

Levels of Self in PB's Writings

Some thoughts about the notion of Self as used by PB in some of his writings, with passing reference to the profound philosophic synthesis made by PB in developing the notion used.

The unfolded vision which found form as the doctrine of the Overself is arguably the central pronouncement of PB's philosophic work. In his writings, he states with bell-like clarity and rock-solid certitude, truths about the Self he found to be so, and made them available for those with ears to hear. Resolution of the question of the status of self in the context of real self knowledge is, as we know, an absolute problem for any student of philosophy. Without self knowledge we cannot have truth. With self knowledge we can gain wisdom and with wisdom understanding, as its natural fruit.

My original intention was to examine the concept of the Overself as found in The Hidden Teaching and The Wisdom. As I began to pursue this task I pushed back to include The Quest and The Secret Path. It became apparent once again that PB's work in these texts speaks to a complete and complex doctrine of the Overself, which while combining and synthesizing the vast comparative intellectual and mystical work he did, addresses itself to the basic orthodox questions philosophy has always asked in regard to the notion of self. From The Secret Path, through The Quest, The Hidden Teaching and The Wisdom, PB presents a graded series of teachings about the Overself. Beginning with the introduction of the Overself in The Secret Path PB outlines an ever-deepening vista of what the self means in such a way that each advance implicates -- I would like to say demand -- an unfoldment that the next level explicates. Yet there are truths stated in The Secret Path that lead one to suspect that the vision was there from the beginning waiting for the form to unfold. My attempt here is not so much an exegesis of the doctrinal points. I am sure they deserve in-depth study and meditation again by one and all. Rather, I am trying to show how clear PB's doctrine of Self is and how, by his profound synthesis, he addressed many of the problems revolving around the question of Self, and by his broad perspective and depth resolved them conceptually for us.

There are some points that PB declares to be so and elucidates. Self is. Realization of Self is. Buddhahood and Vedantic Self Realization are the same. What Self is. What Self is not. How Self can be known. How it makes itself known. We can know it. How we know it. What Self's knowing is. What is the world in this view. Where it comes from. Where it goes. How we know the world. What is sleep, dream, etc. How our thoughts are formed. How we have experience. What life's purpose is. What the goal. How to achieve it all in practical steps. How to transcend. Are we mortal or immortal. How we have higher knowledge. How to live. . . . These, and many more points are answered in these works.

As we well know, PB's doctrine is an extremely well-crafted, philosophically synthetic view of Self, which can be shown to include within the context of a subtle dialectical weave, the meaningful parts of the historical perennial philosophy. The unfoldment begins with the bold assertion of the Overself as eternal, immortal and real, in The Secret Path. It moves through the rudimentary mysticism of The Secret Path to the truly profound Yogic synthesis of The Quest. The intellectualist epistemological analytic needed to support the mentalist notion -- so necessary to push "past" the Overself to Truth -- is unfolded in The Hidden Teaching. The moral implication of the purpose of what the Quest is about -- helping others as stated in The

Secret Path, and iterated in The Quest -- in reasserted in The Hidden Teaching. The view of Self is further expanded in The Wisdom. Building on the truths of The Hidden Teaching PB shows the Self as the ground and source of the world ultimately related to the reality principles sustaining self, world and God.

The Secret Path

In The Secret Path, PB announces his mission and he announces the Overself. Look within to solve all of life's problems. "God is at the Centre of Man." "The Overself . . . lives over our heads, an unimaginable thing of grandeur and mysterious sublimity-" "Man as he really is, as he eternally has been and shall be, is a spiritual being. Life in the body does not detract from that statement." We are not body or intellect but truly 'the Overself, the witness of both, the Source of complete peace perfect intelligence and absolute immortality.' All this and more, plus a technique of practical mysticism which includes a breathing exercise and negation of body, emotion, and thought as source of our real Being. Arriving, at last, to awakened intuition, a mark of the Overself, to self knowledge, the basis for the knowledge of Truth, and further, Wisdom—God!

