

PHILIA is this choice for love; it can be very generous when it recognises that God is the source of love in me. But it concerns in general only the ones I have chosen. In the Gospel of John, Peter recognises that he loves Jesus (PHILIA) because Jesus loves him (AGAPE). How could he love Jesus differently?

Our own will means choice and selection, but in this sense it means also exclusion.

AGAPE is the form of love which does not select. It is the father's or the mother's love. It embraces the whole universe without distinction, as the rain falls on everything and everybody, the good and the bad without acceptance of the person. This form of love is real compassion, it means it is able to suffer with the other. This form of love accepts not to be reciprocated. It loves but does not need to be loved; it can love in secret as God does when we ignore him. We can love our husband / wife, our son / daughter without them knowing even we love them. We can love our brothers and sisters in Christ, it means every human being, every living creature, every sentient being, without need for return.

EROS, PHILIA and AGAPE are like three boxes, one in each other; AGAPE contains PHILIA which contains EROS. In our growth we learn to grow from the smaller into the next "bigger box", as a further stage of development. And these three forms of love are always mixed one with another. They need each other to express themselves, especially the outer boxes need the energy of the inner boxes. AGAPE needs EROS. PHILIA needs EROS.

Love is not always "nice". It is our strongest energy in life; it is firm, it requires a lot from us, it is disturbing because it is all the time on the move. It is peaceful, but it never settles. God is a mother / a father. We can find refuge in her / him. But it is not a cuddle. It is a true security because it is true love which allows us to find our true self, but it is not a form of regression, it is very challenging. It takes us out of our comfort zone. The cross is unavoidable, it is a harsh reality of our life. Love brings inevitably suffering if we are true to God, although suffering is of course not equivalent with love. Love is the main stream in our life, suffering is only the conflict which love brings us into, too often, in our chaotic relationship with the world which does not recognise God as its way to justice. Love is peace but only when our joy can embrace our suffering, i.e. when the joy of love is stronger than anything else.

8) An experience of the Ground of Being-God-Brahman-Emptiness

This title is a challenge; tongue in cheek because evidently nobody has the answer. It seems to me that one of the major dangers in meditation is probably self-obsession when one observes only what happens in oneself and when one becomes obsessed with one's own progress. Indeed we are not the doers; we are rather meditated than we meditate; things (thoughts, emotions, intuitions) happen in us more than we generate them. We can even observe them as if we were (are) an exterior witness. What is then this energy that works in us and makes us alive and communicates to us what we are, feel, think, do? Is it true that everything is grace and that we do nothing but receive what is given? Is it the way to experience the Divine? Is it the way to meet the Ground of Being (GoB)?

Exercise

The exercise consists in sitting in meditation without any expectation. We have nothing else to do than to drop our readymade representations and expectations and to focus on our breath: breathing in and out. Feel how it is the energy of life. We are nobody. We do nothing. We are just a conduit that is sensitive to this mysterious flow. We feel the breath coming in and out and being aware of it. We are consciousness and we receive this gift which is life. Everything that happens in this empty

conduit is the most precious thing that can be. It is much more than air; it is divine by essence because GoB is the origin and source and cause of it all. When we let it flow through the conduit that we are, we are in touch with the Divine. Is it correct? It remains more a question than an answer.

While sitting and breathing, concentrate on how this simple intake of air brings peace and joy. Nothing else exists. If you observe well, it is a true miracle. This is GoB manifesting herself in us. This is a Mystery which reveals to us the essence of life and the most precious Presence of GoB who is the source of all creation and life. Not a creation in the past as the original creation of the whole universe, but a creation now in the present as the energy of life itself. Creation happens in us here and now as a flow of being. There is nothing else that matters much. Observe, and rejoice also on, the discrete aspect of this Presence which does not impose itself onto us but sustains our being in the most humble way we could experience. Isn't it the source of everything? Observe also how it is intimate to us, even more intimate than ourselves. It is indeed different for each one of us. It is personal.

When you sit, do not project thoughts onto what you observe. Just observe and accept what is as it is. Do not try to make it special. If you feel it is nothing special, then take it as such. But nevertheless it is also difficult to observe this flow, on and out, and to feel it is nothing! The problem is that we are so accustomed to this flow of breath that we hardly can still be aware of it and of what it means.

Commentary

It is evidently risky to express anything on this topic of the encounter with the Ground of Being (GoB), but, on the other hand, we will never “evolve” if we do not dare to share our experiences, even if they are very primitive and incomplete. I risk then myself on this tricky path.

