

The Sphere of Sensation

The main vehicles of human experience in the physical world are the sensory organs of the physical body. All experience gained thereby is invariably conditioned by the biological changes taking place in the world moment by moment, nano-second by nano-second. Therefore, some recognition and understanding of that biology is essential if the student is to make progress. The body is not just a solid mass of flesh – a vehicle of physical sensation only – no matter how much we are accustomed to think of it as such. It is a beautiful world of integrated systems that are exquisitely complex and worthy of the greatest respect, and a close examination of it will reveal this microcosmic world to be a perfect reflection of the macrocosm.

Traditionally, the body was viewed as a synthesis of the four elements – earth, air, fire and water – and from our perspective this model is still fit for purpose. Earth corresponds with matter in a solid state, water with matter in a liquid state, air with matter in a gaseous state and fire with pure energy. Thus, earth corresponds with the physical aspects of our body, the skeleton being the most obvious, but also includes the brain, the central nervous system, muscles, cartilage and tendons etc.

Water corresponds with the fluidic parts of our body, particularly the blood and the lymph, air with the pulmonary system centred in the lungs, and fire with the nervous energy flowing through the nervous system. This model is extremely useful to begin with, as it opens up the dark continent of our physical body to observation.

With regards to the sphere of sensation, we are informed that it is an egg-shaped sphere of electromagnetic energy that

surrounds and contains the human body and that it is generated from within the body in much the same way as the Earth's magnetic field is thought to be generated in and by the Earth's core, and as far as we know serves a similar purpose. This field or sphere of sensation is understood to be a vessel which receives the influx of the Divine Light analogous to the way the atmosphere of our planet receives photons of light from the Sun, and as such constitutes the foundation of all living things on Earth. It is possible to see in the structure of this mechanism an analogue of the electromagnetic structure and activity of both the cell and the solar system, which suggests an archetypal model applying to all living things, at least in our world.

The substance contained within the sphere of sensation is extremely fluid and generally in constant motion; indeed, throughout history it has often been alluded to as a sea or an ocean with its own tides and currents. However, the water referred to here is not H₂O but a body of energy with the fluidic qualities of water, and a major part of the student's work lies in understanding and rising above the influences and effects of the forces manifesting within this body of energy.

The forces operating within the sphere of sensation, like the ocean itself, are never still; sometimes they are very unstable and have frequently been described in metaphorical terms as storms and tempests. This is particularly significant because in meditation one of the major problems to confront students, particularly at the beginning, is the constant bombardment of thoughts, feelings and images dancing before the mind's eye. Few perceive this chemistry as an activity of the sphere of sensation; indeed, most simply accept it as the activity of a restless mind in which thoughts and feelings are never still. Others think it evidence that they are incapable of meditating, or perhaps not ready for it. The truth is that this mental noise is

merely a part of the chemistry of consciousness taking place within the sphere of sensation, which is simply being true to its nature. It is a chemistry that is shaped and conditioned by the biological programming of the body as it seeks to survive in this world, and it must be understood rather than suppressed.

This biological programming is an expression of a singular primal urge or instinct 'to be', which may be further considered as being expressed in the form of two secondary instincts, 'reproduction' and 'survival'. These instincts are so powerful that the majority of people will go through their entire lives devoted to fulfilling them and nothing else, and rarely, if ever, perceiving the biological imperatives driving them. Almost all of us unconsciously build our identity in the context of these imperatives, which is remarkable because they play a fundamental role in almost every part of our lives. Indeed, they generally determine most of our everyday thinking, particularly in the way we establish our lives around the complex relationships formed within our community and the world at large. For instance, we aspire to a place and a status in the community that will provide us with sufficient personal respect, money and material resources to attract a mate and provide for a family. In our highly mechanised world this means a career that will fund a mortgage and give us sufficient resources to maintain a family and afford a lifestyle. To achieve this requires an appropriate education, not only in academic studies but also in relationship skills; all of which are set in the context of a community of people by and large striving for the same objectives. For most of us family and career constitute our life.

