

Every Branch in Me

by

Kurt Almqvist

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One of the most important themes in religion—the most important—is the confrontation between the two “selves” in man: the inner, which partakes of God’s unconditional, infinite nature and is identical with his “kingdom”, and the outer self, or human personality with a certain name. It is the intersection of these two dimensions that comprises the religious life. One sees man horizontally from the earthly side; the other vertically as a vehicle of divinity. The crossing point may be multiplied both horizontally and vertically, making a cosmic web formed in one direction of layered worlds or conditions and, in the other, of the beings embodied in them—horizontal and vertical, woof and warp.

The warp or vertical dimension consists of invisible threads that unite all beings with their common source, while the woof is made up of the horizontal threads that cross them and are supported by the warp, thus symbolizing the substances of worlds. Each knot or crossing represents an entity, for instance, a human being. René Guénon elaborates on this theme in his book *The Symbolism of the Cross*.

If we look at our world from the weft or woof point of view, horizontally, it appears to be simply the sum of its parts, of all beings and things. Because there is no truly cohesive principle within this type of world, they are seen as little worlds irrevocably separate from one another, and symbolized in our image by the seemingly discrete crossing points in the web. Nothing prevents each little world from believing itself to be the only one in existence and behaving as if it were. This we call self-assertion, selfishness, egoism; and how could it lead to anything but chaos?

From the other, the warp or vertical viewpoint—the religious view—the world is seen, above all, as divine creation. Every being and thing is then regarded not primarily in its relationship to others but as something which, by grace of the warp threads, derives its very existence from God, and its real significance from its oneness with divinity: the Being in all beings. All are united with one another through this common origin, the “love of God” preceding and containing within it the “love of neighbor”. The love of one’s neighbor, in this metaphysical sense, comes from the true qualitative “aliqueness” among all entities, whereas the merely quantitative, outward uniformity in present-day organizations is in fact a distortion of this transcendent “identity”, or oneness in God. “The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life”.

The organ with which man apprehends and realizes this oneness is his spirit, the transcendent, direct-seeing intelligence, whereas the multiplicities of the world are perceived by means of his fragmented human intelligence, the mind. Spirit is transcendent and immediate by nature, being a direct reflection of the Holy Spirit. God “hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” says Paul (2 Cor. 1:22), and the apostle also explains (Eph. 1:14) that this is the earnest of our inheritance, the redemption (from that which divides us from the divine unity).

Having our reality in God implies that we actually are that part of our being which is his image: the spiritual part. Only therein is man wholly himself. As in the Hindu concept of the Self (*âtman*), the word “self” here has a different connotation from that given it above, for with this perspective the protection and furthering of Self are diametrically opposed to the usual idea of selfishness. Instead of emphasizing one entity at the expense of others—divisiveness at the expense of harmony and unity—this type of “self-sense” which is unaffected by multiplicity stresses the divine indivisibility (Sanskrit *advaita*—non-duality) wherein the human being participates through the spirit.

The important thing is to make a clear distinction between our two selves or egos, so that we love and respect the right one. Much is being spoken and written about seeking one’s identity, but this presupposes a subject and an object as two separate elements. What, then, is this object or goal with which we seek to identify if not the Self, which is more essential and autonomous than our ordinary, empirical self? What other meaning could self-identification have? What would it, in fact, be? To be “beside oneself” or, contrariwise, to “be oneself”, implies the loss, or gain, respectively, of that essential self-identity which is constant, and independent of outer circumstances. The outer or empirical self is that which is seeking its identity.

All that applies to the idea of identity applies also to self-realization. Both actually denote different aspects of the same thing—one static, the other dynamic. If one looks only from the “horizontal” plane, there is but one self—the outer, the points of crossing or knot in the weave—so that the same ego is both the seeker and the sought, which is an absurdity.

A third commonly used word is “integrity”. It comes from the Latin *integritas* and is related to *intact*, which means “untouched” and, in a secondary sense, “whole, possessing all its (original) parts”. From this we see that it must refer to the inner, vertical self, though in current worldly usage, it is applied to the outer, fragmented ego, and then in the sense of “inviolable”: the inviolability of the personality. However, the only inviolable element in man is that inmost secret relationship with Deity which should be the deciding factor throughout his existence and all his activity on the “horizontal” plane.

It follows that the ego holds a median position between the true, enduring, innermost Self which is one with the kingdom of God, and the surrounding world, similar to the central position where woof crosses warp. To the extent that the ego remains subject to the kingdom within as prescribed in *Revelation*—in other words, to the degree that it holds itself to be a servant of this

kingdom—it will serve the inner world in the outer environment. Throughout all its struggles and efforts it never ceases to be permeated with the flow from within: to be the branch which “abides in the vine” (John 15:4). This is self-forgetfulness or self-sacrifice in a more than moral sense.

It is quite misleading, however, to speak of self-effacement or self-annihilation without some further explanation. Even if the metacosmic sphere is the only absolute reality, the world of the senses is by no means completely unreal. It has reality insofar as it reflects the supersensuous and is illusory insofar as it asserts independence apart from its source. This means that in man his reality flows directly from the spiritual Self like a ray from the Sun. This may then be said to be man’s only real Self, though the outward mortal self has reality to the degree that it reflects and manifests the inner, immortal Self. In the final analysis only the divine Self (*Ātman*) is real; but, as the Hindus say, all is *Ātman*.