

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov

Man's Psychic Life: Elements and Structures



Izvor Collection



P R O S V E T A

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Chapter One

‘Know yourself’

Very few people have ever correctly interpreted the ancient motto written over the entrance to the sanctuary at Delphi: 'Know yourself'. Who is this 'yourself' that we must know? Is it a question of getting to know our own character with all its weaknesses, faults and qualities? No. If knowing ourselves was nothing more than that, the sages of old would never have had the saying carved over the door of a temple. It is necessary, to be sure, to know our own character, but it is not enough: to know oneself is much more than that. To know oneself is to become conscious of the different bodies of which we are composed, from the subtlest to the most opaque, to be conscious of the principles which inform them, of the needs we experience because of them and of the states of consciousness which correspond to each one. But people know nothing of these things. They glance into themselves from time to time and learn to recognize their principal strengths

and weaknesses, and then they say, 'Oh, I know myself!' But they are wrong: they do not know themselves yet.

The fact is that there is no one theory of human beings that fully accounts for their extreme complexity, and it should not surprise us to learn that the different religions and philosophical schools of thought have all had different notions of the structure of the human being. Hindus, for instance, consider that a human being is made up of seven component parts, and the Theosophists have adopted the same system. Astrology divides the human being into twelve parts, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac, whereas alchemy divides them into four, corresponding to the four elements. Cabbalists see four or ten components in the human being, corresponding to the four worlds or the ten sephiroth. In ancient Persia, Mazdaism and Manichaeism divided the human being into two, corresponding to the two principles of good and evil, light and darkness, Ormuzd and Ahriman. As for the Christians, they often divide the human being into three: body, soul and spirit. And, finally, I should add that certain esoterics divide the human being into nine component parts, because nine represents the three in the three worlds: physical, spiritual and divine.

So which system possesses the truth? All of them. It just depends on our point of view. We

cannot reject any of them. Personally, for the sake of convenience, I often divide the human being into two parts: the lower nature or personality and the higher nature or individuality, because this division makes it easier to understand certain problems.¹ In other instances, if I think it will help to make things clearer to you, I may speak of the three, six or seven components of the human being. These systems of division are, after all, simply a convenient way of understanding one or other aspect of the whole. None of them contradicts the others, because each one is true from its own point of view.

When anatomists want to give a clear and comprehensible picture of human anatomy, instead of trying to put everything onto one diagram, they present a series of superimposed pictures or diagrams illustrating the different physiological systems: skeleton, muscular system, nervous system, circulatory system, etc. Geographers use the same technique: a series of different maps indicating the physical, political, economic and geological realities of the planet. The same system can be applied in different domains and, like anatomists or geographers, initiates use different diagrams or outlines depending on the particular aspects of the human being or the particular question they want to study.

Note

1. See *Man's Two Natures, Human and Divine*, Izvor Coll. n° 213.

Chapter Two

The synoptic table

‘What is below is like what is above, and what is above is like what is below’,¹ said Hermes Trismegistus. The existence within the human being of certain subtle principles, each of which has its own needs and activities, can be readily understood if we take the needs and activities of the physical body as a starting point. This is what I want to show you with the help of this synoptic table (Figure 1), in which I have attempted to combine all the principal elements of our physical and psychic life.

Let’s begin with the physical body: what are its needs? First and foremost it needs health. In order to be healthy it has to eat, so it needs food. But then it must have money in order to buy food and it cannot have money unless it works for it. You see? It is simple! And now, since what is below on the physical level is like what is above on the spiritual level, it stands to reason that we will find exactly the same pattern at work on the other, subtler levels, in connection with our other,

PRINCIPLE	IDEAL	NOURISHMENT	PRICE	ACTIVITY
SPIRIT divine consciousness	time eternity immortality	freedom	truth	identification union creation
SOUL superconsciousness	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	gesture breath	breathing gymnastics dance paneurhythm
PHYSICAL BODY unconscious	vigour health life	food	money	activity dynamism work

This table, given by the Master Omraam Michael Aïvanhov, shows how the spiritual life is nurtured and sustained on the level of the different subtle principles that constitute man's psychic being, just as his physical life is sustained on the level of his physical body.

Figure 1

subtler principles: our will, heart, mind, soul and spirit. Each of these principles has its own particular goal; in order to attain its goal it needs nourishment; in order to obtain that nourishment it needs money, and it can only earn the money it needs by doing a particular type of work.

Take the case of the will: the goal of the will is movement and power. It needs to act on other objects, beings and situations in order to shape and transform them. But in order to be active the will needs nourishment, and its nourishment is force. Only if the will is nourished by force can it manifest itself, and in order to purchase the force it needs, the will needs money, and its money is the physical gesture. If you want to set your energies in motion you have to begin by freeing yourself from the grip of inertia and immobility. When the will acquires the habit of acting, of moving, of doing, it purchases force and becomes strong and powerful. Every physical effort you make helps to strengthen your will.

Next we come to the heart. What does the heart need? It needs to feel itself expanding with warmth, joy and happiness. The food of the heart is feelings, and the currency it uses to purchase that food is love. When you love, your love is 'money' which enables you to 'buy', that is to say, to experience, all kinds of feelings, sensations and emotions. If you lose your love you lose all that

warmth and happiness; you find yourself out in the cold. How can you keep the wealth that your love has earned you? By cultivating harmony in your relations with the universe and all its creatures.