PB has skimmed the cream of the traditional teachings, and adds much profound occult knowledge about the unit of life, while mentioning succinctly things like who the enlightened of the ages were. "To the real Seer all creeds come alike." Plato, Emerson, Porphyry, Fichte, Jesus, Buddha, are compared. And, though there are degrees of illumination, the ancient wisdom, founded on realization, is independent of race, so that Thoreau and Sankara, Tagore and Eckhart, Milarepa and Plotinus, Rumi and Francis Thompson (a Christian mystic) are said to drink from the same sea of spiritual realization.

The immediacy of the task set in The Secret Path is overcoming in realization the representation of God as a higher being outside us. The person of religion must be made aware God is within. Not everyone is convinced that pursuit of the question 'Who Am I' is worthwhile. Very few perhaps even know that the question exists. The secret of The Secret Path is borne of the closeness of the object sought to the seeker. To the person of religion who can now be led forth in to Self is this secret path told.

One's search for his or our origin is the beginning of the answer to the fundamental problem we all share. A religious might ask, 'If there is God why do I suffer?' (I recognize here that a Buddhist formulation would not put the question this way, but ask simply, 'why do I suffer?') That it is given to us that we need only to return to ourselves to answer this question is the message of The Secret Path. For PB, the answer is given in two ways: we must become aware of Who we are not--all that we take ourselves to be, our egos: and who are -- in the light of truth--the Overself. That we are not who we think we are, that we are in fact something grand and real, that we can transcend the suffering of our ego-bound lives and achieve the real Life of Overself, and that this is the realization by which the great ones have been made great, PB discloses to us in an unequivocal revelation. There is a secret path to reality and it can be tread. -

The goal of the path, the Overself, can be found. its voice only speaks to us in deep silence. Mental quiet, breath control, psychological analysis led by proper understanding can lead to this deep silence. Ever deepening meditation upon the question Who am I? can lead to the full attention of becoming aware. The mind once silenced must wait With patience the Overself can appear. Between thoughts, between breaths, what was behind thoughts and life

will, when both are slowed, begin to percolate up into consciousness. We need only empty ourselves to be filled.

The formulae are so simple so as to escape our complicating understanding. The Overself, as it appears in The Secret Path, seems to be everywhere—above, within, outside our grasp, inside our being. This seeming simplicity should more appropriately be taken as a conclusion. The sophisticated analyses through The Quest, Hidden Teaching and The Wisdom, all lead back to this position on a philosophical basis.

The Quest of the Overself

In The Quest, what has been explicated in The Secret Path is deepened. Now PB is addressing the potential mystic in us. The analytic which negates what is not self is dialectically linked to a mysticism wherein one can locate the Self as such, and dwell in it. It leads, in the end, to realizing that one "can have no other aim than the welfare of all beings", as all selves are one. Between this analytic and the fact of unity of all selves, PB offers a synthesis of esoteric yoga designed to produce the condition or unity within us.

For PB, at all stages the climb to the Self is not theoretic—even though there is a theoretic component to his formulation—but existential, factual. This is evident in The Quest (and The Hidden Teaching, where the bare bones moralistic and epistemic formulae of Vedanta and Buddhism are fleshed out). The study of self becomes a study of one's thought. The study of thought becomes a seeking for a study of consciousness. This becomes, when achieved a study of the presence of the Self in the present moment.

The rise to the precondition where one can pursue the practices needed to experience the Self follows the Vedantic formula of negating what is not self. Along with this is the awareness of and belief that if one is on course, the Light of the Overself will begin to shine into our lives. Beyond our temporal sense, thought-created by us, is the Eternal. Between our breaths is the very source of life which breath brings to body, as the ground out of which our breathing arises and into which it retracts. Beyond our ordinary mind is our Overmind, the source of genius in us.

The mystical practices given in The Quest, a combination of Patanjali Yoga and Buddhist Yoga Tantra, bring the practitioner into the heart. The Overself is found in the heart. After quieting somewhat the being, after exalting feeling and mastering mind, after correct enquiry is deepened into the very body, after the breath and eye are trained and directed, we may be given access to the doorway of the temple. When we have let all go, and with awareness dropped gently into the heart, the ego can die in peace in the Grace of Overself.

