

Socratic Theme: Know Thyself

Let us, today, talk about what Socrates meant when he said, “Know thyself.” What is so important about knowing oneself? Don't we all know ourselves? Don't we know our names? Don't we know who we are, who our parents were, where we were born, where we live? What is so great about this Socratic theme of knowing oneself?

This is a question that has been debated for so long. For thousands of years, man has tried to understand who he really is; whether he is what he appears to be or he's something other than what he appears to be. And when Socrates said, “Know yourself,” obviously he was meaning, “Know yourself more than your physical self, more than your physical body, more than the body that was given birth by parents whose names you know.”

Who are we really? There is the story of an Indian sage who was sitting in his hut. Somebody came and knocked at his door. And the sage said, “Who is that?” After a while the knock was repeated on the door and the sage said, “Why don't you say who are you!” Again there was a knock, third time. And the sage angrily said, “Why don't you say who you are!” And then the man answered, “If I knew that, I would not knock at your door.”

That is the real question which is addressed to the mystics, the Saints and the Masters, “Who are we really and how does it matter if we know who we really are or we don't know who we really are?”

There have been many propositions, speculations on whether consciousness that operates within the human body has a separate entity, has its own separate existence, or it is just a function of the physical system through which we operate. The question is, “Does the human brain, the physical brain, the white matter of the brain create consciousness or does consciousness exist as something that temporarily inhabits the brain when the body is alive?”

How can we find out the answer to this question? If we could find an answer to this question, it would be a very valuable clue in finding out who we really are. For example, if somebody were to come and talk to me, and address me by my name and say, “Ishwar, I have come to talk to you.” I could get puzzled and say, “Ishwar is the name of my body. Ishwar is the name of the person who was given birth by physical parents.” Who is this question being addressed to? A consciousness operating in the body called Ishwar. And who is that consciousness? Is that an existence independent of the body?

Could I say that that consciousness has a lifespan different from, longer than, the one that the body has? If I could say that that consciousness has an independent existence, then probably one could say that this physical body is not the real representation of who I am, but that there is

something which is being limited by the short time span of the physical body.

There are two approaches to the subject of who one really is. One is the material approach. Let us see if in the physical body, the physical/material body, we can find evidence of something that goes beyond the body. In this approach, we came across some very interesting phenomena. The phenomenon of past life remembrance. The phenomenon of little children in a small country remembering things that were happening or had happened earlier thousands of miles away in some other country.

These past life memories which were verified, proved to be a big leap forward in understanding the nature of the human mind and human consciousness and that there was something carried on in the material human brain that was not within the ambit of the time frame of the physical body in which the brain was formed.

There were hypotheses that this could have happened because of genetic transmission or transmittal of information from one gene to another and therefore, at some point the genes in the individual brain cells were able to pick up the information that was handed down to it through the genetic code.

But this has not always been able to satisfy the real seeker of who the true self is. The real seeker of truth has always said, "The genetic code links us only with the direct line of ancestry." How could an Indian girl remember a Japanese past? How could an American Californian remember a past life in China? Things like that baffle us because there is no direct genetic code available to link these experiences.

And why should some people remember past life and not the others? So the material approach has never been able to satisfy the curiosity of those who wanted to know what is the reality of consciousness as an entity or as an existence outside the domain of the physical body.

Then came the mystics, the Perfect Living Masters, the Saints, and sages who practiced meditation, who practiced the art of going within, who gave an answer in a very simple way to this question and who said, "If you go within your own self, you will find who you really are. If you want to know yourself, go within yourself." What did they mean by going within oneself?

They meant go within what apparently looks like yourself. Since you identify yourself with this body, and think that you are the body, go within the body and see how you feel. When they gave this suggestion, that go within yourself, they did not confine themselves merely to exploring the molecular structure of the physical body. What they meant was: as conscious beings, as questioners, as seekers, as the very substance and source of this curiosity, you should go within along that conscious line in which the spirit of inquiry has arisen.

