as the majority still is concerned. We have, we may say, to pass from self consciousness also to at least the beginnings of transcendental consciousness. And these are the immediate goals. Eventually we have to pass from transcendental consciousness to Absolute Consciousness, or, as we also call it, Universal Consciousness. And this, we have to emphasize, can be done within the limits of a single human life-time. This constitutes the Higher Evolution of man, and this part of the evolutionary process is an individual affair. Nature, as it were, carries us a very long way, Nature carries us for millions of years, carries us up to the very limits of the lower evolution, endows us with the rudiments of self consciousness, and then Nature leaves us on our own. From now onwards our progress depends on our own individual conscious effort. Not that any of us have to make this effort: we are free to make it or not to make it, just as we choose. And the majority, of course, do not choose to make it at all, the majority, perhaps we can say, are not even aware of the possibility of choice. The effort is made by the minority, the effort is made by the few.

Some of you may have heard the name of that famous Indian text; it's a Hindu text called the Bhagavad Gita. Some of you may even have read it. And in the Bhagavad Gita there is a verse where Sri Krisna is represented as saying, (speaking as the embodiment here of Absolute Consciousness), is represented as asking that out of a thousand men, out of a thousand human beings, 'only one' he says, 'seeks me.' that is to say seeks truth, seeks Absolute Consciousness. And he also goes on to say that out of a thousand that seek, one perhaps finds. So this gives us one in a million of human beings who seeks and who finds. And if we think over it we probably conclude that this is perhaps a rather generous estimate, one in a million. It illustrates, we may say, this verse illustrates, the difficulty of the whole process of the Higher Evolution.

And then, in the Dhammapada there is another verse, a verse attributed to the Buddha, where the Buddha says, 'It is difficult to attain the human state, mortal life itself is difficult. It is difficult to hear the real truth; the Arising of an Enlightened One', that is to say, One who has realised Absolute Consciousness, 'is difficult.' This is what the Buddha says in the Dhammapada. And we can even paraphrase that in more contemporary language, more in the terminology of these talks, these lectures, and we could say: it is difficult really to be a human being, really and truly to be a human being. It is difficult to develop self consciousness. It is still more difficult to develop transcendental consciousness. It is difficult to be an individual. It is difficult to go on making an effort. It is difficult not to sink back into unawareness and to stagnate. All this is difficult. But difficult as it is, we should not allow ourselves to be discouraged. So long as we realize, so long as we really see, that the whole process of the Higher Evolution, the whole process of passing from simple consciousness to self consciousness, self consciousness to transcendental consciousness and so on - so long as we realize that this whole process is difficult, so long as we see it as difficult and take that difficulty seriously - then there is some hope of success. The danger, we may say, lies in thinking that it's all easy, or at least that it is not very difficult.

Now the whole process of what we call the Higher Evolution is difficult partly because as we try to develop self consciousness and transcendental consciousness various problems arise; problems we had not perhaps anticipated, we might have anticipated some problems, might even have had some idea of what they were

likely to be, but that's all before we actually embarked on this process of the Higher Evolution. Once we make a start, once we really try to develop self consciousness, to be aware, to be mindful, to get a glimpse of the transcendental consciousness, then all sorts of difficulties, all sorts of problems arise, which are totally unexpected. And although we might have read quite widely before-hand, our reading does not give us any help in the solution of these difficulties, and the solution of these problems. Incidentally I say 'difficulty', and I also say 'problem'. By 'problem', I mean a difficulty that can be solved or rather resolved, only by rising to a higher level of being and consciousness, it cannot be solved on its own level. If it can be solved on its own level by a little tinkering here, or a little adjustment there, then we call it just a difficulty. For example, our immediate goal is the development of perfect self consciousness, development of awareness. But we may well find the problem arising in connection with awareness itself. We may even develop the wrong kind of awareness. We may develop what I have termed 'alienated awareness'. By alienated awareness we mean a state of awareness in which we are aware of ourselves without actually experiencing ourselves - especially without experiencing our feelings and our emotions, And we fail to experience ourselves fully, perfectly, for a variety of reasons. Partly, it's due to the very nature of the times in which we live. We live in an age of transition, an age in which values are constantly changing in which there are no stable, universally accepted values to which we can adhere, upon which we can base our lives, in accordance with which we can order our actions. So this means that our sense of identity tends to be weakened. There are also other factors.

When we are young we are conditioned into refusing to accept bodily sensations, especially sensations connected with sex. And, in the same way, we are conditioned into repressing negative emotions. And we are also told, again especially when we are young, that we feel what in fact we do not feel, because that's what we ought to feel, and that we do not feel what actually we feel, because it's wrong for us to feel that particular way. And for all these reasons we end up unable, even unwilling, to experience ourselves, and therefore develop alienated awareness.