In The Quest: the Overself is our essential being; gives birth to the ego and sustains its life for a cosmic period; exists in the human being and outside him as Universal Spirit; is ultimately one in all; is source of life; and is found in the heart. In this view the Overself is attained by a process in time and space, by intuitive felt apprehension. The self knowing at this stage presages the later epistemic and metaphysical views of Self as witness and source of not only one's own world, but of the world as such. The Self, not yet source of all, is source of and goal of our lives as individual subject. If we have been fortunate enough to have 'come upon' the truth of our own being, we may with the next dialectical turn be able to move toward truth itself.

The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga

The fundamental precondition for understanding The Hidden Teaching in fact is a glimpse of the Overself. The intuitive, felt, self knowing of The Quest now becomes the cognitive underlie of the world itself. Self, now linked in meaning to Mind, is the source of the existence of the world, seen now to be a mental world. And, because Mind or Self has imputed existence to the world, it can now know what it has projected. Without the prior glimpse of reality (of Self), truth here would not be attainable.

As in The Quest there are several levels of dialectical interplay. The moral qualities that are demanded to be developed are prerequisite for the attainment at truth. To be ready to pursue analytic thought to its end requires an ability to completely depersonalize our knowing. Without the qualities of desire for truth, strength, an ability to think, detachment, calmness, concentration, reverie, emotional mastery and reason, what is unfolded simply cannot be grasped. The mind must be fluid, open, calm, bright and clean enough to think along with the analysis.

What the analytic achieves is, through a mentalist analysis, is, no less than an inventory of the mind itself and its world-making capability -- in the waking state. While the moral qualities are (so to say) standard, the analysis, synthesizing Eastern and Western thought is not the neti neti of The Quest. Rather, PB here explains the world as a dependent arising leaving it as it is. That we have the ability to follow in truth and see the world as it is in the context of the analytic, to that extent we have understood mentalism. This ability is dependent upon our having achieved the moral qualities outlined in the beginning of the book of which we might have lost track in our analytic.

There is an implied mysticism of thought needed to realize the mental nature of the world which will bring one at its end, to the Witness I. At one and the same stroke intellectual truth and mysticism conjoin. The approach here is similar to somewhat to the Buddhist Madhyamika rather than a strict Vedanta perspective, in that PB leaves things as they are and proceeds with a phenomenology that preserves experience, just places it in thought. The admission of a thinking -that is at once rational and mystical begins to break down the fundamental dualistic mental set with which we think. Without this occurring, the great truths of The Wisdom of the Overself cannot be received; with this, attaining this wisdom becomes possible. A person, now so armed with the truths learned and the requisite moral qualities somewhat achieved, can now begin to see that the forms of experience are mentally given as thought and as such are evanescent, and that this nature of the forms can be realized. This realizing is one key to detaching from the bondage of the world previously not understood, but experienced as other and material. With this knowledge we can now function in such a way that the world can become meaningful in fact, as the Essence of this thought world is Mind, the Reality. The reasoned revelation of this Truth follows in The Wisdom and requires this kind of understanding prerequisite.

It is interesting to note that while The Hidden Teaching makes little mention of the Overself, all of the analysis is within the context of its awareness. PB concludes that the truths of mentalism permit a us to unify in meaning, ourselves and the world. The recognition of the sameness of Overself of all beings demands enlightened action for the sake of all. This sameness of Overself of all is the next level of understanding to be unfolded. The Hidden Teaching ends with a personal mentalistic stance. We learn that we, as Overself, construct the world anew for ourselves each instant. How the world is constructed and what the Overself's role is, is unfolded in The Wisdom.

The Wisdom of the Overself

If the precondition of a glimpse of the Overself was the keystone to actually understanding the world as mental, the intuition of the non-difference, that is the non-duality in essence of ourselves and the world is a precondition for understanding in fact, the truths delivered in The Wisdom. The Wisdom contains truths which belong to the Overself. We are asked to understand these ultimate truths. (And they are ultimate, if only in the sense that they will be there long after we all are gone.)

In The Wisdom the rational mentalistic doctrine begun in The Hidden Teaching is woven into the traditional perennial philosophy wisdom teachings and synthesized. The questions of the final status of self, world and God are melded into a discussion of the world as mind containing a multifaceted many layered texture, stretching the notion of self from a unicellular organism to an Eternal idea in the Mind of God - OverSelf. That we can receive the truth of The Wisdom at all is only because that is what we are, as Overself. Could we be but simple enough, what is told in The Wisdom would be sufficient as doctrinal knowledge for a transformation of our Natures. Alas, as the Overself is both one and many, we have to be the many, and try to understand for ourselves these Truths.