We all know there is no recipe for finding GoB. We know also that where one discerns the presence of GoB, another one would see nothing. And none of these two people can prove to be right. But we can nevertheless share what seems important to us. For my part I would say:

- 1) Let's start from a very rational consideration: 1) Either the universe is just a mechanic world generated by chemical, physical and mechanical processes. Evolution is then only a slow transformation guided by chance and necessity. In this case, as human beings we would be nothing more than complex entities, in our material composition not very distinct from heaps of stones, but just a bit more complex. If only matter exists and there is not spirit, sentient or human beings have no special nature. There is then no special value either in life if it is a mere material (mechanical-chemical) process only. 2) Or, on the opposite, we are touched by the beauty of nature, life and evolution and we notice that it is indeed guided by a will or spirit or purpose that leads its slow transformation. No probability could create such a complex and meaningful universe: an echidna, a kangaroo, a whale, a swallow, a blossom, a heart, a bacteria, a galaxy, a mountain. It means that beyond appearances there is an acting force or energy or will. In this case the Universe is then only a visible reflection of something deeper and invisible that constitutes its core and essence. This essence can be understood as a Presence that is the energy of Life itself, a discrete leading will that does not impose itself but rather proposes, suggests or offers. Dimensions such as love, peace, joy, justice are then subtle and discrete expressions of this Presence and they are infinitely more than mere mechanical and chemical effects! Evidently this second option invites us to discover who this Presence is which is Mystery and Graciousness, because it is evidently the essence and source of everything. We want to start with a blank page because we know that this is the best way to discover the true essence of this mysterious presence.

- 2) This first basic rational (and pretty elementary) consideration allows us dropping our representations. It is first important to forget any representation we have of GoB. Any representation we have is far from reality and becomes an idol. As Zen says: if you meet the Buddha, kill him! Let's try, as much as we can, to start with a blank page of "complete unknowing". Hard task because the mind quickly fills the gap.
- 3) We speak often of encounter with GoB but it is probably very inadequate. I believe we do not meet GoB as we meet our friend, our dog or the tree in the garden. GoB is not distinct from us. He is not a bearded guy on a cloud or a separate entity. If She is the essence of Life and the Spirit of the world, it means we cannot see Her, but only through Her effect on our environment or inner life, as we do not see the wind but see only how the trees move. And yet it is also a personal presence with whom we can have a personal relationship. Mysterious contradiction!
- 4) GoB cannot be distinct from us although we are not GoB and She is infinitely broader than ourselves. If the Universe is Her body, She is then the spirit that animates it and makes it alive. But nowhere in the Universe, it seems, we can meet Her as distinct from the Universe. Similarly in myself I cannot make a distinction between my body and my spirit. It must then logically be a bit the same with GoB. He is one with the Universe and one with us. He penetrates everything and is in us as the essence of our Life. It is probably the best way to hide and nevertheless be fully present. Like the salt dissolved in water. Love, to be true, cannot impose itself; it has to remain discrete, or even hidden, never clearly identifiable.
- 5) Let's admit that our experience of GoB starts with our first breath at birth. Probably even before, when we are conceived. Aboriginal people make a distinction between the physical conception and the intake of the spirit. Fascinating! This first breath is the intake of what drives our own energy of life. Let's start from the simplest presumption: there is maybe nothing more in Life than this breath, or rather nothing essential that would not be encompassed in this breath. The rest is anecdote or distraction.
- 6) When we sit in meditation and concentrate on the breath, it frees us from other processes which happen in us: thoughts, emotions, feelings. These sorts of events drop out as a drop of water on the duck's back. It runs off without leaving any trace. At the beginning of my meditation practice, concentrating on the breath seemed to me a bit limited. But it is not. All the contrary. It frees us from the superfluous and opens us to the real depth of mystery because we become more available to this unknown dimension.
- 7) If this approach is correct, it means that we are just conduits of expression of a deeper Reality. In other words we are not the real actors or creators of what we do, we think, we know - as we believe too often we do. This essential energy (Life) seems to come from "elsewhere" and it is freely and abundantly given to us. This means that the intuitions I had, the knowledge I assimilated, the cake I baked, the house I built, the care I have given to my family and friends, the books I have written, the song I have sung are not my own work but essentially GoB's work. I am only the hand, the voice, the body which makes it visible in a material form. I find this understanding very fascinating because it opens us to a form of inner revelation we live minute by minute and to its unlimited depth. It opens us to true freedom. We remain responsible of each gesture we do but we are no more fully in charge. This form of abundance could yet also be understood as a form of determinism where GoB would manipulate us as puppets. But, if I understand well, it is indeed all the contrary. What is given is only on offer. It is never imposed. We can take it or not. And we remain therefore fully responsible for what we do and for our attitudes and for the choices that ensue out of them. This mysterious origin of what we create does not mean either that we are right, or at least not righter than others who are exactly in the same position because these others are also the recipients of the same generosity. It dissolves our false idea of self and opens us to the experience of the true Self (yet we still do not know