And this already deplorable situation is sometimes aggravated by a wrong understanding of Eastern spiritual teachings, of teachings, for example, which tell you that you have in fact no self, or at least which appear to tell you this, which appear to tell you that the self is an illusion, that it just isn't there. Or by teachings again which tell you that you are not the body, that you are not the feelings, not the emotions, not the mind - that you are in fact God, without parts, without passions. And sometimes the situation is aggravated still further by Eastern teachers without an understanding of the Western mind and its difficulties. True awareness, which we call integrated awareness or integral awareness, is developed by learning again to experience ourselves, to experience our physical body, to experience our repressed feelings and emotions, and so on. And there are several ways in which we can do this. And here, as we know, our communication exercises which some of us will be doing tomorrow and the next day, help very much. Now all this, all that I have said so far this evening, is familiar ground to most of you, to nearly all of you. It represents the jist of the last two lectures. We are just briefly recapitulating to refresh our minds.

Tonight we come to a problem which is, if anything, even more important, even more crucial than that of alienated awareness, and that is the problem of individuality, of individuality true or false. And with this problem, when we come to this problem, when we encounter this problem, we at once find ourselves in the midst of great, not to say dire, confusion. In fact, we find ourselves in the midst of a real hornets' nest, and if we're not very careful, we shall certainly be stung. Now this problem, the problem of individuality, of individuality true or false, arises directly out of the previous problem; that is to say it arises out of the problem of alienated awareness, and this kind of awareness, alienated awareness, arises, as we have seen, when we do not experience ourselves - when we do not experience ourselves and when at the same time, we are aware of ourselves or aware of that non-experience, even when we experience, as it were, ourselves not being there. When you do not experience yourself, when I do not experience myself, this is when alienated awareness arises.

But here there is another question, another question arises, which is: when we say that we do not experience ourselves, that you do not experience yourself, that I do not experience myself, what is it that we mean by the self? And once we have asked this question then others inevitably follow, such as, is the self identical with consciousness We have spoken much about consciousness, four kinds of consciousness and so on, How are they related to the self? And then what is the relation between self and individuality? Are they two things or are they the same thing? Again, what is personality? That's another term that we use, And where does the ego come in? So we find that we are in the midst of the hornet's nest already.

Now these questions are obviously not just semantic questions not just questions of words. Or rather perhaps I should say instead, they are just semantic questions, but semantic questions happen to be of the greatest practical importance, even in the spiritual life. We've all heard of Confucius. Confucius was once asked by a disciple, what was the first thing to be done, the first thing to be attended to, by the man who wanted to reform the state? Apparently in China, in Confucius' day, there were lots of little states, hundreds, even thousands, of little states, each under its own little duke, or its own little prince, and sometimes these states

were in a rather bad way, rather badly administered, even tyrannically administered, and so on. And sages and wise men like Confucius himself, used to go about offering advice to these Dukes and Princes, and trying to reform them, trying to reform their states and to make them more ideal and more easy to live in for everybody. So this was the question that Confucius was once asked supposing someone wants to reform a state, supposing he wants to put everything right, supposing he wants to create ideal conditions (like Plato's Republic or Moore's Utopia) then what was the very first thing that he should do, what was the first thing that he should attend to? And Confucius answered, 'The rectification of terms'. He didn't say get a big army or raise plenty of money through taxation, or anything like that; he didn't even say preach morality and spiritual life. He said, 'The rectification of terms'. This comes first, this is the most important. In other words, start calling things by their right names, by their proper names, or start by defining your terms. If you do this, then thought will be clear, orders will be unambiguous, and action will be decisive. And eventually the state will be reformed, or at least there will be a good chance of its being reformed.

Now we are in the position of the man who wanted to reform the state before Confucius gave his advice. The only difference is, we want to reform, not the state, but ourselves. In other words we want to develop ourselves, want to cultivate the path of the Higher Evolution. Confucius, as we know, is no longer around, so for advice we have to go to some other quarter. Some of us read books, all sorts of books, books about magic, books about mysticism, philosophy psychology, psychotherapy, Eastern wisdom, Western thought, and so on, We attend lectures, all sorts of lectures - every week in a place like London there are scores and scores of lectures - talk with our friends, discuss with our friends. And we might, if we are very, very interested, even go and visit some visiting Oriental teacher. Or if we are very interested indeed, we may even go abroad, we may even go to the East - we may even go and visit the teacher in his own special cave in the Himalayas, or his own Zen monastery away in Japan.

