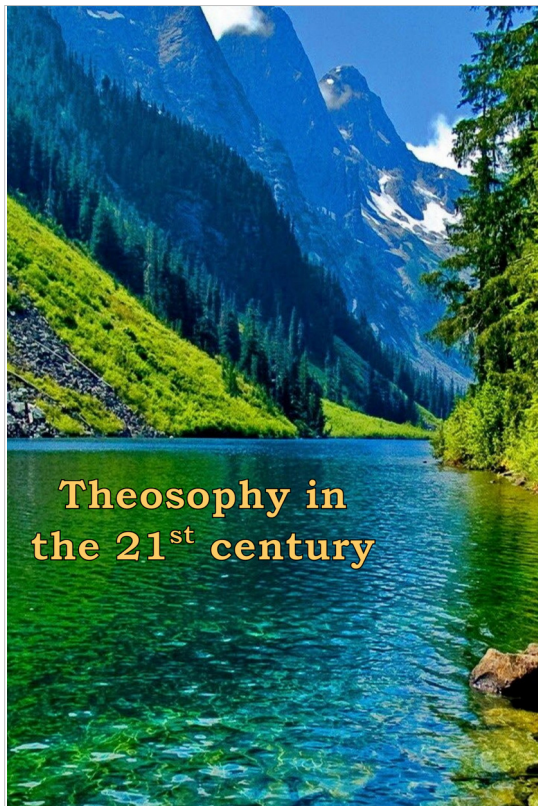




**Theosophy in
the 21st century**

8 The mind and beyond

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Why study the mind?

- The mind manifests itself subjectively as the stream of consciousness.
- The processes of the mind are private.
- The mind is different from the emotion but it is very linked to it.
- It is our organ of knowledge.



The mind is one of the mysteries of our being. We use it naturally.

We realize its existence by the stream of consciousness, the constant flow of perceptions, ideas, memories and many kinds of mental contents.

One characteristic that makes it difficult to study the mind is that mental processes are private. They take place in our consciousness and are not perceived by others except for what we communicate or do. This makes mental processes subjective. We can say what we are thinking, but this is already an attempt of objectification, of translation into terms of language in order to communicate that thought and it is a new process.

Mental processes are different from emotions, although they are closely related and are generally linked. It is not so easy to separate them when they are mixed and there are neurologists who say that they are different graduations of the same. Our behavior is determined by our mind and our emotions.

But, above all, what makes the study of the mind important is that it is our instrument of knowledge. We know the world through it. And if we seek to know the deepest mysteries of life, we must pay attention to our own mystery.

The physicist and philosopher Arthur Eddington (1882-1944) emphasized the need to know our own instrument of knowledge with a parable. A man studied the fish on the shore of a lake by fishing with a net and pointed out his measurements and observations. His first conclusion was that there are no fish smaller than 5 cm. Then an observer, an epistemologist who studies how we know, tells him that to reach that conclusion it was not necessary to throw the net into the water, since the size of the mesh determines the minimum size of the fish that can be fished. (Arthur Eddington, *Philosophy of physical science*).

But can the mind know itself? What do we know about her? We will study this problem.

What is the mind?

- The mind is defined as the aspects of the intellect and consciousness:

- Perception
- Memory
- Thought
- Reasoning
- Imagination
- Emotion
- Will

...

- It is difficult to define its functions exactly.

- The processes can be conscious or unconscious.



Psychologists often define the mind as a set of aspects or functions of the intellect or consciousness such as perception, memory, thought, reasoning, imagination, emotions and even the will itself is sometimes included among its attributes.

It is really very difficult to define the mind because of its subjective nature. Science still knows little about it and although new discoveries are constantly being made, the mind remains elusive, like a mystery still to be conquered.

The processes of the mind can be **conscious** or **unconscious**, which makes our introspection even more difficult. We do not even know our own mind. We do not realize the unconscious processes but they are there, ready to emerge as unknown causes, although they also have their laws and order.

