

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

‘KNOW THYSELF’ *Jnana Yoga*

Part 1



Complete Works – Volume 17

P R O S V E T A

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Chapter One

‘Know yourself’

'Know yourself'. Very few people have ever understood the true meaning of this formula that was once inscribed over the entrance to the temple of Delphi. Who or what is this 'self' that we must know? 'Why, that's easy', you will say. 'We have to know our own character, our own strengths and weaknesses.' But that is not what this maxim is about. True, a knowledge of our own strengths and weaknesses is necessary but it is not enough. To know ourselves is to know the different bodies of which we are constituted (the physical, etheric, astral, mental, causal, buddhic and atmic)¹ and the needs of each of these bodies. But human beings know nothing about all this. They all realize that they have certain virtues and vices. They say, 'I know myself only too well!' But they are deluding themselves: they know nothing of the being that lives deep within them. They know nothing of its desires, needs or aspirations or what makes it suffer. They don't know who their 'self' is; they think it is their physical body and spend their time giving that body food, clothes, jewellery, comfort and pleasures without realizing that their true self is asking for something quite different. The satisfaction of their purely physical, material needs has never made human beings any happier or more contented. It is only when they begin to know themselves as they are on a higher plane that they become capable of living in true splendour.

If the initiates of old laid so much emphasis on the necessity for humans to know themselves, it was because this knowledge is the key that opens up great possibilities for making progress

and achieving success. As long as we are ignorant of the needs of our higher self we continue to give everything to our physical body, which becomes glutted and overfed, whereas our soul and spirit suffocate and die of hunger and thirst.

But how can you expect people who don't even believe in the existence of their other, subtler bodies to do anything about nourishing or strengthening them? It is amazing to see the situation so many people are in, even those who are highly cultivated: they take great pride in their university degrees and all their culture and erudition, and yet they are constantly in a state of inner torment and anxiety. Isn't this proof enough that something has gone very wrong with their lives? When someone is as ignorant as that they would do better not to be so pleased with themselves.

'Know yourself!' All science and all wisdom lie in knowing ourselves, in finding ourselves, in the fusion of our lower self with our higher self. The symbol of the initiate who has succeeded in this is the serpent with its tail in its mouth. In the ordinary way a serpent forms a straight or wavy line, and a line is finite, limited. But the serpent with its tail in its mouth forms a circle, and a circle represents the infinite, the limitless, the eternal.² Those who succeed in becoming a circle enter a world without limitations where 'above' and 'below' are no longer separate, because all the powers and all the riches and virtues of the true, higher self have been infused into the lower self. The higher and the lower become one and the person becomes a divinity.

Sèvres, February 6, 1972

Notes

1. See *Spiritual Alchemy*, Complete Works, vol. 2, chap. 1: 'Gentleness and humility'.
2. See *Langage symbolique*, langage de la nature, Complete Works, vol. 8, chap. 4: 'Le temps et l'éternité'.

Chapter Two

The synoptic table

I

The table that you see here (Figure 1) sums up the whole of Initiatic Science and all the sacred scriptures of humankind. To be sure, it is not the only valid way of illustrating a human being's psychic life; in fact I have already spoken to you of others. When you want to describe the human anatomy, for instance, you don't try to include everything on a single chart. It is much easier to understand if you use different diagrams for the different systems: the skeleton, the muscles, the circulatory and nervous systems, etc. And we do the same when we study geography with the help of physical, political, economic and geological maps. Similarly there can be different ways of illustrating the psychic structure of human beings, and although this table is different from the sephirotic tree, for instance, it represents the same reality and every aspect of the human being is represented. I have already given you other diagrams before this and they have all been different, but that doesn't mean that they contradict each other.

You will not find the table that I am showing you today in any book. In fact this is the first time that it has ever been presented, and it is a summary and a synthesis of all the truths of life. When you first look at it all you see is a certain number of isolated words with no apparent connection between them, but once I have explained each word, its position in the table and its connection with all the others, you will be astonished by their meaning and the correspondences between them.

