

THE FOURTH DIMENSION IN PSYCHOLOGY

by

SWAMI KRISHNANANDA

The Divine Life Society
Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh, India

Website: swami-krishnananda.org

The learned are aware of the doctrine of the fourth dimension proclaimed by modern physics. But few would be aware that there could be a fourth dimension in the realm of psychology. The Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics even now rule the world of three dimensions. Man has a set way of thinking, according to which he seems to have discovered certain invariable facts, such as that 2 and 5 make 7, the three angles of a triangle make two right angles, bodies have mass and weight of a fixed nature, and there is the pull of gravitation which uniformly follows a law everywhere. We may call this an almost universal attitude of mind, with the system of three dimensions, by which we mean that we always think in terms of length, breadth and height of things, and there is no conceivable object without these dimensions.

Now, this mode of thinking is not confined merely to the world of things. It also constitutes the framework of the system prevailing unhampered everywhere, in every field of human knowledge. It applies also to the realms of chemistry and biology, ethics, logic and metaphysics. The discoveries of the Theory of Relativity are said to have brought about a revolution in the world of mathematics and physics, whereby the systems of Euclid and of Newton have been substituted by a way of approach which it is difficult for the traditional

mind of classical physics to accommodate. It becomes so difficult, because man's usual standpoint of thinking is the same always, and everyone seems to be thinking in the same way. That there can be another way of thinking altogether different from how people everywhere think is regarded either as a wonder, or something unintelligible and suspicious. But today, somehow, a handful of the thinkers of the world seem to have stumbled upon a conviction that the world of visual perception is not as it appears to be, that the solidity of matter and the spatiality of temporal extension give way to a more significant continuum where space and time no more stand apart but become standpoints of an indivisible something, in which the mathematical and physical laws put on a new face altogether. We are told that parallel lines may meet under certain circumstances, the arithmetical totals of our conception may not hold good in subatomic realms, light rays do not always move in a straight line, the law of gravitation is not simply the attraction of one body by another, and the three angles of a triangle need not always amount to two right angles.

If these and such deeper truths are not to be, how can one appreciate certain similar facts and aspects of the thinking perspective as, for example, when the Bhagavadgita proclaims that resort to one thing brings everything (IX. 22), or that surrender to God destroys all sins (XVIII. 66)? We have never seen an acquisition of one thing bringing to one everything else also, and it is contrary to the laws that seem to be working in the world. We always see a manifold effort being called for when a manifold result is expected. Nor is it possible to imagine that one can violate natural laws and go unscathed and scot-free. Every action produces a reaction due to the very structure of the cosmos. The balance of forces constituting all creation seems to be behind the operation of this law which sets up a counterpose against every initiative. But we are also told that it is possible to break the bonds of Karma, strange and mysterious though this may look. How could one be involved in something, and yet be free from it at the same time? Our logic follows a stereotyped method,

according to which some determined and expected result follows as a corollary from certain given premises. This has also reference to our belief that a particular cause should produce only a particular effect. But that this is an unfounded faith has been the opinion of certain modern thinkers like A.N. Whitehead, who hold that the doctrine of the 'simple location' of things and of the 'bifurcation of cause and effect' is a prejudice of the human mind, which does not conform to reality. Unless we keep ourselves open to the acceptance that deeper truths than our minds can think may exist, certain discoveries and observations in the field of physics, psychology and spiritual life cannot become intelligible.

The system of three-dimensional thinking is at the bottom of all this complexity. We see a world outside our bodies; we see space, and know time; we observe something proceeding from something else in a cause-and-effect relationship. On the foundation of this rule is based also our arithmetic, geometry, and on this alone do many of our physical laws seem to hang. But can there be no other way of thinking than this commonplace method of the mind? Are we always bound to think in terms of spatial extension, to put it shortly? This is a moot question, which is rarely raised, and when raised cannot elicit a satisfactory answer. But a little patience and analysis of implications and possibilities will open up another avenue of perception and a new vista of unknown facts will be revealed before our eyes. There is such a thing as thinking without space and knowing without objects.