In short, they were saying, if you have a question in your own consciousness, "Who am I?" Address this question to your own self within the physical body, within your own mental self,

within your own conscious self. They indicated that when you consider which part of your physical body is actually generating this kind of question, it does not take very long to find out that this kind of question that we address to ourselves, is coming from the upper part of our facial system. In fact, it's coming from the head part and it's coming from some point behind the eyes.

Even if one were to close one's eyes, one would find that the real question that's being asked by us, the contemplation of this question, is taking place behind the eyes somewhere. So this was a very good clue. If we want to go within ourselves to find out who we really are then we could explore the space in which consciousness operates in the physical body behind the eyes.

This consideration led to the development of several methods of meditation, several methods of deep introspection, several methods by which one could carry one's attention inward, instead of allowing it to flow outward. If we look at our normal lives, we find that our attention is constantly flowing outside. But if we are able to put our attention inside, we come to know how the source of that attention is functioning and not the objects which are being picked up by sense perception.

Thus, if one were to close one's eyes, and appear to be behind the eyes, imagine to be behind the eyes, what would happen? If one could imagine deep enough, intense enough that one is behind the eyes, one could eventually find out what happens if instead of flowing outward along with attention, we flow backward to the origin of attention.

If we close our eyes and withdraw our attention from outside stimuli, from outside experiences, and put it behind the eyes, what would happen? A very good approach, an approach which could at least give us immediate indication of what kind of experiences are in store for us if we dissociate ourselves and our identity from the physical body and associate it with the consciousness operating in the physical body.

So, therefore, this became a standard practice for meditation or for introspection or for self-realization or for self-discovery, to go within through a process by which the attention could be held behind the eyes inside instead of allowing it to flow outside. When one closes one's eyes and is conscious of the body one has a strange feeling; that although one is behind the eyes but one is also conscious of the rest of the body. One is conscious of so many other organs operating in the body, so many other energies operating in the body. If one closes one's eyes, one realizes that the fact we are conscious more of the head and less of the trunk or the legs or the feet is because we are awake.

When we go to sleep and dream, we are not so conscious of the head. We are equally unconscious of the body and trigger off various kinds of fantasies and dreams and that does not seem to relate to any particular part of the body. As if the experience of being behind the eyes is related to wakefulness in the body.

This was a good clue for these exponents of meditation as a way of finding out who we are. They said, "When we are awake, the attention is, in fact, flowing from a point behind the eyes," and they

called it the 'third eye.' They called it the 'center of the eyes.' They called it the 'center of consciousness.' They called it the 'center.' They used many other phrases, but the idea was that we have been able to find and pinpoint a location in the physical body from where attention flows outside and if we want to know who we really are other than the physical body, we could possibly find an answer by withdrawing our attention back to the same point behind the eyes. The condition would be: it should be done while we are awake because when we are not awake the attention drops somewhere else; the attention is not behind the eyes.

Where is the attention when it is not behind the eyes? And what kind of conditions can we have in which the attention is not behind the eyes? These practitioners of meditation found that when we are putting our attention behind the eyes, we are likely to go to sleep, in which case, we do not know where the eyes are, where the body is, and so it shifts somewhere else in the body.

When sophisticated meditation gave them an insight into how this shift takes place, they found that as we go to sleep, the point from where the attention is flowing out from behind the eyes, itself, starts shifting downwards. A little experiment can be done by any one of us. The simple experiment is: at night when we are about to sleep, we can call our attention to where we are operating from. Where are our eyes? Before we go to sleep, we can close our eyes, bring our hands up and touch the eyes. Say yes. As we do this exercise of touching our eyes with the hands, even if the eyes are closed and we want to touch the eyes, we touch exactly where the eyes are.

After that as we go to bed and get sleepy, and want to get into sleep state, just at the last moment when we are still conscious of our body, let us close our eyes and touch our eyes again with the hands and we find that when we try to do it, instead of touching the eyes, we start touching the nose. We still feel we are touching the eyes. And it looks a very strange thing, that we are touching the tip of the nose and thinking that behind that are the eyes from which we are looking out, which means that the center of attention that we call the 'third eye', itself, is shifting because of the nature of sleep, because of the nature of consciousness, the nature of the level of consciousness that sleep induces in us.

