

(ALAN BEGINS SLOWLY, LIKE A STREAM ON A SOFT HILL)

ALAN

I may take the Liberty of beginning by saying something about myself, and my .. role ... in talking to you about philosophical matters --- be'cause I want it to be understood perfectly clearly .. that I am not a guru.

In other words, I talk about what we call these things,.. and that comprises a multitude of interests,.. concerning Oriental philosophy, .. psychotherapy, .. religion, .. mysticism etcetera. I talk about these things because I'm interested in them, and because I enjoy talking about it. And every sensible person .. makes his living .. by doing what he enjoys doing. And that explains me.

Now in saying therefore that I am not a guru .. that means also .. that I'm not trying to help you or improve you. I accept you as you are. I'm not out, therefore, to save the world.

Of course, when a stream, a bubbling spring, flows out from the mountains, ~~it~~ it's doing its thing, and if a thirsty traveler helps himself, well that's fine. When a bird sings, it doesn't sing for the advancement of music, but if somebody stops to listen, and is delighted, that's fine.

And so I talk in the same spirit.

I don't have a group of followers, I'm not trying to make disciples, because I work on the principle of a physician rather than a clergyman.

A physician is always trying to get rid of his patients, and send them away healthy to stand on their own feet whereas a clergyman is trying to get them as members of a religious organization so that they will continue to pay their pledges, pay off the mortgage on an expensive building, and generally uuuhh belong to the church, boost its membership, and thereby prove, by sheer weight of numbers the veracity of its ténets ... and my objective is really to get rid of you. So that you won't need .. me or any other teacher.

I'm afraid some of my colleagues would not approve of that attitude, because it is widely believed and said that in order to advance in the spiritual life, whatever that is, it is essential that you have a guru, and that you accord to that guru perfect obedience.

And so I'm often asked the question --"is it really necessary to have a guru."

I can answer that only by saying, yes, it is necessary if you think so. In the same spirit as it is said that anybody who goes to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined. Of course there is more in that saying than meets the ear.

Because if you really are sincerely concerned with yourself, and are in such confusion that you feel you have to go to a psychiatrist to talk over your state, then of course you need to go.

Likewise .. if you are in need of someone to tell you what to do to practice meditation, or to attain a state of liberation - Nirvana, moksha or whatever it may be called - and you feel that necessity very strongly, then you must do it, because as the poet William Blake said the fool who persists in his folly will become wise.

(Alan begins to pick up
the pace a bit.)

However I do want to point this out.

What is the source of a gurus authority?

(sirens from the street are audible in the background)

He can tell you that he can speak from experience. That he has experienced states of consciousness which have made him profoundly blissful, or understanding, or compassionate, or whatever it may be. And you have his word for it. .. And you have the word of other people who likewise agree with him.

But each one of them, and you in turn, agree with him .. out of your own opinion .. and by your own judgement. And so it is you that are the source of the teacher's authority.

(The sirens in the
background fade away)

That is true whether he speaks as an individual or whether he speaks as the representative of a tradition or a church.

You may say that you take the Bible as your authority .. or the Roman Catholic Church. And the Roman Catholic following very often says that the individual mystical experience is not to be trusted because of .. its liability to be interpreted in a whimsical and purely personal way, and that it has to be guarded against excesses .. by the substantial and objective traditions of the church.

But those traditions are held to be substantial.. and objective .. only because those who follow believe it to be so. They say so. And if you follow it. You say so.

So the question comes back to you. Why do you believe, why do you form this opinion, upon what basis does all this rest.

Well of course ... almost everybody is looking for help.

(Help, I Need Somebody -
The Beatles)

"And yes, when I was younger so much younger than today, I never needed anybody's help in any way."

But .. there is this feeling .. of a certain helplessness .. of being alone and somewhat confused .. in an unpredictable .. wayward .. (car horns from the street, several) external .. world of happenings.

And this world of happenings includes an enormous amount of suffering, tragedy, and we wonder why we're here - how we got here, and in short - what to do about the capital P problem of capital L life .. to which should be added death .. because it seems to be certain that we're all going to die .. and that death may be a painful process - those we love are going to die, and so what about it? Is there anyway in which we can become Masters of the situation.

Well there are all sorts of ways of trying .. to escape from the human predicament of being .. a lonely, isolated consciousness, in the midst of this enormous and wayward, not self.

We can, of course, try, to beat the game on a material basis by becoming very wealthy or very powerful. We may resort to all kinds of technology .. to get rid of our sufferings - hunger, pain sickness, and so forth.

But it will be noticed that as we succeed in these enterprises we are not satisfied.

In other words if you feel at this moment that an increase in income would solve your problems, and you got an increase in income, this would give you a pleasant feeling for a few weeks. But then as you well know, if that's ever happened to you, the feeling .. wears .. off. And you may stop worrying about paying your debts .. and start worrying about whether you will get sick.

