**Confusion of the Psychic and the Spiritual**

*De la confusion du psychique et du spirituel*, March 1935.

from "The Veil of Isis", Guenon

We have already pointed out on many occasions the unfortunate tendency

of some people in the West to confuse the two domains of the

psychic and the spiritual; we are forced to observe so many manifestations

of this tendency in various forms that we must return to this subject

once again, unfortunate as it is to deal with it. Indeed, we see all too often

the consequences that may result: spreading this confusion is, whether

we like it or not, to commit beings to be irretrievably lost in the chaos of

the ‘intermediary world,’ and, in this way, to play the game of the ‘satanic’

forces that govern what we have called ‘counter-initiation.’

It is important here to be precise in order to avoid any misunderstanding:

no development of the possibilities of a being, even in a lower order,

can be regarded as essentially ‘malefic’ in itself; everything depends on

the use that is made of it, and, first and foremost, it is necessary to consider

whether this development is taken for an end in itself, or on the

contrary, for a simple means to achieve a goal of a superior order. Indeed,

as we have often pointed out, anything can serve as an opportunity and

‘support’ depending on the circumstances of each particular case for

those who embark on the path that will lead them to spiritual ‘realization’;

this is especially true at the beginning, because of the diversity of

the individual natures whose influence is then at its peak, but it is still so

in later stages, to a certain extent, as long as the limits of the individuality

are not exceeded. On the other hand, anything can be as much of an obstacle

as it can be a ‘support,’ if the being stops there and is allowed to

be deluded and misled by certain appearances of ‘realization’ which does

not have any value on its own and are only accidental and contingent

results, even if they may be regarded as results from any point of view;

this danger of illusion and aberration always exists precisely as long as

we are still in the order of individual possibilities.

The most gross example, if we can say, of such a mistake is that which

refers to possibilities of a purely corporeal and physiologic order, in this

we refer, in particular, to the common mistake among Westerners with

regard to certain preparatory processes of *Yoga*, where their ignorance

only wishes to see a kind of method of ‘physical training’ or a special

‘therapy.’ Moreover, this error is basically the least serious and the least

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dangerous, because it is the one whose consequences go the least far: it

runs little more risk than the obtaining of an opposite result to the that

which is desired due to ‘practices’ being carried out inconsiderately and

uncontrollably, and to ruin one’s health by believing it to be improved.

This does not interest us in anything except that there is a deviation in

the use of these ‘practices’ which, in reality, are made for an entirely

different use, as far as possible from the physiologic domain, and the natural

repercussions of which are merely an ‘accident’ to which it is not

appropriate to attach the slightest importance. However, it must be

added that these same ‘practices’ may also have repercussions in the psychic

domain, i.e., in the subtle modes of the individual, which considerably

increases the danger: without suspecting it in the least, we can thus

open the door to ‘influences’ of all kinds, against which we are all the

less prejudiced so that sometimes we do not even suspect their existence,

and even more that we are unable to discern their true nature. But at the

least there is no ‘spiritual’ or ‘initiatic’ pretension, whereas it is quite

different for those who seek so-called ‘powers,’ i.e., in sum, extraordinary

‘phenomena,’ or for those who try to ‘center’ their consciousness on

lower extensions of human individuality, mistaken for higher states

simply because they are outside a setting in which the activity of the

ordinary man is generally closed from; we will return to the first of these

two cases again, for it is on the second that we wish to insist on now.

Indeed, here again it is the attraction of the ‘phenomenon’ that is most

often at the root of the error: those who behave in this way wish to obtain

results that are ‘sensory,’ and this is what they believe to be a ‘realization’;

however, this is to say that everything that is truly spiritual escapes

them entirely. Of course, it is not a question of denying the reality of the

‘phenomena’ in question as such; they are all too real, we might say, and

they are all the more dangerous: what we are questioning is their value

and their interest, and that is what the illusion is about. If there was only

a waste of time and effort again, the evil would not be very great, but, in

general, the being who attaches himself to these things then becomes

unable to overcome them and go beyond them; the cases of these individuals

is well known in Oriental traditions, those who have become

mere producers of ‘phenomena’ that will never reach the slightest spirituality.

But there is more: there may be a kind of ‘reverse’ development,

which not only does not bring any valid acquisition, but always moves

away from spiritual ‘realization’ until it is to be definitively lost in those

inferior extensions of his individuality to which we were alluded moments

ago, and by which he can only come into contact with the ‘infrahuman.’

His situation is then hopeless, or at least there is only one, which

is a ‘disintegration’ of the conscious being. It is there, one could say in

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all rigor, that is a true ‘descent to Hell’ without any possible ‘recovery’;

as for the outcome, it corresponds to one of the most unfavorable and

‘sinister’ meanings of this ‘second death’ of which we have spoken in a

previous article: it is properly the ‘inverted’ shadow of the ‘second death’

of initiation.

One can never be too wary in this regard of any appeal to the ‘subconscious,’

to ‘instinct,’ to infrarational ‘intuition,’ or even to an ill-defined

‘life force,’ in a word all those vague and obscure things that lead

more or less directly to a contact with the lower states. All the more, we

must beware of everything that induces beings to ‘coalesce,’ we might

willingly say ‘to dissolve,’ in a kind of ‘cosmic consciousness’ exclusive

of all ‘transcendence,’ and therefore of all effective spirituality; this is the

ultimate consequence of all the anti-metaphysical errors that terms such

as ‘pantheism,’ ‘immanentism,’ and ‘naturalism’ designate, all things

closely related to each other, a consequence which some would certainly

retreat from if they knew what they were really talking about. In fact, it

is there that spirituality is taken ‘backwards,’ to substitute it in place of

the opposite, since this leads to its definitive loss, and this is what ‘Satanism,’

properly speaking, consists of; whether it is conscious or unconscious,

it does not change the results, and we must not forget that the

‘unconscious Satanism’ of some, more numerous than ever in our age of

intellectual disorder, is never anything but an instrument at the service

of the ‘conscious Satanism’ of the representatives of ‘counter-initiation.’

We have sometimes had the opportunity to point out the initiatic

symbolism of the ‘journey’ accomplished through the Ocean representing

the psychic domain, which must be crossed, avoiding all dangers, to

reach the goal; but what of the one who would throw himself in the middle

of this Ocean and have no other inspiration than to drown in it? This

is exactly what this ‘fusion’ with a ‘cosmic consciousness’ means, which

is only the confused and indistinct whole of ‘psychic influences’ which,

although some may imagine otherwise, have certainly nothing in common

with the ‘spiritual influences,’ even if they sometimes imitate them

in some of their external manifestations. Those who commit this fatal

mistake simply forget or ignore the distinction between the ‘Upper Waters’

and the ‘Lower Waters’; instead of rising to the Ocean from above,

they sink into the abyss of the Ocean below; instead of concentrating all

their powers to direct them to the informal world, which alone can be

called ‘spiritual,’ they disperse in the infinitely changing and fleeting diversity

of forms of the subtle manifestation, without suspecting that

what they are taking for a plentitude of ‘life’ is actually only the kingdom

of death.