In human terms this world is the mundane world and we identify the most personal and intimate part of ourselves with this world, invariably failing to recognise that our thoughts and feelings are products of biological drivers interacting with our

social environment. Yet, although our thoughts and feelings are predominantly determined by our biology and the environment we live in, our ability to think is essentially a function of the soul, as is the mechanism of thought. Thus, our rational, imaginative and emotional faculties are faculties of our soul and should be acknowledged as such.

Traditionally, the means by which the student is enabled to rise above this biological conditioning is through self-observation, which is to say, that through process of inner reflection it is possible to transcend the flow of transient thought-forms dancing in the light of consciousness and behold the permanent reality that is the substrate of our being and the true ground of the soul, and meditation is the tool designed for such work.

Meditation was designed in the precincts of the sanctuary by the exponents of the spiritual life who understood it to be the first step on the path of self-knowledge. However, successfully engaging in the work of meditation requires some understanding of the chemistry of consciousness and its environment, and a key part of that environment is the sphere of sensation and the movement of energy continually taking place therein. It is an energy that is linked into the tidal movements of energy of this world and all of the life-forms manifesting within it. That is to say, its movements correspond with the movements of energy in nature. The sphere of sensation is in effect if not in fact a microcosm of the world of nature.

Before one can effectively control the chemistry of consciousness taking place within the sphere of sensation it is necessary to recognise and understand the cyclic movements, or tides as they are sometimes called, of the sphere itself. The movements of energy taking place within the sphere correspond

with the changes taking place moment by moment in the macrocosm. One example of such a tide is the circadian cycle. The word 'circadian' derives from the Latin words *circas* and *dies*, meaning *around* and *day*. Thus, the circadian cycle is approximately 24 hours long and a great deal of the natural world is governed by it. In human terms there are several key biochemical processes and activities including physical, mental and behavioural patterns based upon this cycle. Many of these processes respond primarily to light and darkness but can also be affected by other influences. The main biological mechanism that controls the circadian rhythms is located in the hypothalamus gland situated in the brain.

The Sun, which clearly governs the flow of our vital energy, plays a central role in the circadian cycle. Thus, along with many other creatures that rise with the Sun, we are most active in the morning. As the day progresses through the afternoon we gradually become less active, until in the evening, with the setting of the Sun or shortly after, we naturally drift into sleep. This daily cycle is also reflected on a larger scale in the procession of the seasons where a great outpouring of energy and activity occurs in the natural world during spring and summer, gradually declining into rest during autumn and entering a dormant period akin to sleep during winter.

The energy of the Sun also powers ocean currents and the circulation of the atmosphere. It is the major controlling influence of the Earth's climate and of the human condition. For instance, the lack of sunlight can affect the circadian rhythms disrupting sleep patterns, blood pressure and hormonal activity, thus affecting emotional tides and our ability to act rationally. This can particularly affect those who live at latitudes above 37 degrees north or below 37 degrees south of the equator, where for six months of the year (autumn & winter) exposure to

sunlight is much reduced causing health problems for many people. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is one such condition that is directly associated with sunlight deprivation.

In conjunction with the Sun, the gravitational impact of the Moon influences the fluidic elements of the Earth – the oceans and seas – causing them to rise and fall twice daily as the Earth turns upon its axis, and has a corresponding influence upon the fluids of our body, especially the blood and lymph. From a human perspective this influence is most noticeable at key times in the cycle

of the seasons such as the equinoxes and solstices, and during its 28 day circuit of the Earth, concerning which a great deal of folklore testifies.

Variations in the ionisation of the atmosphere caused by magnetic disturbances such as those produced by the cyclic ebb and flow of solar flares and sunspot activity are now understood to have a direct influence on the metabolism of the body. This phenomenon is also observable on a regional or local level where positive ions at the leading edge of a weather system make us irritable, whilst negative ions, in abundance at the end of a storm, induce a sense of relief and well-being. There are also certain types of winds, such as the Sirocco in Italy or the Autan in France, that bring with them high levels of positive ions. These winds are well known for their disruptive effect on the health and social behaviour of people. Knowledge of the cycles and tides of such forces enable students to arrive at more informed conclusions about the chemistry taking place within their own spheres of sensation.