For PB, the climb (as it were) to the Overself proceeds on a firm phenomenological footing, incorporating the primal doctrinal truths being revealed. The logical schemata PB uses demands that we find the Overself as the basis of existence. That we have awareness means the Overself is present. That we have states of existence means the Overself is present. Because all states -waking, dream and sleep--arise and set within our awareness, we are those states and that awareness. As the certainty of I which is felt in the waking state vanishes in dream and sleep, and as all states are thought, who the thinker is and who (later and what) the awareness is become essential questions. Body, mind, and world arise as thought just as a dream arises. If we but awaken from the dream of personal self, we may become who we are.

For PB there is no doubt who we are. We are that awareness which is both source and cognizer of the world. The logic further unfolds. Awareness is an ultimate truth. No analytic can reach it. Yet part of awareness (remember the non-dual prerequisite) acts on our body and brain, part is projected as the world and part remains seated in itself as the observer of it all. This is a truth of mentalism. The waking, dream and sleep states arise by refracting various degrees of awareness and prove after insight in to this truth, that our existence is mental. This permits us to infer the reality of the hidden observer beyond those states. The hidden observer Lives beyond space and time as the mind which at once constructs and knows the world. Yet, while this hidden observer is never known by us, it can be inferred by the presence of the 'I'-thought. The Self in this view, the 'Who Am I' brought to a philosophic level, becomes the body, the mind and the observer of both, whom they symbolize as our lives. This observer, of whom we have become aware through this analysis, is the Overself.

Again, returning to the phenomenological epistemology he has used all along, PB, after making the Overself source of the world, demands that we do not misunderstand. The fact that there is an objective world, given all this, indicates that there is a World Mind (beyond our scope here) which is the ground of all observers and sustains them by substantial identity. As such, all selves are one self, and one is all. And, though the world is the outcome of a

combined individual and cosmic mentalism, there is really only one observer. To be sure PB goes to great concern to show that even given this Truth, the individual remains as it were.

Summary

Have the truths first announced in The Secret Path been transcended? I cannot say. However, the theme regarding Self, which began The Secret Path culminates in The Wisdom in 'The Overself' chapter. The moral basis for the pursuit of the goal--ending our suffering, helping others to end theirs, and moving from an individualistic ego-based existence to a noble universal existence in the Overself--returns.

For PB the task and way is clear. We must transcend the ego to end our suffering. There is no freedom for us in identifying with the ego. We must replace the false idea of self with the correct idea of Self. 'Rightly thinking ourselves immortal, we can attain immortality'. The Overself is our immortality. Mystically found in the heart, the Overself is where we can share in the universal existence of God.

This truth when tasted must effect (and affect) our lives in ways unsuspected by the ego. The shift from a lower to the higher standpoint (although in part intellectually acquired) has to have profound existential consequences for the quester.

For PB, when we begin to renounce our ego, the light of the Overself can begin to enter our existence. The illusions of ego life begin to be replaced by the living light of Self. This living light lives in all creatures and this means that all existence is shared by all creatures. We are privileged co-creators of the world, and upon realizing this will necessarily work for the benefit of all, as in the universal good is our personal good. When this interconnectedness and interdependence is grasped, the quest for a purely individual salvation is seen to be an illusory one.

It is in regard to the Unity of Overself that individuality has its basis. The individual feels the unity as ego self whereas he should know it as the Overself's.

A last note: The Wisdom concludes with PB's ultramystic meditations, which in effect, among other things, reconnects the student back to 'normal' life. If the quest has been properly pursued, the texture of our lives, our experience, can and needs to be made properly understood in such a way, so that proper reverence for the light of the Overself that presences within those lives can be effected. That is what the exercises do. They lead us to the philosophic life.

This has been written in April 1998 by one who feels the road while watching the sky, in the spirit of philosophic friendship, and joy in the pursuit of an unreachable goal.

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Herbert Shapiro