Scholars have described some functions of the mind.

Thought: Faculty of making a model of the world (get models of our environment and ourselves).

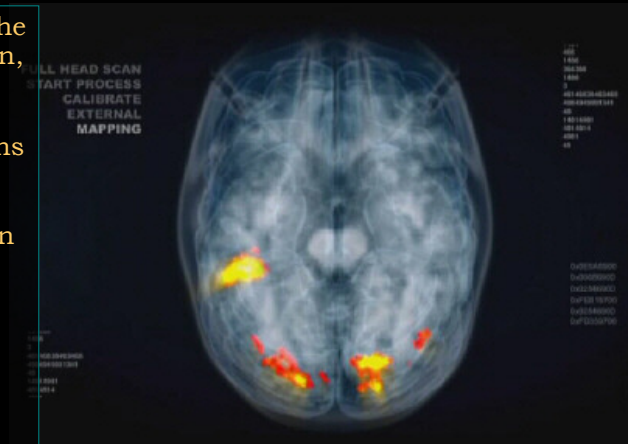
Cognition: Idea, imagination, manipulation of information, formation of concepts, obtaining of rules, resolution of problems, reasoning, decision making.

Memory: Ability to store, retain and retrieve information.

Imagination: Ability to create partially or completely personal domains, models, that the mind derives from the perceptions of the world. Perceptions are recreated in the mind. The imagination can be: reproductive or constructive (inventive) and is a mental simulation. However, the reproductive imagination is equally inventive because we re-create the world from our perceptions by building a model of it.

The mind according to science

- Most scientists consider the mind as a resultant function, as a product of the brain.
- According to them, neurons *produce* thought.
- Different areas of the brain correspond to different mental activities.
- There is a close correspondence between mind and brain.



Positron emission tomography

Strictly speaking, it can not be said that the brain is the cause and the mind only the effect

Several scientific disciplines study the mind. From neurology to psychology, each one with different approaches and methods, sheds light on the enigma.

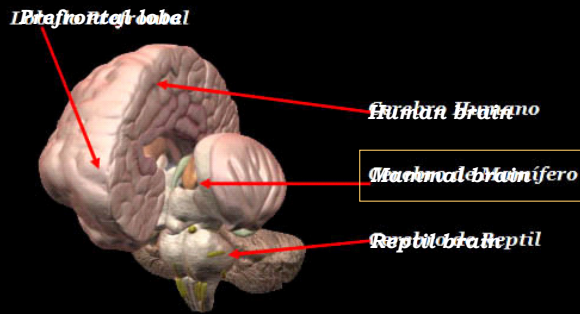
Advances in the study of the brain and the development of instruments to detect brain activity increase the interest in neurology that studies the physical system of mental phenomena. Positron emission tomography is a technique that allows us to know which area of the brain is working at a given time thanks to highlighting the metabolism of glucose, a substance that provides energy to neurons. It is known that there is an association between certain areas of the brain and activities of the mind such as the perception of a certain sense, speech, coordination or reasoning. With carefully designed experiments and these observation techniques, mental activity against external stimuli can be made a little objective.

For most neurologists, the functions of the mind are the *product* of brain activity. The close association found between thought and neuronal activity induces most scientists to think in this way. This current of thought is called **reductionism** or reductism.

But strictly speaking, it is not something that is demonstrated and there are scientific works that collect a criterion opposed to reductionism, such as the remarkable book "*Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*" by Edward Kelly, Emily W. Kelly, Adam Crabtree and others, all researchers and professors in psychiatry. The authors empirically demonstrate the fallacy of reductionism by providing evidence of psychological phenomena that can not be explained in this way, such as the placebo effect, the psi phenomenon, near-death experiences, the creativity of genius and mystical experiences.