And the intellect, the mind, what is it looking for? The intellect needs to be illuminated; it seeks light, knowledge. The food of the intellect is thought. The money with which it can buy the best food is wisdom, and the activity through which the intellect earns wisdom is meditation. Only wisdom is capable of nourishing your mind with the very best thoughts so that it can obtain the light it seeks.

The ideal of the soul is space, immensity. The human soul is a tiny particle of the universal Soul, and it feels so constricted and hemmed in within the human being that its one desire is to be allowed to expand in limitless space. In order to attain this goal, the soul too needs nourishment to keep up its strength, and the particular type of food that suits it best is all the qualities and virtues of the higher consciousness: impersonality, self-denial and self-sacrifice. The coin with which it buys this food is ecstasy, fusion with the divine world, and the work which enables it to earn this fusion is the work of prayer and contemplation. Yes, the specific activity of the soul is contemplation.

Aïvanhov shows how the spiritual life is nurtured and sustained on the level of the different

subtle principles that constitute our psychic being, just as our physical life is sustained on the level of our physical body.

The ideal of the spirit is eternity, for the essence of the spirit is immortal; it transcends time. But in order to attain eternity, the spirit too needs food, and the food of the spirit is freedom. The soul needs to expand in space, and the spirit needs to break its bonds and free itself. Truth is the coin with which the spirit purchases freedom. Every truth, about anything whatever, is liberating. Jesus said, *'Know the truth and the truth will set you free'* Yes, it is truth that sets us free, and the activity that puts us in possession of truth is identification with the Creator. Those who identify with the Creator become one with him, possess the truth and are free! When Jesus said, *'My Father and I are one'*, he summed up in those few words this whole process of identification.

In this table I have tried to put together a unified, coordinated picture of the principal elements of our physical and, especially, our psychic life, which are usually scattered and disconnected. These notions could, of course, be developed and elaborated on almost indefinitely. The table does not contain everything, of course; there are a certain number of notions that you will

not find in it, but you can, at least, see where the different levels or degrees of consciousness fit in: the unconscious, the subconscious, consciousness, self-consciousness and the superconscious.

A great many philosophers, psychologists and psychoanalysts have studied this question of the different levels of human consciousness. Their findings are very interesting but it is often difficult to see exactly how they relate to everyday experience, so let me give you a simple example you will easily understand. Suppose you have a bad fall and hit your head so hard that you are knocked unconscious. If someone gives you first aid you will begin to stir, but your eyes will remain closed: this is a state of subconsciousness. After a little while you open your eyes and realize that you are lying on the ground, that there are people round you, but you still have no idea what has happened to you: this is the state of consciousness. Before long you are back to normal: you can feel pain and you remember what happened to you and how it happened: this is the state of self-consciousness. And finally, when you have completely recovered, you can feel joy and gratitude to heaven for having been protected, for it could have been so much worse. This is the state of superconsciousness. I think that should be perfectly clear to you now.

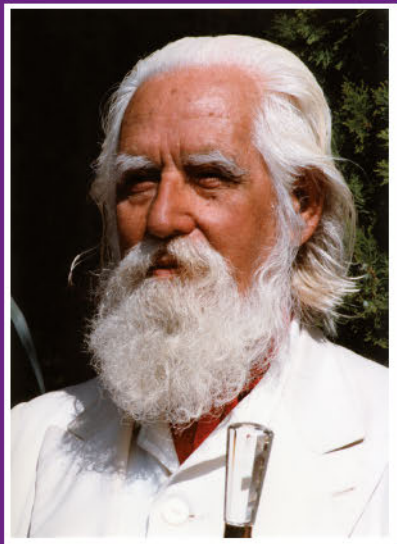
And now let us see how the different elements that make up our being correspond to these dif-

ferent levels of consciousness. The physical body itself corresponds to the unconscious. The manifestations of physiological life (breathing, digestion, circulation of the blood, elimination, growth, etc.) correspond to the subconscious. Those things concerning the will and the heart correspond to the level of consciousness, whereas self-consciousness begins only on the level of the intellect. Finally, superconsciousness corresponds to those things concerning the soul and the spirit; in fact we could say that the domain of the spirit corresponds to divine superconsciousness.

But to come back to the essential purpose of this table: it shows clearly how you can work with all the different principles within you without neglecting any one of them. Only those people who learn how to work every day with their physical body, their will, heart, mind, soul and spirit, will one day reach perfect fulfilment.

Note

1. See *Man, Master of his Destiny*, Izvor Coll. n° 202, chap. 5: 'The law of correspondences'.



The French philosopher and spiritual Master, Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov (1900-1986), was born in Bulgaria and came to France in 1937. Although his work addresses many aspects of initiatic science, he explains: "The questions with which we are faced will always be the same: to understand who we are, to discover the meaning of our lives and to overcome the obstacles which we find on our path. So, do not ask me to talk to you about anything else; I will always return to the same subjects: our development, our difficulties, the path to be followed and the methods we need to follow it."

‘No single description or explanatory formula can ever hope to do full justice to every detail of the complex reality of human nature, so it should come as no surprise to us to learn that the different religions and philosophical systems have not all had the same understanding of the structure of the human being. They are all right, but they all have their own particular point of view.

In order to give a clear idea of human anatomy, anatomists have to use a series of different pictures, each of which illustrates one of the systems of the human body: the skeleton, the muscular system, the circulatory system, the nervous system, etc. Similarly, when initiates want to study one or other aspect of the human being’s psychic structure, they use different diagrams or outlines depending on which aspect they are studying’.

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