

Fundamental Keys

Meditation, concentration, prayer: these three words epitomize the spiritual life, while at the same time indicating its principal modes. Meditation, from our standpoint, is an activity of the intelligence in view of understanding universal truths; concentration, for its part, is an activity of the will in view of assimilating these truths or realities existentially, as it were; and prayer in its turn is an activity of the soul directed towards God.

We have spoken of universal truths; by this term we mean principles which determine everything that exists. The function of the intelligence, from the point of view considered here, is to distinguish between the Absolute and the Relative; its second function will then be, on the one hand to perceive Relativity intellectually insofar as it seemingly enters into the domain of the Absolute¹ and on the other hand to perceive the Absolute as it is reflected in the Relative.

Let it be said again — since the context requires it — that the "pure Absolute" is "the Essence of Essences" or Beyond-Being; as for the Relative, it includes both Being and its central reflection in the world, and then the world itself; Being — or the personal God, the Creator — is the "relative Absolute," if it may be designated thus for want of a less problematical term.

We may thus distinguish in the total Universe four degrees: Beyond-Being, God-Being, Heaven and Earth, this last term designating symbolically and comprehensively all that is situated below the celestial Summit. Or again: Beyond-Being and Being taken together — if one may so express it — constitute the Divine Principle; while Heaven and Earth constitute universal Manifestation — Heaven being able to be conceived as including Being and Beyond-Being, as is suggested by the expression "Our Father who art in heaven."

But the total Universe is not made up of degrees only, there are modes as well; the former are disposed in "vertical" order, while the latter are in "horizontal" order, being situated in the appropriate manner at each of the four degrees. There is first of all a duality: an "active" and

¹ Or insofar as it appears mysteriously within that which, seen from the standpoint of contingency, is still the Absolute — a paradox which can be explained despite the clumsiness of language, but not in a few words.

divinely "masculine" pole, and a "passive" and divinely "feminine" pole;² then there comes a trinity: Power, Consciousness and Felicity.³ Lastly, we may distinguish a quaternity: Rigor and Gentleness, Activity and Passivity; in other words, Purity or Sacrifice, Goodness or Life, Strength or Light — or victorious Act — and finally Beauty or Peace; herein is to be found the origin of all the Qualities, divine and cosmic.⁴

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Following upon meditation, which pertains to Truth and intelligence, comes concentration, which pertains to the Way and the will; there is no Truth that does not have its prolongation in the Way, and there is no intelligence that does not have its prolongation in the will; the authenticity and totality of the values in question require this.

Concentration in itself — apart from its possible contents — ultimately pertains to the "deiformity" of the planes constituting the human microcosm: man is like a tree whose root is the "heart" and whose crown is the "forehead." Now, our mental space — the substance or energy containing or producing thought — is in itself consciousness of the Divine Reality; the mind emptied of all coagulations "thinks God" by its very substance, in "holy silence"; man being "made in the image of God."

The same is true of our bodily substance — or more precisely, our consciousness of this substance — actualized in perfect immobility: the moment we do nothing but "exist," we are virtually identified with Being, beyond all cosmic coagulations. Concurrently with bodily consciousness, there is vital, energetical consciousness, in short, life and movement, which — as

² *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, at the level of Being, *Ishvara*; but these poles are reflected also at the other levels, beginning with the supreme Paramatma in which they necessarily have their root.

³ Sat, Chit, Ananda, which enter into all existence, although in Vedantic parlance these terms designate only the "dimensions" of Atma in itself

⁴ Hindu mythology, like every other, designates these RootQualities by the names of numerous divinities, the quaternity being moreover the opening onto indefinite differentiation. With the American Indians, the four universal Qualities are manifested mythically by the cardinal points.

sacred dances testify — can be vehicles for our participation in cosmic rhythms and in universal life, at all the levels that are accessible to us by virtue of our nature and through Grace.

This leaves, in the human microcosm, the consciousness of self — namely the "heart," which can likewise be the support of an existential "remembrance of God" on the basis of intellectual, ritual and moral conditions that guarantee the legitimacy and efficacy of such an alchemy. Whatever the case, the psychosomatic analogies we have just called to mind convey teachings that concern all men: every human being must, through love of God, strive to "be what he is," to disengage himself from the artificial superstructures that disfigure him and which are none other than the traces of the Fall, in order to become once again a tree whose root is liberating certitude and whose crown is beatific serenity. Human nature is predisposed towards the unitive knowledge of its Divine Model; *amore e' l cuor gentil sono una cosa*.

We must now consider another aspect of the question, which is that of symbolic content. Mental activity is capable not only of thought but also of imagination, thus of visualizing a symbolic form; in like manner, the spirit is sensitive not only to concepts but also to evocative sounds, to auditory symbols; and in like manner again, the body is capable not only of movements that are necessary or useful, but also of symbolic gestures. All this enters into a psychosomatic alchemy of which the spiritual traditions of the East offer us many examples, and of which the Christian liturgies offer echoes. The visual image a priori addresses the mind, thus it pertains to the region of the forehead; sound is in connection with our center, the heart; and symbolic movement, quite evidently, concerns the body. And this relates both to the deiform character of the planes constituting the microcosm and to the alchemy of non-discursive, existential symbols — namely forms, sounds and gestures.

Such is the alchemy of existential participation in the life of the spirit; the mental space participates in it by means of the image, the heart-root through sound, and the body — which is a projection or extension of the two poles — either through immobility and static gesture or through rhythm and dynamic gesture; and we have in mind here basic postures as well as ritual

operations accompanied by an awareness of their profound nature.⁵ It goes without saying that all this has its applications in the diverse forms of sacred art or traditional craftsmanship, and sometimes even in legitimate forms of secular art.

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Man possesses a soul, and to have a soul means to pray. Like the soul itself, prayer comprises modes and each mode contains a virtue; to pray, then, is to actualize a virtue and at the same time to sow the seed of it. First of all comes resignation to the Will of God: acceptance of our destiny insofar as we cannot and should not change it; this attitude has to become second nature with us, given that there is always something from which we cannot escape. Correlative to this attitude or virtue there is the compensating attitude of trust: whoso puts his trust in God, while conforming to the Divine demands, will find God altogether disposed to come to his aid; but what we expect from Heaven we must ourselves offer to others: whoso desires mercy for himself must himself be merciful.

Another compensatory attitude with respect to resignation is the petition for help: we have fundamentally the right, based on our acceptance of destiny, to ask God for this good or that favor; but it goes without saying that we can ask nothing of Heaven if we lack gratitude. Now, to be thankful is to be conscious of all the good that Heaven has given us; it is to appreciate the value of even small things and to be content with little. Gratitude is the complement of supplication, just as generosity is the complement of trust in God. The great lesson of prayer is that our relationship with the world depends essentially on our relationship with Heaven.

⁵ Of which above all Hinduism and Northern Buddhism, with their science of mantra, yantra and mudra, possess the secret.