Emotions according to neurology

- Emotions are considered to *originate* in the limbic system.
- Emotions are a rapid response system.
- There is a direct connection to the thalamus.
- They allow us to react before the planning of the mind.



Recall that in a previous chapter we talked about the three brains in the human being, or triune brain, and that according to neurology, the limbic system of the brain is related to emotions. The limbic system consists of the thalamus, amygdala, hypothalamus, olfactory bulbs, septal region and hippocampus. It is related to emotions, pleasure and pain, joy, depression, etc.

The limbic system is a kind of primitive brain, predecessor in the evolution of the neocortex, which has a much simpler structure than this and which therefore allows a response to stimuli much faster than that originated in the neocortex. This system of rapid response is appropriate for situations of danger or those that need instant decisions, for which the rational mind is not prepared because it needs to evaluate more and plan a strategy. This is explained very well in the well-known book *The Emotional Intelligence* of Daniel Golemann.

Actually, in practical life we could not make decisions without the help of emotions, since fully reasoned decisions require much analysis. Before it was believed that most of our decisions were the product of rational thinking, but now we know that although we use the mind for certain decisions, most of them are based on emotions, according to what we like or dislike, what it causes us attraction or rejection.

As we have pointed out earlier regarding the mind, there is no evidence that emotions are *originated* by the limbic system as the reductionists maintain. All that can be said is that there is a close relationship between emotions and the activity of this system.

A function of consciousness and the support or material vehicle that implements it are two differentiated and complementary aspects.

The mind-brain relationship

- There are many theories that emphasize different aspects of the mind-brain relationship or more generally Consciousness and Matter.

- They are divided into dualists and monists.

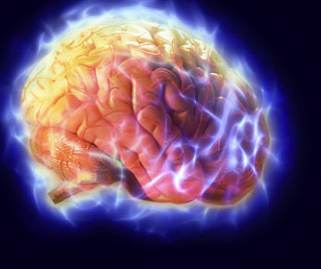
- Consciousness and Matter are two aspects of the same Reality.

- Matter acts on the mind but also the mind on the body (as in the **placebo effect**).



Is the material universe a projection of the mind?

Or is the mind a product of the brain?



What does philosophy tell us about the mind? Much, but there are so many theories about the mind and cognition as philosophers.

Philosophical theories focus mainly on the so-called **body-mind problem**, that is, in trying to clarify the relationship between consciousness and its material counterpart, the brain.

Theories can be roughly divided into **dualists**, who consider that two independent principles, consciousness and matter, intervene, and in **monistic** theories according to which consciousness and matter are only two aspects of a single reality.

Dualism: The mind and the body are different things (Plato, Aristotle, Sankya, Yoga, Descartes). At the same time there are varieties:

- Dualists of the substance: the mind is an independent substance
- Dualists of the property: The mind is a set of properties that emerge from the brain but can not be reduced to it.

Monism: The mind and the brain are not distinct entities (probably Parmenides, Spinoza, Vendanta Advaita.) There are also variants here:

- Theory of the dual aspect (Spinoza). The mind and the body are two aspects of the same underlying reality (Nature)

- Physicalism: Only physical entities exist and the mind can be explained in terms of them. In turn this trend can be divided into:

+ Reductive: All states and mental properties can be explained by the states and physiological processes. This is the reductionism followed by most neurologists.

+ Non-reductive: Although the brain is the origin, the vocabulary used to describe mental processes is necessary and can not be reduced to the lower level physiological terms.

- Idealism: The mind is all that exists and the external world is mental or is an illusion created by the mind.

- Neutral Monism: The things perceived in the world can be considered physical or mental depending on whether one is interested in the relationship with other things in the world or in the relationship with the perceiver. It does not postulate a fundamental substance of which mind and matter are its aspects.