But then what happens? What happens at each and every one of these stages? Whether it's just reading a book, or a number of books, or going to lectures or consulting masters, what happens? What happens is that different authorities tell us different things, or even quite opposite things. One says that you should do just one thing: just ask yourself, 'Who am I?' Nothing more just say, 'Who am I?' When you find yourself speaking, say well, who speaks? When you find yourself listening, say well, who listens? who am I? who am I doing all this - seeing, hearing, speaking, thinking, experiencing - who am I? Don't bother about the object, only bother about the subject: who am I? Turn this thought, turn this idea, turn this question over and over again in the mind, 'Who am I?'. So this is one kind of advice that we can get. But another authority may say, just give up all thought of the I. just don't let it come into consideration at all. So long as you start thinking, 'I', so long as you even are asking, 'Who am I?' then the trouble begins, so forget all about the I. He gives diametrically opposite advice. Another authority may say, well, realize the self, the Great Self, the self is all, the self is everything, the self is transcendental. the self is God, you are that: just realize that self. But another authority, on the other hand may say, realize the not self, may say there is no self, no such thing, pure illusion, just words, so see there is no self at all. That's the advice we get from that quarter. Then somebody else, perhaps on a more psychological level, not quite such a lofty plane, may simply say, be yourself, develop your own personality, do your own thing (as the current idiom has it). But somebody else again will say, NO; tear up the ego by the roots, just get rid of it, throw it away. Blow it up with dynamite, if necessary. I remember some years ago, I went to a lecture by a well-known Buddhist speaker, and he went into this at great length and in great detail, under the similitude of climbing the mountain side. I forget what else he said, but he describes the person climbing up the mountain side as, in the course of his progress, hacking off great bleeding lumps of self - so as to make himself, apparently, all the lighter for the journey or the ascent, and presumably he was to hack them off with a sort of spiritual razor blade!

So in this way we become confused: who am I? or, don't think about the I; Realize the self: there is no self. Develop your personality: get rid of your ego. Conflicting advice comes in this way through all quarters, from all directions - so naturally we become confused. And we become confused about what is after all really a quite fundamental issue. We don't know what to think, we don't know who is right, we don't know who is speaking the truth, so we don't know what to do. We're just dimly, we're just vaguely conscious that there is something - you know, something around, something sort of here to which we refer as I or me; we're pretty clear about that, at least most of the time, that there is something, call it what you like, here or there (we're not quite sure about that, but anyway it's somewhere if not here or there, well somewhere in between or somehow it covers both) and we call it I or we call it me. And it seems to us that this is the same something to which such terms as self and ego etc. also apply, also refer. But we don't know quite what to do about it, this sort of experience of I or me, this so-called self, if it is that, or this ego or person. We don't know quite what to do about it in view of all these conflicting advices that we have been receiving. The experience of I, the experience of me, is undoubtedly there, even if it ought not to be there, still it's there. Or we may say, even if it isn't really there at all, but we only think it is; but the thought is still there, even if it's the wrong thought. Or sometimes we think: well, perhaps we only think that we think it is there. And in this way of course we really do get confused. But the question, the practical question, remains, what are we to do about this I or about the thought of this I - whether it's about the I itself or the thought about the I. it comes to the same thing -

or even the thought of the thought of the I, what are we to do about that? Are we supposed to cultivate it? Or are we supposed to develop it? Or are we supposed to refine it? or should we just look at it quietly and steadily until we see that it isn't really there at all? Or should we just quietly ignore it and hope that it will go away? What should we do?. So obviously some clarification is urgently needed. We have to embark on our own great rectification of terms, on a rectification of terms perhaps even more thorough-going than the one envisaged by Confucius, because the matter is not just of theoretical interest, it's of great practical consequence, of great practical importance. Unless we settle this matter, settle this issue, then our spiritual life is more or less at a standstill, because we don't know what to do about the self or about individuality; don't know whether to cultivate it or eradicate it, reject it or ignore it, idealize it or debunk it; don't know whether what we are already doing in the way of spiritual practice, exercises and so on, is right or wrong; don't know whether we are evolving, whether we are standing still, or whether even we are regressing. So this problem must be resolved.