This revelation cannot become apparent without a certain amount of training along new lines of approach. The mind revolts against any possibility of non-spatial or non-objective concept. And this is exactly the revolt against the non-Euclidean geometry, the discoveries of the general theory of relativity and also against the weird ethics which the statesmanship of Sri Krishna seems to have followed in the war of the Mahabharata. This also is the explanation of one's inability to understand how sins can be destroyed, the realisation of one thing can mean the realisation of

everything, or, in the words of Christ, seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness can add all things to oneself. But all this is as impregnable and impractical to the spatio-temporal logic and sociological ethics of the mind as the laws of relativity or the mathematics of the world of electrons. We have here to give up the three-dimensional psychology and enter into its fourth dimension, if we are to come to any solution.

This fourth dimension is not merely a marvel but appears to be a kind of terror to our usual ways of living and thinking. It is a wonder because we cannot understand how this could be possible at all. At the same time it is a fearsome something, since it seems to smash all our faiths and beliefs which we have been hugging all the while. Even as the meanings of 'here and there' or 'now and then' are not absolutely valid but have only relative significance according to the theory of relativity, we seem to discover that what we regard as 'true and false', or 'good and bad', also, have a relative meaning and vary under different circumstances. The Yogavasishta has it that, within the four walls of the room of some person there could be a vast kingdom of another person; and within a period of what was only eight days for someone, another ruled an empire for 72 years. If the systems of reference of space and time can change in different levels of consciousness, those of logic and ethics also can be equally relative. We have many intriguing forms of ethical judgment, such as the righteousness of the Pandavas standing against the wisdom of Bhishma, and the legalistic virtue of the latter vowing to stand by the greed of Duryodhana; the instruction that there was no unrighteous element in Arjuna's taking the lives of his own grandfather and teacher; that a stratagem, a lie or what may be regarded as an ungentlemanly conduct be resorted to in causing the deaths of Bhishma, Drona and Karna; that Krishna could offer active help in a subtle manner to bring about the destruction of several warriors, against his principle of non-interference. These conditions of ethical judgment are as difficult to understand as the conditions of logical judgment which

wants to explain how a universal God could create a localised world, the Absolute become the relative, lifeless matter emanate from a conscious body, or even such simple processes of one thing becoming another thing be possible as, for instance, when food is converted into energy in the physiological apparatus. Though hydrogen and oxygen are said to form water, the two gases cannot give us the comfort which water gives. Water is nor merely a mathematical effect of the combination of the gases. Even as a living child cannot be equated with merely the chemical effect of the combination of sperm and ovum, there seems to be some mysterious third element in such combinations which do not constitute merely two things coming together, though it may look so apparently. The Satarudriya of the Yajurveda says that the great God of the universe is both the positive and negative in every conceivable vocation of life or system of thought. How could contraries be attributed to one and the same truth? This hymn identifies with God even what we usually consider as poor, low and undesirable. What is this ethics which equates the hunter and the thief, the highwayman and the thug, with the majesty of God's existence? This seems to be the very same system of ethics, according to which the Bhagavadgita holds that sins, whatever they be, get annihilated in the state of self-surrender to God.

How does the law regulating and valid for dream stand contradicted in waking? This does not happen by the negation or absence of anything real but by the attunement of consciousness to a different order of experience. The waking consciousness is, in some respects, the fourth dimension to the dream consciousness to which there are length, breadth, height, solidity and a logic of thought which are invalidated in waking. We are now seeking for a fourth dimension of our waking consciousness. Just as the dreamer cannot know what waking is until he actually wakes up, we seem to be incapable of knowing the consciousness that transcends waking, because we are still in the waking state only. The psychology of this fourth dimension is