As we see, there is something for everyone. Theosophy offers an integrated vision, closer to the monism of the dual aspect, since it holds that there is a single Reality that manifests itself in different aspects as held by Spinoza. According to this, the human being is an entity emanated, not detached, from the Reality, and its principles are expressions of its essential nature or Atman. Manas, the mind, and Kama, the desire, are principles or aspects of the consciousness of the human being that are reflected and have a support in the physical body.

Is the Universe really a projection of the mind or is the mind an effect of matter? Many religions have tried to focus on the aspect of consciousness or spirit by denying the matter by qualifying it as perverse. But if we think of the Universe as a Unity, everything is absolutely sacred and it does not seem logical to think of an asymmetry such that only one aspect of Life is sacred and beneficial while the other is illusory or malignant. Consciousness and Matter are the two aspects of the underlying Reality as are the positive and negative charges of electricity. One can not exist without the other and between the two originate the third aspect of the trinity with the interaction between both giving rise to the phenomenon of Life. They are like the front and the back of a coin. There can not be a coin with only one face.

The mind is a dual principle composed of the Higher Manas or abstract mind and the lower Manas or concrete mind. It is an extraordinary characteristic that is more developed in the human being, and it is what allows us to know the world and try to know ourselves and the beings that accompany us through life.

The mind according to the Vedanta

- **Chitta.** It is the ability to create mental images.
- **Manas.** The construction of the image chain.
- **Buddhi.** The light of intuition reflected in the mind.
- **Ahamkara.** The center of individuality.



The Vedanta philosophy, which is the philosophy of the Vedas that are the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, has given an analytical presentation of the functions of the mind. It is very remarkable that thousands of years ago there were wise men who got ahead of their civilization and worried about the detailed knowledge of the human mind. Dr. I.K. Taimni has exposed it very didactically in a series of articles published in "*The Theosophist*" between 1970 and 1971 and compiled in the Spanish book "*Studies on the Mind and Consciousness according to Hindu psychology*" (Editor: Walter Ballesteros, Colombia). The first chapter is dedicated to examining the mind according to Vedanta.

According to the Vedanta philosophy,/ the mind has four aspects or functions that intervene in its functioning: *Chitta*, *Manas*, *Buddhi* and *Ahamkara*. These aspects work in coordination and give us the sense of unity of our mind.

The four aspects of the mind are usually compared to the radii of a wheel whose center is the Self, which does not make contact with the world but through them.

In ancient philosophies many times the different psychic components of the personality are not clearly differentiated and the word mind is usually used in a broad sense that encompasses the emotions and more internal aspects of consciousness. We have to take this fact into account when we study how Vedanta describes the mind.

We will study in more detail these 4 aspects of the mind that are described by the Vedanta philosophy.

Chitta

Chitta is the faculty to build mental images



- The images are not only visual, but are an aggregate of the impressions of the different senses.
- Reproductive imagination
- Inventive imagination

Chitta is the mind's ability to form images. We are not referring only to visual images. **Mental images** are an aggregate of the impressions received through the senses and the mechanism of perception that form an idea, a concept, a model of something.

The images can come from three different sources:

- Sensory perception
- The storage of memory
- Pure imagination

The Chitta function causes images originating through different senses to be combined as a single composite image. Taimni gives the example of our image of an orange. It combines color, flavor, aroma and texture. Chitta is the ability to combine all these sensory attributes into a single mental image.

Chitta also provides the missing perceptions by substituting them with those of his mental image or archetype. When we see a very good looking orange we can imagine its flavor. This is of great importance in the genesis of desire, since the artificially completed image can lead to the desire to experience the missing feeling. That is to say that if we only see a good orange we may want to taste its sweetness.

Imagination can be reproductive, as when we remember an object or an event, or inventiveness as when we are creating forms or ideas that we have not previously perceived with the senses.

Manas

Manas is the faculty of creating a succession of mental images that flows uninterruptedly



Stream of images

- *Manas*: same root as latin *manare*: to flow, to spring
- The stream of *Manas* is guided by the law of association.
- We build a network of associations.
- Desires → possible paths → stream of *Manas*

Manas is the faculty of the mind to convert the images created by Chitta into a current, a succession of images that flows uninterruptedly through the field of our consciousness, making up the current of thought.