If we could keep this consciousness of the body further when going to sleep, we would find that when we are dreaming, the consciousness has, in fact, dropped to as low a level as the throat. Similarly, by experimentation, it was found that the attention keeps on dropping through various centers or various levels in the body leading to the hypotheses that there are many energy levels which are in ancient Indian texts called, the 'chakras', 'the centers', chakra is a translation of center; that there are energy centers and six of them were identified as existing in the physical body mainly in the trunk portion and not in the legs or the extremities. And those centers are in the eyes, at the throat level, at the heart level, at the navel level, at the level of the reproductive organs, at the level of the rectum; that these six levels represent the points at which we appear to be operating as conscious beings at different levels of energy, different levels of awareness in the physical body.

This was a big breakthrough. People were able to go into different kinds of meditational

techniques to find out what happens if we concentrate our attention on these different centers of energy in the body. Thus came the practice of going into a trance; going into a subliminal state; going into a sleep-wakeful state; going into sharp dream state; going into induced dream state; going into various kinds of yoga. The word 'yoga' meant union, union with one's own real self.

The attempt to find one's own self inside at these energy centers led to a large rash of yogic practices and several schools of yoga, starting from the great Raj yoga of Patanjali in India and going on to several kinds of tantric yoga and other kinds of psychic phenomenon, other kinds of psychic practices which swept the whole world from East to West and people began to examine how different forms of energy exist within us which are untapped in the normal wakeful state but can be tapped if we concentrate our attention within ourselves.

In a way, it was a good thing that people began to look within themselves. On the other hand, it was a tragic thing because instead of finding out who they were, they strayed away into a subject that was not even connected with the original inquiry of finding one's true self.

They strayed away into looking for energy, looking for new forms of persuasive power, looking for new forms of expressing the power game, looking for new forms in which they could show their macho self to the others. Thus, all this yogic practice which originally started with the question of finding out who we really are, ended up in finding out what are our powers, what are the energies, how we can influence others.

What happened to the original question? What about the original question that Socrates had proposed before mankind? Who are we? What is our reality? That question was answered only by rare individuals who were able to go within in the wakeful state, not in the sleep or trance state; who did not care what happened to the energy centers below; who were not out to play a game; of other people who wanted to find out who they really were.

These people we called 'Perfect Living Masters,' the 'Masters of the Highest Order', the 'Masters of Self-Realization,' the 'Masters who had gone to regions of pure awareness and consciousness and not regions of energy.' When these Masters shared their joy and their knowledge with us, they shared in a very simple, loving way. They said, "Don't go to sleep. We should wake up to our reality, not go into a trance and go into some kind of lower form in order to find the truth. Truth cannot be found by going into a lower form. Therefore, give up these yogas of the six chakras or the six centers. They do not lead to self-realization. If you want self-realization, rise to your own higher self, to higher expanded awareness."

And they gave a very simple way. When you are awake, concentrate your attention back on the eye focus, on the third eye, on the center behind the eyes, without allowing it to go down. And as you gather your attention behind the eyes and don't allow it to go down ... that means don't go to sleep or into a trance ... you gather this within yourself, your consciousness through the power of withdrawal of attention and you find you are filled with a music and with a light which you have never seen before. Thus giving you a clue into why light and sound have played such an important

role in the discovery of spiritual truths.

There is so much light within which we have never seen. Much more than we have seen outside. In the Bible it is said, “If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be filled with light.” It is reference to the single eye or the withdrawal of attention from the world which we have seen through two eyes back to the single eye behind in consciousness which perceives the world at that point.

When we withdraw our attention to the single eye, the whole body gets filled with light of a magnitude which we have never imagined. So when we discover our own self has so much light then we find we must have wasted our time in utter darkness outside in trying to find out who we are by looking outward into the darkness.