There is always something to worry about.

And if you are very rich indeed you've still got the .. anxiety about sickness and death, and also anxieties about revolution, and about whether the Internal Revenue Service will take it all away from you, or catch you for cheating on your taxes, or put you in prison for no good reason.


There is always this worry.

And so you realize that the problem of life does not really consist in your external circumstances, because you worry *whatever* they are. The problem consists in, rather, in what you call your mind.

Could you, by some method, control your mind so that you won't worry and how on earth would you do that?

Well there are those people who tell you that the best answer is to think positive thoughts -- to .. be peaceful -- to breathe slowly and hum gently -- and get yourself into a peaceful state of mind by repeating affirmations, such as all is light, all is God, all is good, or whatever it may be.

But unfortunately it doesn't always work because you have a nagging suspicion in the back of your mind that you're simply hypnotizing yourself, and whistling in the dark.

What the Germans call a Hintergedanken. Which is  a thought concealed way way back behind your intellect that has annoying persistence.

What if?

And so you realize that this matter of controlling the mind is no superficial undertaking. Because although you may be able to smooth the ruffles of your consciousness, there is beneath that a vast area of unconsciousness which erupts as unpredictably as events in the external world.

(said as if the words are slipping downhill)

And so you consider seriously the possibilities of psychoanalysis -- to go down and get into those depths and see if .. oil can be put on those troubled waters.

And then of course you get into the guru business.

You have to go to someone against whose mirror you can reflect those aspects of yourself of which you are not directly aware.

So as the process goes on you find .. there is something awkward about all this, and this awkwardness can be expressed in many different ways.

One of them is this.

How on earth are you to get at yourself .. to do something about yourself .. because it's a project not unlike trying to pierce the point of the pin with the point of the same pin?

In other words if you feel that you could do with some sort of psychological or spiritual improvement, obviously you are the character who's going to have to bring this about.

But .. if you are the one who needs to be improved, how are you going to accomplish the improvement. You're in the predicament of trying to lift yourself up off the floor by pulling at your own bootstraps. And as you all know that cannot be done and if you attempt to do so you're likely to land with a bang on your fanny .. and be lower down then you were in the first place.

So that problem continually arises and it has arisen historically in all the great religious traditions.

We find it in Christianity .. in the debate between Saint Augustine and Pelagius. And Pelagius said that if God had given us a commandment to love Him and to love our neighbors he would not have done so unless we could obey it. Saint Augustine countered and said yes but the commandment was not given in order for it to be obeyed; God never expected that it would be obeyed .. because .. we were incapable of loving anyone but ourselves.... The commandment was therefore given .. to convince us of our sinfulness .. from which we could be rescued only by divine grace, that is to say, by the infusion of our souls with a power beyond them.

(said as if under water)

And that was more or less the doctrine to which the church settled.

The puzzle has always been, therefore, how to get grace .. because grace is apparently freely offered to all, but some .. people seem to get it, and some don't. With some the medicine takes and with .. with others it doesn't.

WHYyyyy?

Well .. apparently .. you have the power to resist grace. But if you do, you also have the power not to resist it.

We would like therefore to know how not to resist it and to be open.

And there you see we're back at exactly the same problem with which we began.

It's like saying you must relax ... damn you.

Let gooooo!

Give innnn!

And I know I ought to give in; I know I ought to let go and abandon my will (car horn) to the divine will... but as Saint Paul put it so will, so well: to will is present with me. But how to do that which is good - I find not; for the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do.

In other words we all come down to a basis in ourselves which we will call, so first of all, since we are in a Jewish Temple, the yetzer hara, or the wayward spirit which God is supposed to have put into the soul of Adam. Or in my translation, our element of irreducible rascality .. where we are all basically scamps.

And if you haven't found that you're very unconscious.

I know all sorts of people who are full of outward love, but of course it always turns out that they need money. And when it comes to money virtue flies out of the window.

.....

So we do have that element in ourselves .. we know it very well .. and the question is therefore once again how can it be transformed? But if the transformer is the one who is afflicted who transforms the transformer?

It's the old problem of who guards the guards? .. who polices the policeman? Who governs the government?

And it seems perfectly insoluble for that reason alone that it is a vicious circle.

There's a great deal of talk about two selves. The lower self or ego, the higher self called the spirit, or the Ātman .. and the duty of the Ātman seems to be to transform the wretched little ego.

Well sometimes it does .. but a lot of times it doesn't.

So we asked: why doesn't so and so's Ātman succeed in getting through? Is his ego too strong, if so who will weaken it? Is his Ātman too weak, and if so, why, for surely aren't all Ātman's the same?

The puzzle remains.

So let's take a look at what we're trying to accomplish.