

### The Most Intimate Universality

Getting to know who we really are can be a difficult thing to do for many of us. This may be because starting on the journey to rediscovering our true selves first requires having very serious doubts about whether we really are any of the things we have come to believe we are.

Inquiring into any subject usually implies having doubts about that subject. Doubt is an essential component of investigation. Where there's no doubt there's no inquiry and where there's no inquiry there's no discovery. This is why rediscovering our true identity can be a difficult thing to do, because most of us don't have much doubt about who we are. We all think we know ourselves rather well, so we hardly ever pose ourselves the question "Who Am I?"

Some people sometimes ask themselves that question, but only to respond by listing some of those obvious personal characteristics that everyone usually talks about: That they're Americans, or Germans, or whatever other nationality they might have; that they're men or women; that they're rich, poor, or middle class, that they're tall or short; that they're good looking or not; that they're good in sports, or any other field of human endeavor or not; that they're intelligent or not so intelligent; and a series of other personal traits that we all have come to believe are fundamental components of who we are.

Hardly anybody has any lingering doubts about their identity. Most of us prefer taking for granted that traits like the ones listed above constitute everything that we are, which is why most of our lives are anchored on the belief that we're nothing but our physical, emotional and mental attributes.

The fact may be that, without such anchoring, most people would probably lose their sense of direction and their sense of purpose in life, with the resulting disintegration of the individual, family and society that such absence of direction and purpose would entail. This is probably the main reason that most people refuse to inquire into the validity of their assumptions about their identity, as without such assumptions their lives would probably lose all meaning.

Out of sheer personal observation, I would venture to speculate that anyone who constantly doubts the validity of this kind of personal "self-knowledge" would tend to be a social misfit in one way or another. Such is very likely the case of some philosophers hiding in their ivory towers, or some scientists burying their heads in their laboratories, or some monks locking themselves up in monasteries.

There is, however, another kind of inquirer that doesn't necessarily have to hide in any of those places to pursue the resolution of their existential doubts. Some of us actually managed to keep living a relatively normal social life while engaged in such pursuit.

But, is having deep doubts about ourselves such an indispensable premise for inquiring about our true identity in a serious manner? Yes it is. As we said above, where there's no doubt there's no inquiry, and where there's no inquiry there's no discovery.

For example, someone who doesn't have a deeply inquisitive mind has probably never questioned any of those basic existential tenets that we all rather obediently absorbed during our formative years. But such is not the case of the self-inquirer. In the view of our kind of existential doubters, no definition is acceptable as the final, ultimate definition for the object of their doubt. Regarding existential matters, there may even be some definitions and concepts that are widely accepted by the great majority of people, but those definitions and concepts may still not satisfy the understanding or general perception of a small number of inquirers.

Any adult person attempting to redefine their True Identity would first have to question the validity of the following pre-existing and seemingly undeniable premises:

- ❖ We are all either of the female or the male gender,
- ❖ We are all of a certain race or mixture thereof,
- ❖ We are all of a certain culture, nationality and linguistic background and,
- ❖ We are all human beings. On top of that we would also have to question
- ❖ All the particularities pertaining to each individual's physical, emotional and mental attributes.

But there's really no need to conduct such existential inquiry at the levels or phases outlined above. Once we have understood what our inquiry is all about, the question "Who Am I?" would suffice.

The question "Who Am I?" comprises the following questions:

- ❖ Am I my mental attributes? (my intelligence, my memory, my thoughts, my ideas),
- ❖ Am I my emotional attributes? (my capacity to feel love or anger, joy or sadness, etc.),
- ❖ Am I my physical attributes? (my gender, my physical characteristics, my possessions, my physical abilities) and,
- ❖ Am I just a human being? (is there any consciousness transcending the life of my body?)

In this context, the question "Who Am I?" implies having doubts about any existing premises related to our identity. Nothing pertaining to who we might think we are is taken for a fact. Not even whatever may lie at the end of our inquiry is taken for granted. All bets are off. The question "Who Am I?" implies that we don't even know WHAT we are, for not even our humanity is taken for a defining trait of our identity.

This type of inquiry is called "Self Inquiry," as it pertains to rediscovering what our Innermost Identity might be. When self-inquirers finally transcend the ideas and perceptions about themselves that form their "identity," which are the same ideas and perceptions about themselves that form what we usually call the "ego," and finally get through to the Eternal Source of their Consciousness, which is the same as their Innermost Self, they rediscover who they really are. In fact, they "Become" again who they really are, always were and will always be.

Becoming again that identity which resides beyond all spurious perceptions and notions about ourselves means merging our human awareness into our Innermost Eternal Consciousness. That Innermost Eternal Consciousness is known in Jnana Yoga as the Atman. The substance of the Atman is one and the same with the substance of the Universal Consciousness which is the basis for everything that exists in the Universe. That Universal Consciousness is known in Jnana Yoga as the Self.

To regain Direct Consciousness of our Atman/Self is simply to exist again as, be again conscious of, and rejoice once again in, the most Intimate Universality that each and all existing beings will ever share.

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