Now first of all, let us look at the terms that we have been using, terms apparently referring in one way or another to the I or to the me, including the term used in the title of this week's talk. So. including that term, there are four such terms altogether. First of all there is the term, 'self'; then there is the term 'individual,' then there is the term, 'ego'; then there is the term, 'person'. Each of these terms has a number of derivative forms. For instance, we say, 'bodily self', but we've got, 'selfish', we've got, 'unselfish', 'self-centred', 'self-realization'. So in this way there is quite a large family, as it were, of words: these four terms and all their derivatives. Now if we take these four terms, together with all their shades of meaning, all the ways in which they can be used, and all the derivative forms, we notice something which is quite interesting, something which is quite relevant to our present purpose, something that will help us to solve the problem of individuality, true or false. We notice, if we examine them, that all these words - the four original words and their derivatives - all these words can be used in two different ways, or classified in two different groups: one positive, and one negative. In other words, each of the four words has a double meaning, can be used in two different, even two opposed senses: one good and one bad. And it is for this reason that we can speak of true individuality and false individuality, of the lower self and the higher self, of a person and also of a personality, of being ego-centric and of being ego-directed.

Each of these, therefore, we may say, is to be both cultivated and eradicated, depending on the sense in which the word is used, whether positive or negative.

Now at this point a third question arises, and the question is, what is the basis of the distinction? that is to say the distinction between the positive and the negative usages of the four words. And in order to answer this question we must go back to last week's lecture, back to the question of alienated awareness. We saw that alienated awareness arose due to one's failure to experience oneself, especially to experience one's feelings and one's emotions, particularly negative feelings and negative emotions. Now this failure tends to create in us a split - this is why it is so disastrous - it tends to create in us a split, a split between that part of oneself which one continues to experience or to allow oneself to experience, and that part of oneself which one no longer experiences, which one has ceased to experience, or at least which one experiences only intermittently and very imperfectly, very partially. Or, we may say, that the split is between the conscious and the unconscious. Now because one refuses to experience a certain part of oneself, it does not follow that that part ceases to exist; it does not mean that that part is no longer alive, that it has, by our refusal to experience it, been killed off, as it were. Whether we know it or not, that part is still very much alive: not only alive but kicking. It still makes its presence felt even though it is not seen. Now we all know that from time to time we are subject to what we call moods, often rather negative moods. Sometimes we feel say depressed, or we feel angry, or we feel apprehensive. It just comes over us, it just takes possession of us and we don't know why. We don't know where the mood comes from, we don't know its origin, its causation. And we say, or at least we think, when the mood is on us, or at least we say or we think it afterwards, when the mood has passed away, we say that we are not, or that we were not ourselves because so long as the mood persists, and to the extent that the mood persists, we feel for the time being as though, almost, we were somebody else. Now in many cases these moods are due to the subterranean activities of unacknowledged parts or, if you like, aspects of ourselves. And from this follows an interesting and important conclusion. We have seen that, when subject to moods, we say, or we can say, that we are not ourselves, that for the time being we are, as it were, somebody else. Now what does this mean? It means, if you reflect on it, that we are in fact not so much a self as a succession of selves. Or we may say that we are more like a bundle of selves. not just a self, the same self all the way through, but a bundle of selves like a bundle of sticks, of which only one is usually operative at any one time. There isn't just one unified completely integrated, continually operative self in us, as we tend to assume. We can even say that we are a collection of selves, each of which is battling for supremacy. And this explains why we so often fail to do things that we have decided to do. For instance, we decide to get up early in the morning. So we assume that the same self is operative all the time, all the way through - the self that makes the decision, the self that carries out the action - is one and the same. But in fact it is not so. One self decides at night before we go to sleep to get up early in the morning. But then what happens? When we wake up (we say 'we') - when we wake up we find that in the interval, in the course of the night, another self

has come on duty. The old one is no longer there and the new self, the self that is now on duty in the morning, he doesn't want to get up, so we stay in bed. This is what happens, and we vaguely, we sort of vaguely, being half aware that we decided to do something but that we're not doing it, we sort of vaguely wonder what has happened.

So we are now in a position to answer our question. We can now see the basis of the distinction between the good and the bad usages of the words: 'individuality', 'self', 'person', and 'ego'. 'Good' refers to a higher degree of unification and integration; 'bad' refers to a lower degree of unification and integration. A true individuality is a more integrated individuality - a false individuality is that which is less integrated. True individuality therefore is to be developed, and false individuality is not to be developed. And the same applies to the higher, to the lower self etc. In other words it is integration itself that is to be developed. And we integrate in the first place by recovering and acknowledging those parts of ourselves, those aspects of ourselves, which we had disowned, by allowing ourselves to experience them once again. This is what we may term integration on the level.

But we must also integrate with our own unrealized higher potentiality. This is, we may say, a sort of vertical integration. And this integration both on the level horizontal, and vertical, with a higher possibility - this integration leads to increase of awareness, that is to say increase of true awareness, increase of integrated awareness; and this leads to increase of self consciousness. And in this way we evolve.