Therefore, the answer came “Keep yourself awake and go within and find out what happens when that light arises within you”. It was not only a question of a one time concentration of attention behind the eyes and finding out who we are, by staying at that point, indeed, by rising further in awareness at that point, one could find that we could exist independently without the use of any of the external forms of the body and yet have all the sensory perceptions that we were accustomed to.

We could see, hear, touch, taste, smell, know about, without using this body. This is a strange experience but anybody can have it by withdrawing the attention behind the eyes. The Mystics and the Perfect Masters came and gave us this message and gave us the easy way of finding out that we have a self which outlives the self that we call the physical body and has all the perceptive abilities, indeed, more perceptive abilities than this body has.

This was a good case for finding out if consciousness has another form in which sense perceptions are intact. And this body can be removed from that self and the self still exists. By personal experimentation and by personal experience, one found this was not only possible to prove to oneself, but this could be made a regular experience. Not only that, the sensory perception itself came from another illusion of the body like the physical body and that was named as the astral body, the sensory body, or the body that picks up sense perceptions without physical aid. That body itself was no more than another cover upon consciousness just like the physical body was a cover upon the astral body and that consciousness.

It was found that by following the same rule of thumb, namely, withdrawal of attention within the astral body, one could go to a level of consciousness where senses were no longer necessary; that one could be alive and kicking and have an experience of one's self without tying it down to sense perceptions.

When that was found it was a very big step toward discovering who we are. We found that the human mind is capable of existing per se without having to go into senses or the physical body and to find out it's expression only in the material world. Thus came the notion of the causal body, the

one that really causes all sensory and bodily experiences to take place. Thus came the notion of the universal mind. Thus came the notion of the akashic records, or the akashic records where all destinies have already been made which are subsequently expressed in mental, sensory, and physical phenomenon. This was a big step in discovering that we, in our mental self, could sustain ourselves without having to become physical.

But, there was another step forward. We found that not only could we discover our own mental origin, we could also go further and find out that the mind itself, the thought process, the intellectual apparatus, all this was a cover upon consciousness; that consciousness could exist even if this apparatus was taken off; that even if we did not use the physical body, even if we did not use the sensory body or the astral body, even if we did not use our mind, the causal body, we were still alive and conscious.

That consciousness was not dependent on these. That consciousness could exist and perform functions which were so vital to the real nature of our inquiry, that they represented our real self. What would happen? Supposing we got this experience. What do these people say who have this experience? What happens when we withdraw our attention from the physical body, also from the astral body, the sensory body, also from the causal body? What happens?

They discover they have a consciousness, a self which radiates functions, which radiates experiences, which, itself, has got those experiences which cannot be ascribed to the mind, the senses or the body. Those experiences are the experiences of love, intuition, joy, bliss. We have talked of these words earlier. We have talked of how these words go along with the spiritual experience. But did we ever know that these are the functions of our real self? Then what name shall we give to that pure consciousness which is now trapped in a mind, the soul and mind being further trapped in a sensory or astral body. The soul, mind, and the sensory body being further trapped in a physical body.

What name shall we give it? Nothing better than calling it the spirit of consciousness, the soul. That is our real self. So if we want to find who we really are, we have to pierce these outside coverings and find out that even when we are ignoring these outside coverings, consciousness can exist and be filled with its natural functions of love, joy, beauty, and intuition. These functions belong to our own self.

And that is our real self. If we take one step further after discovering our soul and find out its origin, we find it comes from a single totality of consciousness which we have always called God, Creator and that God and Creator when individualized, becomes the soul. This is the real way to find out who we really are.

Therefore, the Socratic theme, which has been the subject of great investigation, has been answered by these Mystics and Perfect Masters and Saints with the simple way that if you go within, you will find that you are in fact the essence of the same creator, God, and you are a perfect being full of love, intuition, joy and happiness and are called a soul.

So this kind of experience is the answer to this question that Socrates raised.

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