THE SYNOPTIC TABLE

PRINCIPLE	IDEAL	NOURISHMENT	PRICE	ACTIVITY
SPIRIT DIVINE CONSCIOUSNESS	TIME ETERNITY IMMORTALITY	FREEDOM	TRUTH	IDENTIFICATION UNION CREATION
SOUL SUPER- CONSCIOUSNESS	SPACE IMMENSITY THE INFINITE	IMPERSONALITY SELFLESSNESS	FUSION DILATATION ECSTASY	CONTEMPLATION ADORATION PRAYER
INTELLECT SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS	KNOWLEDGE LEARNING LIGHT	THOUGHT	WISDOM	MEDITATION PROFOUND STUDY
HEART CONSCIOUSNESS	JOY HAPPINESS WARMTH	FEELINGS	LOVE	MUSIC SONG POETRY HARMONY
WILL SUBCONSCIOUS	DOMINATION POWER MOVEMENT	STRENGTH	GESTURES BREATH	BREATHING GYMNASTICS DANCE PANEURYTHMY
PHYSICAL BODY UNCONSCIOUS	VIGOUR HEALTH LIFE	FOOD	MONEY	ACTIVITY DYNAMISM WORK

This table, given by the Master Omraam Michaël Aïvanhov, shows how the spiritual life is nurtured and sustained on the level of the different subtle principles that constitute a human’s psychic being, just as their physical life is sustained on the level of their physical body.

Figure 1

We call this table ‘synoptic’ because it gives an overall view of the structure of a human being and the activities that correspond to each element of that structure. As you see, it is divided into five vertical columns.

The first column shows the principles that constitute the human being: the physical body, the will, the heart, the intellect, the soul and the spirit.

The second column is headed ‘Ideal’, for each principle aspires to an ideal. The heart, the intellect and the soul, for instance; each strives to attain a different ideal.

Each principle needs food; it needs to be nourished, strengthened and fortified in order to attain its ideal, and we must give it what it needs so that it may continue to manifest itself. This is why the third column is headed ‘Nourishment’.

The last two columns concern the ‘Price’ we have to pay for this nourishment, and the ‘Activity’, that is to say, the work we have to do in order to earn the currency with which to pay.

As you see, all these different notions are very clearly and logically related to each other.

Now, it will make the whole thing easier to understand if we begin with the physical body, for everybody knows what the physical body is; everybody has some experience of it. It is a visible, tangible reality whose existence is beyond all doubt. The ideal of the physical body is health, life. Nothing is of greater value to the physical body than to be robust, vigorous and healthy and, in order to enjoy this vitality, it has to have all kinds of solid, liquid and gaseous foods. If the physical body does not receive the nourishment it needs it dies.¹ We don’t need a university education to know that we have to eat in order to survive. Even children know that. But in order to eat we need money. You are all familiar with the conversation between Antonio, who spent his life breaking stones, and the passer-by who asked him, ‘Hey, Antonio, why do you spend your time breaking stones?’ ‘To earn money.’ ‘Why do you need money?’

'To buy macaroni.' 'And what do you want macaroni for?' 'To eat.' 'Why do you have to eat?' 'To keep up my strength.' 'But why do you have to be strong?' 'To break stones...' Yes; it's a vicious circle! But I think you all agree that we need money in order to eat and that we have to work in order to earn money. It's as simple as that!

But just a moment: has it never occurred to you that this situation, which is self-evident on the physical plane, is equally valid on the other planes? The will, heart, intellect, soul and spirit all have their respective goals, and in order to attain those goals, they too need to be nourished. Like Antonio, they need money in order to buy their food, and like Antonio they have to accomplish a certain form of work in order to earn that money. Once you have got this synopsis firmly into your heads you will possess the key to the physical and psychic life of man.

As you know, the physical body is the vessel that contains all the other, subtler principles. The soul and the spirit, for example, are not wholly contained within the physical body but they are manifesting themselves through it – through the brain, the solar plexus, the eyes, etc. When you look at someone with a great deal of love, light and purity, for instance, who is it that is manifesting himself through your eyes? The eyes belong to the physical body, but who is the being who uses them as a medium through which to manifest themselves? Perhaps it is the soul or perhaps it is the spirit – perhaps it is God himself. And if, on the other hand, you say something so terrible or give someone such a black look that they fall ill and have to take to their bed, it is because you have been the tool of evil powers that sought to attack them. The physical body, therefore, is often no more than the instrument of forces that may be either beneficial or malignant and that may exist either within it or outside it.

The goal or ideal of the will is power and movement. You will say, 'But the will can also seek wisdom, intelligence and

beauty, for instance.' No, these things are not what the will desires for itself; they are the goal of other principles. The powers of the will can be used in the pursuit of intelligence or in the creation of a work of art, but its own objectives, the only things it really wants for itself, are power and motion. It cannot bear to be immobile; it needs to be busy, to move about, to touch and displace things. But, like the physical body, the will cannot achieve its ideal without nourishment, and the nourishment of the will is strength. When it is nourished by strength, the will becomes energetic, and if it is not nourished it wilts and fades away. Then there is the element that corresponds to the money, the currency with which the will can buy the food it needs, and this currency is movement, gestures. Yes, one has continually to drag oneself out of the rut of immobility and inertia in order to trigger, stimulate and activate the energies of the will. It is by cultivating habits of activity and movement that the will 'buys' strength and becomes powerful.