It is noteworthy that *Manas* is a Sanskrit word that means the mental principle, the thought in the human being, but in this context of the Vedanta refers only to a faculty of the mind. The root of the word *Manas* is the same as the latin word *manare* meaning to spring, to flow, and that suggests to us the continuous sprouting of ideas in the field of the mind.

The sequence of images is not random, but follows some laws of association. We build networks of association of ideas based on attributes, classifications, circumstances, deduction, reasoning, modeling, and other criteria, which create a conditioning because we tend to connect ideas in the same way.

What will be the next idea in the field of the mind? Of the many possible courses, if we filter those that obey external stimuli, normally *Kama*, the sum of our desires present at that moment, is who decidedly, although very subtly, directs the current of *Manas* through a network of associations.

Consciousness does not show itself in fragments. Words such as string or series are not enough to explain it. It is not articulated but fluid. A river or stream would be more appropriate metaphors. Henceforth, let us call it the flow of thought, of consciousness or of subjective life.

William James

Buddhi

Buddhi is the light of consciousness that illuminates mental images, giving them meaning and sense

- Buddhi: light, illumination, understanding, modeling.
- Buddhi as property in the Manas is the reflection of true Buddhi or Intuition, which is the Wisdom principle of our higher Self or individuality.



Buddhi is the light of consciousness that illuminates and gives meaning to mental contents. It is the faculty of knowing, of understanding the meaning of what we are perceiving. We can read a book and understand the letters, the alphabet with which it is written, we can understand the words (the lexicon) and also understand the grammar, but if we do not understand the meaning (semantics), we will not understand the author's message. Still, we can continue to generalize and see that behind the message of a paragraph there is a message in the chapter, and behind it there is one in the whole book. Buddhi is the faculty of intuition that the more it is reflected in the mind, it allows us to understand more widely the levels of reality.

Within this context of the functions of the mind according to Vedanta, this Buddhi is the reflection in the mind of the Buddhi principle in man, the Intuition, the expression of Wisdom. In this way Buddhi is integrative, it is the consciousness of Life as a whole. Its reflection in the mind allows us to find models, laws and meanings.

Buddhi is the power or faculty of knowing, which relates the subject to the object. The penetration of the object or mental image by the subject, or the illumination of the mind by consciousness, are the work of Buddhi. So that Buddhi participates in the nature of the subject; it is certainly that element of the Spirit that has been imprisoned within the mind. It will be seen therefore that Buddhi is a spiritual element in the constitution of the mind. It is related to the Spirit; it is indeed the projection of the Spirit in the field of the mind, which is also an expression of the Spirit below.

I. K. Taimni, *Studies on the Mind and Consciousness*

Ahamkara

Ahamkara is the singular center from which the light of consciousness (buddhi) that illuminates the mind is projected



- Ahamkara: *Aham* (the Self) + *kara* (thing created by)
- It is the self of our mental life that remains behind the changing experiences but also creates the illusion of separateness.
- It is the center of individual consciousness, which makes us unique but at the same time integrated into the Universal Mind.

Ahamkara is the singular center from which the light of consciousness is projected, the Buddhi aspect, which illuminates the mind. It is the intimate self of our mental life that we perceive as permanent after the changing experiences throughout our life.

Ahamkara is the faculty that makes us feel different, separate, but it is also the cause of our feelings of suffering and separation.

Ahamkara is closely associated with Chitta and with Manas. A very strong sense of self-consciousness obscures the light of Buddhi that is integrative. However, Ahamkara is also the expression of our identity as sparks of the fire of Life. Each spark is part of the Unity and is a reflection of the All, but expresses it in a unique way, different from all other sparks.