what it is!). This means we cannot claim any special authority because we experience our personal expression as the expression of GoB's gifts. It is true that these gifts are not given pure; we have still to welcome them, listen correctly to them and give them shape. What we feel or say or write or build or give is maybe inspired by GoB but we have to still question whether it has been truly understood and well expressed in our poor words and means. This remains an enigma that opens us to the deep Mystery. Is what I do inspired by my own madness or by GoB? It makes us humble and aware that we have to open more and more to these gifts because they constitute the real core of our lives.

Now remember, this is only an exercise. Do not create new concepts from your experience. They would become idols, and we would be back at the starting point. Forget everything I just wrote!

9) Koans and Enigmas

This next exercise aims at focusing at a special enigma or issue in our daily life. It can be a challenging situation we encounter regularly or a decisive choice we have to make in a near future.

In Zen tradition there is a practice of what is called koans. These are enigmas that ask impossible questions, or questions that cannot be solved by our intellect because they challenge our rational mind and common sense. Among the most famous koans there are: "what is the noise of the clapping of one hand?" or "What was your face before your parents were born?" In the practice of Zen these koans are intended to be meditated upon, but not in a rational way, not with our intellect, not with our rational mind. It is then important to let the question sink into our heart-mind and let the answer arise, that will most often be expressed rather under the form of a gesture or a short word than by a long explanation. As I never could or did not commit to really enter this practice, I will not comment it further. But we can be inspired by this practice and extend it to the enigmas of our own life, to our own koans. This is much more familiar to my own practice. For instance if we have to take an important decision or if we live in a situation of conflict in our daily or professional life, we can meditate on this situation in the same way as it is done with koans in Zen practice, i.e. without focusing on the problem in a rational way (with the left hemisphere of the brain) but in letting the solution surface naturally, by our deeper intuition, whatever this mysterious faculty may be.

Exercise

Sit in meditation. Concentrate on the situation you want to examine. It can be a conflict with a person you meet regularly, or a decision you have to take or even a metaphysical question that intrigues you, even a scientific enigma! Do not think rationally about it but try rather to visualise and to feel what it is; make it real and present in you, in your heart-mind. Then meditate on it without focusing on the topic but keeping it present in yourself. Find indeed your personal best way to do so. It is impossible to propose a simple recipe. You have to discover your own way through your own practice. And let the response surface. Of course meditation is not a practice that intends a result; it is not an aim oriented activity. Hence do not expect great revelations nor definitive solutions to your enigma. But let it ripen slowly. And your own feeling about what may arise will indicate to you how trustworthy it is. There is no magic; this is rather a way of letting arise what we maybe already know, or it is the inspiration by the Spirit or something like that. This exercise makes you aware how we are connected to a deeper Ground of Being that acts in us in a mysterious way; we can call it morphogenetic fields, memory of the Universe, action of the Spirit, etc.. It is not us but it is acting in us.

Commentary

You will notice that, if an intuition arises, you will tend to concentrate on it and to grasp it with your rational mind. What the right brain hemisphere produces is generally then processed by the left brain hemisphere. When we try to grasp the content of intuitions with our rational mind, it is a bit like catching the butterfly; it is beautiful when it flies freely but we destroy it and its beauty when we try to catch it; we break its fragility and freedom. Intuitions are similar; they need to fly freely and be all the time on the move; nothing can stop them, or they die. The fact that, in this exercise, you tend to return to your rational mind means also that your mind will produce new thoughts and the meditation process will be broken. You will be back in your thinking mode. In such a situation it is probably precious to register the intuition that has arisen. Take a short note of it on a piece of paper and then try to come back to the meditation process or to your koan practice, free from the intuition that tends to become a thought.