And do you know what the very first movement is? It is breath. The first act of a newborn baby is to breathe, and this breath triggers all the other functions. If you want to earn this 'money', therefore, you must get into the habit of doing the exercises recommended by the teaching: the breathing exercises,² the gymnastics³ and the paneurhythmy dances,⁴ all of which are designed to strengthen the will. Naturally, you can add to these any number of other activities that are part of your daily lives. There are so many that I cannot take the time to enumerate them; I only mention here the methods recommended by the teaching, which concern more particularly the spiritual life.

You have probably never thought that these exercises could have much influence on the will; you probably believed that they were intended simply to increase the vitality of your physical body or make you feel light-hearted and joyful. Well, they can do that too because everything is connected. At the moment I am trying to make things clearer for you by distin-

guishing the different planes and identifying the elements that belong to each one, but in reality of course all these principles are inseparable. It is obvious that when you do the gymnastics or the breathing exercises, your physical body also benefits, you feel more vigorous and not only your health but your general frame of mind also improves. Nothing is isolated; everything hangs together.

Human beings possess a faculty of feeling and emotion that we call the heart. But this heart is not the physical organ known to anatomy and physiology and which bears the same name. The heart known to anatomical science is a kind of hydraulic pump and constitutes the principal organ in the circulatory system, whereas the true organ of feeling is the solar plexus. When the initiates say that true understanding is the understanding of the heart, they are referring to the solar plexus. Actually the solar plexus is a kind of inverted brain. In the brain the grey matter is on the outside and the white matter on the inside, and in the solar plexus it is just the reverse: the white matter is outside and the grey matter is inside. But I have already explained all this before, so I shall say no more about it now.⁵ The only thing I want to tell you today is that there are riches and treasures in the solar plexus that have been hidden in it from time immemorial and that, although human beings are not really aware of it, it is this organ that enables them to feel and understand. The brain understands things from the outside, objectively and theoretically, and this is why people often form judgements about certain things without ever having felt or experienced them inwardly. And yet it is only when we experience, touch, feel and taste things for ourselves that we can truly understand them. It still remains for contemporary science to explore the world of the solar plexus, for it knows very little about it.

So now the question is: what is the ideal, the goal, of the heart? Does it yearn for knowledge, learning or powers? No. The heart's only aspiration is for happiness, joy and warmth,

for warmth brings the heart to life whereas cold kills it. Wherever it goes, the heart seeks only warmth from others.

The nourishment of the heart is feeling, sentiment: every kind of sentiment, good as well – I am sorry to say – as bad. But as our time is limited we shall only talk about good hearts, the hearts of good disciples which are nourished by good sentiments.

The money that serves to pay for happiness and joy is love. When you love your heart is immediately nourished. How often I have told you this: neither wealth nor psychic powers nor beauty can give you happiness; only love! Love is the only thing that can make you happy. Whatever else you offer your heart it will always be dissatisfied; it will continue to clamour for love because with love it can buy all that it needs. When you love, your love is a currency that enables you to ‘buy’ all sorts of sensations, emotions and feelings; it gives birth to thousands of sensations every day. But when you have no more love you have no more money and consequently no more emotions or sensations. All that is finished. If you no longer love your wife you may still embrace her but you will get no joy or happiness from doing so. Whereas if you love her... Ah! Then, even if you never even kiss her you will be filled with thousands of feelings and sensations that defy analysis. Yes, simply because love is present.⁶

Human beings also possess an intellect and the goal of the intellect is knowledge and understanding. This is a very important goal, for when you are ignorant of the true nature of things, you will always be confused, you will do yourself harm and you will lose your way in dangerous regions from which you will not know how to extricate yourself.

In order to attain its ideal the intellect also needs food, and the food of the intellect is thought. Here again, just as the heart can feed on both good and bad feelings, the thoughts on which the intellect feeds can be good or bad. But here in our teaching it is implicit that we only want to talk about the best and most

“Know thyself” was the maxim inscribed on the pediment of the temple at Delphi. What is this ‘self’ that we have to know? Is it a question of knowing our own vices and virtues, our strengths and weaknesses? No: to know oneself is to know the different bodies (the physical, etheric, mental, causal, buddhic and atmic bodies) of which we are formed and what each of these bodies needs. If the initiates of old insisted so much on the necessity of self-knowledge it was because this knowledge opens up tremendous possibilities for growth, progress and success. As long as man is ignorant of the needs of his higher self, he will continue to surfeit his physical body while his soul and spirit suffocate and die of hunger and thirst.’

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