If we examine our mental life, we find that all the images that pass through our mind, and our experiences, congregate in a egoic center that relates them and coordinates them all in a harmonious and integrated set. Without such a center of consciousness there could be no meaningful and continuous mental life. All our experiences and mental images would remain scattered in a fortuitous way, with nothing to conglomerate them into a life singular and different from the lives of other individuals.

I. K. Taimni, *Studies on the Mind and Consciousness*

See also in Internet:

<http://www.swamij.com/fourfunctionsmind.htm>

The fragmented mind

- The ego distorts our perception of reality.
- Our mind united with desire filters, hides what is feared and magnifies what is desired.
- Thus we generate a fragmented, partial, conditioned mind that prevents us from seeing the whole.
- The problem is the presence of the psychological ego that conditions the mind.



The ego distorts our perception of reality. We have limitations in our perception of reality due to the limitations of the senses. We do not perceive light of greater frequency than violet, we do not perceive high-pitched sounds higher than 20,000 Hz, and so with all the senses. But to these limitations we must add another more important factor that distorts our perception and that is the self.

The self is the psychological entity that we have been creating over the years and experiences and acts as a center that polarizes and colors relationships with what surrounds us. The self directs the mind united with desire in such a way that it magnifies what we desire. The desire for a new car can make us exaggerate the problems we currently have. And also the ego self-defends hiding that which causes us fear or threatens our position. If we have a conflict that has been generated by our bad attitude, the ego will tend to look for guilt in others or in circumstances, because else it can not be discovered and we may change our attitude and weaken it. Jung spoke of the *Shadow* as the psychological structure where the self hides those characteristics of itself that it does not want to accept.

In this way we generate a fragmented, partial, conditioned mind that prevents us from seeing the whole. A typical example is when we talk to another person, perhaps a co-worker. We tend to interpret what he tells us as if he wanted something from us or as if he is subtly criticizing us for something we do, generating an attitude of defense on our part. And yet it is possible that our partner is so locked in his own problems that our perception is totally false.

Our mind conditioned by the self presents us with an imaginary world, which is not real. And with a fragmented mind we can not understand ourselves or the world around us. We do not see the whole, we do not understand the whole process of Life.

The renewal of the mind

What to do?

- Empty the mind of confusing contents.
- Have a critical (philosophical) attitude.
- Accept uncertainty, deferred judgment.
- Do not obsess.
- Have a whole mind, not fractioned.
- To reflect the light of Buddhi the mind must be calm (not inactive).



To be useful to our essence,
the mind must be renewed

Science shows us the physical structure of the brain and shows how it is related to emotions and physical activity. Vedanta shows us the functions of the mind from the point of view of consciousness. But as we have seen, the qualities of the mind make it useful, but they can be an obstacle to deeper knowledge.

For the mind to be a useful instrument for the internal Being, it must be renewed in content but above all in attitude. A few guidelines that we can take into account:

- Empty the mind of confusing contents. We must clarify what we know of what we only suppose. And what we know, should be as clear and precise as possible. The confused contents of the mind will produce doubts and contradictions in our behavior.
- Have an attitude of philosophical criticism. Do not accept ideas just because they are familiar or because they come from a supposed authority. Exercise our own judgment, review evidence. Assume as little as possible.
- Accept uncertainty The world is changing and complex. There is uncertainty. It is preferable to accept that we do not know something and that we will be able to know in the future instead of force an explanation. The forced explanation will cause us to lose the incentive to discover the true explanation. It is what Krishnamurti has called *deferred judgment*. We need to eliminate the beliefs that color our mind and condition us to see with certainty.
- Avoid obsession A big concern will cause us to go around a problem without finding new ideas. It is preferable to let the unconscious processes of the mind reorganize and allow us to find new perspectives. And maybe intuition allows us to see better.
- To reflect the light of Buddhi the mind must be calm, like the surface of the water to reflect the sun. Not idle, but calm, without tensions or anxieties or distractions.