supernormal, for it does not apply to man in his ordinary condition of wakefulness to a world of objects. Truth has no objects outside it. When the mind of man begins to think objectlessly, thought coalesces with being, Chit becomes Sat, and consciousness is existence. This is the Sadhana for the experience of Truth. This is the meditation towards the realisation of the Absolute. The moment thought switches itself on to that order of experience where it is enabled to fuse objectivity into the subjectness of its consciousness, the bubble bursts and light seems to flash forth from every atom of space. The world seems to be flooded with suns glowing with incandescent orbs, and ignorance and impotency of every kind vanish once and for all. The logic of this state, the ethics of this consciousness, or the mathematics of this awakening is the answer to the riddle of the problems posed by the possibilities faintly indicated by the relativity-mathematics and hinted at in the Mahabharata-ethics as well as the Yogavasishtha-metaphysics.

The depths of this discovery in consciousness cannot become clear to one who does not endeavour to live it in a state of adjustment of thought as demanded in the meditation prescribed, wherein objects and subjects cast off their masks and dance round the nucleus of Truth, like the Rasa dance described in the Srimad Bhagavata. Everything gets mirrored in everything else, and everything is everywhere. There is neither cause nor effect, for everything is both a cause and an effect. There is neither subject nor object, for everything becomes resplendent with omniscience in the blending of infinity and eternity. The eleventh Chapter of the Bhagavadgita makes an effort to describe this apotheosis of consciousness, in a language of poetry and image, for it cannot be portrayed in any other way. Here the goal of life is reached, and here man's questions are answered for ever.

It is also our common experience that what is depleted or lost cannot be recovered again, for example, time that is past, energy that is wasted, etc. But the Yoga system is confident that the lost can be gained and even the past can become a

future or a present in different frames of reference of consciousness. These may all appear startling facts, but some of them are now being corroborated by the findings and possibilities in the realm of modern physics. Relevant to this context also is the lesson of the anecdote of the three Alvar saints of Southern India, who, when they expressed the difficulty that in the narrow space they occupied not more than three persons could even stand, were informed by some fourth being that he could be with them even if there be no space. The story refers to God's existence which needs no space or area to occupy. The sciences of mankind, its laws and rules seem to be mocked at by some stupendous truth which would stand underestimated even if it is to be called superhuman. In the words of Eddington, something is doing something we know not what! The words of Einstein, Jeans, Eddington and Whitehead in the field of mathematical philosophy, and the teachings of Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Yogavasishta and the Mahabharata among the sacred writings of the Hindus, help us a great deal in getting an insight into this mysterious truth of all truths, a truth which surpasses understanding, because it defies mathematics, ethics and logic, as known to us. It seems to have its own system of calculation, reasoning and morality, transcending human concepts and values. If it really transcends man, can he ever hope to know it? Agnostics may despair of all this, for, according to them, Truth, even if it exists, cannot be known for obvious reasons. The obstructions of space, time and the categories of the understanding, said Kant, would prevent man from knowing the thing-in-itself. According to Yajnavalkya, there is no consciousness on the death of individuality, for one knows another only where another is. But where another is not, says the sage, who is to know what, and by what means? But the enigma of this situation itself becomes an answer to the question it raises. Health, wealth and prosperity of every kind and freedom absolute is promised by the Upanishads to one who knows Truth. How can this be? And what is Truth? When we say that Truth is non-relative, we have said

everything about it. For, to say anything else about it would be to make it relative. And to maintain a consciousness of this non-relativity without any adjectives – for adjectives create again a sense of relativity – would be to live in Truth. This is life-absolute, which steers clear of all references to the outside, and stands supreme in the strictest sense of the term. It is this that people call God, a word whose meaning has not become clear to us, still. The magic works by a single stroke of mental effort, and this magic is the realisation of Truth. Hands and feet do not help us here, nor do the traditional modes of thinking. This transfiguring process deals a death-blow to all that man holds as dear and near in the darkness of his ignorance, for its function is to enlighten him rather than please him, to light the lamp of understanding rather than feed his passions, to wake him from sleep rather than serve him a meal in dream. This is why, according to the Kenopanishad, “One who knows it knows it not, and one who does not know it knows it.” But the intriguing Upanishad also shows the way.