

# Mysteries of the Soul

## Reflection 3 - connecting the 3 degrees of the soul

### **Spiritual text: *Zohar, highest grade of faith***

As a soul, you are called to be a link between the unity and the multitude, a living connection between heaven and earth. If, based on boundless awareness, you acknowledge that the soul is formless and timeless, and you experience that your consciousness is a revelation of a grandiose reality – all pervasive and perfect – then this realisation evokes a new genesis. You were born to abandon slavery and return to the trunk from which you have grown. You are called to become free from misery, humiliation and error in the land of strangers. You are invited to live in the world of the soul, of rest of consciousness, inaccessible to fear, showing a high dignity and joy.

How can you know all this? You know this certainty from the living experience of your state of awareness and also from holy scriptures of humanity, which can be viewed as maps of the soul- world. With these maps, with your inner compass of awareness and with help from above, you can start your symbolic journey home, pursue it and complete it. Many problems with which humanity struggles are direct results from the fact that people do not or only barely live from the world of the soul – the pure astral field of experience of the concrete archetypes, the field of unity, freedom and love – but rather identify themselves with their personalities. They search for solutions in the dimensions of the sensory perceptible world and the psychologically perceptible world, but these methods usually address the symptoms rather than the causes. In general, sustainable solutions for problems are not to be found in the dimensions in which they arose. In the light of a higher dimension – the world of the soul – difficulties vanish into thin air and there instead is radiant joy. How can you gain admission to and live from this mysterious world of the soul? Through self-knowledge! Not without reason were the words ‘gnothi seauton’ – ‘know yourself’ – written above the entrance of the temple of Apollo in Delphi.

### **Self-knowledge**

How do you achieve self-knowledge? Perhaps by studying psychology? Psychology is the science of the psyche, and psyche is the Greek word for soul. Psychology, however, does not engage the soul, at least not what esoteric traditions mean by soul; rather it engages the earthly personality. A stable personality is an important condition for proper functioning in the material world. If a personality is unstable and is troubled by certain disorders, psychological or psychiatric interventions may offer solutions; but they can never lead to the world of the soul. You can do countless psychological tests: to determine what type of person you are, for instance; to find out your strong points; to discover where work still needs to be done and what really suits you. This work can, of course, be very useful in order to construct a way of life that accords with who you are. But do those interesting test results really tell you who you are? They are all forms, labels, that stand alone and do not relate to the essence.

Ashtavakra advises us not to identify with forms. He sings:

*'Earth, fire and water, the wind and the sky – you are none of these.  
If you wish to be free, know you are the Self, the witness of all these,  
the heart of awareness. Set your body aside. Sit in your own awareness.  
You will at once be happy, forever still, forever free.  
You have no caste. No duties bind you. Formless and free, beyond  
the reach of the senses, the witness of all things. So be happy!'*

The Advaita Vedanta tradition, a philosophical-religious movement within Hinduism, emphasises that man can come to real self-knowledge through awareness. Throughout history this practice has been known as raja yoga, of which Patanjali is regarded as the progenitor because of his reference work compiling the Yogasutras. This type of yoga is quite different from what the western world usually considers yoga to be, which is hatha yoga. Raja Yoga does not primarily concern physical exercises. Yoga means unification and as such refers to unification of the high and the low, of the heavenly and the earthly. This spiritual unification is also found in the Kabbalah, a mystic tradition within Judaism. The Kabbalah values the study of the three degrees of the soul. In the most important book of the Kabbalah, the Zohar, we read:

*'The study of the three degrees of the soul gives some insight into the higher wisdom; and only in this way can wisdom connect a number of the mysteries.'*

### **Study and reflection**

To study the soul is not contradictory to awareness.; the two can even reinforce each other. Study can give guidance to perceptions, for example, and can promote the power of discrimination and help assimilate and stimulate mental energies. Conversely perceptions can be an invitation to study the soul in order to give it more depth and put it in context. To achieve self-knowledge by studying and reflecting on what is revealed by living experience and the spiritual tradition is a practice that is known in India as jnana yoga. This philosophical type of yoga is closely related to what the western world calls gnosis, inner knowledge, the knowledge of the heart. The most important features of gnosis have been defined by the well-known Dutch theologian Roelof van den Broek as:

- the conviction that the essential core of the human being derives from a divine world of light and peace and must return to it, but has been kept from it in many ways in the material world in which we have become entangled;
- this understanding of the origin, current position and destination of humanity at the same time means our liberation from the grasp of the material existence and our return to the divine world;
- self-knowledge and knowledge of God are therefore two sides of the same coin;
- this knowledge is not the result of rational reasoning, however, but arises from inner enlightenment on account of a revelation from the divine world;
- this spiritual insight, the gnosis, is not accessible for everyone, but only for those who are worthy, and for that reason alone its essence must be kept secret.

If you wish to realise something, then it is necessary to have an idea for it. This idea will gradually gain more and more life and clearer contours; it will guide your thoughts, feelings and actions and at a certain moment it will concretely manifest itself in the form of consequences. That is why Ashtavakra sings:



and carries out the prospective suggestions of the spirit-soul. There are, as yet, very few people in whom the spirit-soul is active. That is not surprising, if we know that the Zohar tells us that the spirit-soul is active in the person who has perfected himself and is called 'holy', meaning that he has actually been 'healed' and has forged the personality-soul, the soul and the spirit-soul into a harmonious and dynamic unity. That becomes possible when a twofold, personal, shining garment of the soul has been woven: the shining garment (the soul) and the golden robe (the spirit-soul). When the spirit-soul has become active in a person, he or she is a living connection between heaven and earth. The mortal earthly personality-soul is then transfigured into an immortal heavenly personality-soul. That does not mean that his or her growth has come to an end because development goes on forever, even outside time and space, from strength to strength, from glory to glory.