Yoga

- Yoga is a philosophy and techniques that seek to align the personality with the inner being.
- Patanjali defined it as the absence of disturbances of the mind.
- Yoga begins with a physical, moral and psychological preparation and uses meditation.



Yoga is the suppression of
mind modifications
Patanjali

The tranquility of the mind is one of the pillars of Yoga. Yoga is one of the ancient schools of self-realization born in India. In the West one of its aspects is well known: Hatha Yoga that focuses on performing a series of postural exercises or *Asanas* to promote relaxation and health in the body combined with breathing techniques. But Yoga is much more than that.

True Yoga or **Raja Yoga** is a series of practices of personal self-realization based on one of the philosophical schools of India, the Sankya. The great compiler of the teachings of Yoga that until then were hardly mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita and little else was Patanjali, a sage born about 256 BC. in Kashmir, in northern India. In his great work The **Yoga Sutras** explains the practice of Yoga composed of 8 stages or better said members or components.ç

The purpose of Yoga is to produce an alignment of the personality with the inner Being, to achieve the self-realization of our essential nature by releasing its enormous potential.

We can not extend ourselves into Yoga within the context of this course, but we can say that it is a very practical aspect of the philosophy of Theosophy.

Patanjali defined Yoga in the following way:

Yoga is the suppression of the modifications (disturbances) of the mind.

Patanjali, Yoga Sutras, 2

For this, Yoga begins with a preparatory stage that aims to dilute the causes of the disturbances and that have to do with our way of living, with the desire, with the way we use the mind and with the way in which we relate to the rest of Life.

4 steps for meditation

- **Attention.** The full implication.
- **Concentration.** Focus of the mind on the object of thought.
- **Meditation.** Introspection. The consciousness turns inward.
- **Contemplation.** The conscience realizing the union.



The mind has a huge potential. But the true power of our nature is found when the focus of consciousness transcends the mind to sink into the depths of our being, our essence. Patanjali pointed out that to achieve realization through Yoga, *Samadhi*, we must do a **meditation** work, an exercise with the mind that has 4 aspects.

- **Attention.** The full involvement in what we think and what we do. The attention has several levels and not only requires attention to the obvious but also to the different meanings and implications that underlie everyday events.
- **Concentration.** It is the focus of the mind on the chosen object to think. This object can be a flower, a work of art, an inspiring phrase or an idea. It implies being attentive to the chains of associations and using them to see the object from different angles.
- **Meditation.** It is a deep introspection in the object of thought. The consciousness turns inward, becomes absorbed in the object of thought, remaining exhausted, occupying all its field.
- **Contemplation.** It is the coronation of the process in which the exhausted mind becomes quiet and the consciousness is fully open to the light. The analytical, comparative activity ceases and the consciousness realizes the unity with the object of thought. There is full attention. There is no difference between the thinker and the object. There is no me that observes. Consciousness works from the level at which the essential unity of Life is realized. It is the state of Samadhi.

These four steps summarize very briefly the technique of meditation. We'll talk about it later. The important thing now is to realize that if we want the inner light to be expressed, the mind must be calm, and this can only be achieved if the entity that generates the conflict, our psychological self, ceases to act and to hold the reins of our lifetime.

To learn more see the following books:

- Raja Yoga [V.W. Slater]
- The Science of Yoga [I.K. Taimni]

To think



Watch, think, investigate, inquire ...
Make the following questions or thoughts suggestions
But don't stay here, ask yourself and find out.

- 1- What is the difference between sensation and perception?
- 2- Why is it important to have accurate images in our mind?
- 3- Do we usually use the abstract mind?
- 4- Can Buddhi or intuition reflect on the agitated mind? Reason the answer. Mention some factors of agitation of the mind, for example: fear.
- 5- What happens when we pay real attention to something? Is there only one level of attention?
- 6- Is it necessary to adopt a special posture of the body to meditate?