So the path is quite clear before us. We can see quite definitely what it is that we have to do. There is no need at this stage for us to concern ourselves with the reality or unreality of the individual in a metaphysical sense. We know that we are conscious, that we are aware, we're aware of ourselves. We have the rudiments of self consciousness. and this is indubitably our experience: there's no need to enquire whether this experience is metaphysically real or unreal. Certain enquiry, we may say, at least at this stage, is meaningless. What we have to do is to clarify and intensify that experience; to increase awareness, to increase self consciousness, and in this way we shall cultivate individuality, or, if you like, shall pass from false individuality to true individuality.

Now we have seen that the words, 'individual', 'self', 'person', and 'ego' are all used in good and in bad senses. Their meaning, in other words, is extremely fluid. But, at the same time, there are standard modern psychological usages which try to fix the meanings of these terms to some extent, and it may be useful for us to refer to these. And after that we will conclude with a few remarks on the Buddha's teaching of 'Anatta'.

In modern psychological usage, individuality means the sum total of the of the characteristics of an individual which distinguish him from other individuals. And these characteristics may be conscious or unconscious; or they may exist in varying degrees of unification and integration. Here individuality is a purely descriptive term.

'Personality' is defined as the integrated and dynamic organization of the physical mental, and moral, and social qualities of the individual as that manifests to other people in the give and take of social life. And 'self' is defined as the personality or ego regarded as an agent, conscious of his own continuing identity. Jung uses the word 'self' in a sense of his own. Summarizing Jung's views on this subject, one of his followers, one of his disciples, writes, 'The self by definition comprises the full scope of a personality from its most individual traits to its most generic attitudes and experiences, actual as well as potential. Hence it transcends the existing personality. The archetype of wholeness or of the self can therefore be regarded as the dominant of psychic growth.' Finally, 'ego' is defined as in individuals experience of himself - or the dynamic unity which is the individual.

Now it is possible for us to adapt these definitions to our own more specialised requirements. We can say that the word or the term 'individuality' represents the present relatively unintegrated state of experience of ourselves. 'personality', we can say, is the process of that integration. 'Self' is the future state of complete integration, and 'ego' is one's consciousness of the whole process of development and of oneself as its agent. But what about the Buddha's teaching of Anatta? Someone may put this question, 'Did the Buddha not state categorically that there is no self?' Many people I am sure are under that impression, so let us, before we close, devote just a few minutes to this question.

I remember that when I was in India many years ago, when I was studying Pali and Abhidhamma and Buddhist logic in Benares, one of my teachers there used to be very fond of pointing out that the word Anatta, Sanskrit Anatman, is a compound word. It is made up of two parts, it is made up of the word atta or atma, usually Translated as self, and it is made up of the negative prefix an-anatt, anatman, and this teacher used further to point out, (and this was a point that he very much insisted on), that if one wanted to understand the meaning of Anatman or Anatta, non self or no self, one could do so only after having understood the meaning of Atman or Atta. This might appear obvious, but it wasn't apparently obvious to everybody, not everybody that he had met, anyway. In other words, you cannot understand what is meant by anatman or Anatta unless you know

what particular conception of the self it is which is being negated. It is clear from the contexts, the various contexts, in which the word Anatta or anatman occurs in the Buddhist scriptures, that the Buddha was concerned to negate the contemporary idea, the contemporary Brahminical idea, of a permanent, unchanging self. He was concerned to negate this idea. He didn't teach that no self whatsoever exists, he did not teach that our experience of ourselves is a complete and utter delusion, that we aren't really here at all, we just think that we are, and the thought itself is a delusion. He taught that the self, the empirical self, the psyche, does exist, but that it is constantly changing, And it's because it's changing that it can evolve, develop, grow. Therefore we may say that the purpose of His teaching, the teaching of Anatta, literally the no-self or the not self, is not theoretical but practical. The Anatta teaching is not intended as a metaphysical statement, it is not intended as an assertion or denial of the existence or non-existence of the self in a metaphysical sense. The Buddha's not concerned with that. It is intended, we may say, as a safeguard to the possibility of treading the path. Because, if there is in us any element which is fixed and unchanging and permanent, then no growth, no progress, no evolution, is possible. So the Buddha pointed out that all that we experience as the self, all that we call the self, all that we know as the self, is in a state of constant flux and change. And this is what He meant by Anatta. So in this way, the teaching of Anatta is intended as a safeguard to the possibility of treading the Path, which means changing oneself, changing oneself in a forward, in an upward direction. And the same holds good, we may say, of our own current distinction between individuality, true, or false. This too is intended as a solution of a practical problem, intended to help us fulfill the process of the Higher Evolution of man, the Higher Evolution of the Individual.