### **The divine plan of creation**

The threefold soul comes into being in order to cooperate in the divine plan of creation. It is the task of the spirit-soul to give birth to the divine idea, to conceive the proper guidance. The soul has the mission to work, full of love, with the divine idea; to provide the energy that can be used to go in the chosen direction. And it is up to the personality-soul to bring the divine idea to reality and to realize the desired forms concretely.

Real spirituality aims to let the spirit-soul become active in the personality-soul. This is not an easy task, for the personality-soul cannot directly endure the high energy of the spirit-soul. Therefore a spiritually striving person will have to first wake up the soul, and bring it to maturity. When that intermediary has been created, the spirit-soul can be received. Only then will the soul and the personality-soul be fundamentally renewed and synthesized into a dynamic trinity, together with the spirit-soul. That process is called transfiguration.

If we take a look at what is on the market nowadays under the heading 'spirituality', we must conclude that most of it relates to the personality-soul, and not to the soul or the spirit-soul. That is not necessarily serious. For instance, if someone is very much out of balance and certain interventions not acknowledged by medical science ensure that this person comes to balance again, that is a fine result, of course. It is quite different, however, if one is systematically working towards the development of so-called 'spiritual powers' which stem from the personality-soul. In principle it is, for instance, possible for anyone to learn to see auras, to become clairvoyant, to remember previous incarnations or to become a medium. Authentic spiritual traditions strongly advise against the deliberate development of psychic abilities. Why? Because in such a case a person – just like the archetypal sorcerer's apprentice – ties himself to spheres, influences and powers that are mostly unpleasant, ones that he cannot control. Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov wrote about this subject in his book 'The Mysteries of Yesod'.

*'Imagine that you have successfully developed clairvoyance before having developed in yourself the qualities of love, patience, goodness, tolerance, forgivingness and self-control; you surely do not know what is in store for you. If you were able to see the hidden vices and crimes, and also the creatures, that accompany your friends – all kinds of monsters and monstrosities, etcetera – you would cry day and night in dismay and beg the Lord to free you from your clairvoyance. You would have to admit that you felt much better before, and that that was a thousand times better, even if you were living in illusion at the time. If, on the other hand, you have overcome many weaknesses within yourself; if you are prepared and purified; if you can control yourself and feel*

*much love for the people, then you will not see these horrors anymore; you will see things that correspond to your essence. You will see the future of the people and the happiness that awaits them. And even if you notice something wrong, you will – by virtue of your love, your courage and your self-control – not be scared or discouraged, but you will support them with your thoughts.'*

### **Abandoning psychic powers**

During paranormal development of the I, powers will arise that are easily misused by the person in whom the soul does not yet reign. There is also a danger that the personality-soul identifies with its paranormal tricks and thus starts to feel tremendously important and becomes proud. These are temptations from demonic spirits. There has been a long period in the evolution of humanity in which the people had a natural and unconscious clairvoyance at their disposal, as is still the case with many animal species nowadays. In most people this sensitivity has almost completely disappeared, as it was meant to, because consciousness was to be developed through the lived experience of material reality.

Deliberately developing clairvoyance therefore usually does not mean a step forward in the human evolution, but rather a step backward and a cause of delay in human evolution. On the gnostic spiritual path, totally new spiritual powers will appear in a perfectly natural way – free gifts that we will consider in the ninth and last reflection.

Psychic powers (also called *iddhi*, or *siddhi*) are, therefore, no measure for spiritual development, and identifying with them poses major obstacles for the soul. They all need to be abandoned on the spiritual path so that an entirely new human being can evolve, a person with entirely new abilities, a person animated by the spirit. That is why the booklet *The Voice of the Silence* starts with the warning:

*'These instructions are for those ignorant of the dangers of the lower iddhi.'*

### **Surrender**

When the earthly personality-soul symbolically dies on the gnostic spiritual path, then such associations are abandoned. That process of dying is necessary in order to come to renewal. It is complete surrender to the divine. The mythical firebird, the phoenix, must first burn before it can rise from its ashes, renewed, in full glory. That is why Hermes Trismegistus said in 'Admonition of the soul':

*'By dying, he regains the true life and captivity, humiliation and depreciation are kept far away from him.'*

The fact that Hermes has realized this truth appears in the name 'Trismegistus', which means literally 'thrice-greatest'. In a spiritual sense he was born, died and was resurrected. Hermes has connected the personality-soul, the soul and the spirit-soul, thus becoming a living connection between heaven and earth. In Greek mythology Hermes is the messenger of the gods. The name Hermes Trismegistus is therefore, just like Christian Rosycross, a mystery-name that expresses the essence of the spiritual path. By means of the life of the patriarch Abraham, the Zohar concisely describes the spiritual path on which the three aspects of the human soul gradually evolve. Abraham leads the way for us and you can follow him, if you wish. Just like Abraham, your inner being is called to remain faithful to God and to become and to be the right hand of the world.

*'When Abram entered the land, God appeared before him, and Abram received nefesh and there erected an altar to like grade of divinity. Then he 'journeys toward the South' (Gen. 12:9), and received ruah. He attained at last to the summit of cleaving to God through neshama, and thereupon he 'built an altar to the Lord,' whereby is meant the effable grade which is that of neshama.*

*Then seeing that he must put himself to the test, and pass through the grades, he journeyed into Egypt. There he resisted being seduced by the demonic essences, and when he had proved himself, he returned to his abode; and, actually, he 'went up out of Egypt' (Gen. 13:1), his faith was strong and reassured, and he attained to the highest grade of faith. From that time, Abram knew the higher wisdom, and cleaved to God, and of the world he became the right hand'.*