

THE LIGHT OF AWARENESS IN THE AFTERLIFE

What follows is an intimate personal account of the Divine Awareness, its “knowing light” and its all-pervading “atmospheric presence” – as experienced by William James and recounted in ‘The Afterlife Journal of an American Philosopher’ by Jane Roberts.

“The living often equate death with darkness, for how can the dead see? How can the spirit have vision disconnected from the organs of sight? Yet here I am, surrounded by illumination that emanates from everywhere – colours more sparkling than any I knew on earth, a light of enchanting varieties, not even or monotonous but seemingly alive in its own fashion. It emanates from what I see, but also seems to be inherent all about me, whether or not there is anything to be perceived otherwise.”

That this ‘light’ is essentially the universal light of awareness is clear to James when he describes it as a “knowing light”.

“...it is more mobile and possesses qualities not normally associated with light. I would say it was a knowing light, everywhere existing at the same time, at once...it appears out of itself at every conceivable point in the universe. Physical perception ‘sees’ only a small hint of this light, and from it springs all of the lights and colours physically visible.”

James also describes his experience of an ‘atmospheric presence’ connected with the “knowing light” – one he terms “the divine mood”.

“Nowhere have I encountered the furnishings of a conventional heaven, or glimpsed the face of God. On the other hand, certainly I dwell in a psychological heaven by earth’s standards, for everywhere I sense a presence, or atmosphere or atmospheric presence that is well-intentioned, gentle yet powerful, and all-knowing.”

James senses the atmospheric presence as a field of awareness out of which all beings arise, and which at the same time nurtures their creative potentialities of awareness:

“Each person, living or dead is somehow a unique materialisation or actualisation, psychologically ‘perfect’, of this basic, loving condition or atmospheric presence.”

“The psychology, if one can use the word in this regard, of such an atmospheric presence is such that it ever seeks the most creative, expansive, loving expression, in such gargantuan terms that our usual ideas of motivation utterly fail us ... and I feel within myself the coming birth of a new kind of creativity, involving all of my own characteristics, abilities and idiosyncrasies, as if each nook and cranny of my knowing being was preparing its own delightful surprise expansion, and further expression.”

“The words ‘psychological growing medium’ come to mind, as if this atmosphere ... provides the spiritual and psychological medium arousing the creative development of even the smallest incipient seeds of personality”.

James experiences the working of the “knowing light” and “atmospheric presence” as not only nourishing and enhancing qualities and capacities he knew to be his own but allowing new hitherto latent potentialities to come to life within him. The result is a qualitative expansion, not only of his awareness but also of his very identity or sense of self:

“Qualities and characteristics that I never suspected I possessed now surface within me so that I feel to myself like a garden ever coming to growth, containing far more flora and fauna than I ever realised; as if earlier I had identified with only one crop of abilities that I called my own.”

His conclusion as a scientist and psychologist.

“I can think of no more challenging activity than the exploration of what I can only call divine psychology”.

“It is as if this atmospheric presence were a psychological repository for all possible subjective beings, of such import

that no one could comprehend these at once or in any combination of 'times'... a repository of individuation and perceptive abilities. As all required elements for life spring up from the ground of the earth, which also nurtures them, this medium seems to perform the same services, only giving birth to psychological entities and the entire universe that sustains them."

The atmospheric presence, moreover, has qualities of "active passivity" corresponding precisely to the intimate unity of Shiva (as passive awareness) and Shakti (the immanent responsive activity of awareness) as described in Tantric teachings:

"There is no demanding quality to the atmospheric presence or its light, yet it seems possessed of what I can only call a divine active passivity ... This presence is responsive. I am sure that it reacts to me, yet while it is everywhere, it is not obtrusive but again, like the summer day, it is more like a delightful medium in which all living is bathed ... I suspect that the dimensions of its existence reveal themselves or are revealed according to the attention one accords them."

There follows the most perfect description of the essence of 'Tantra' - as the loom or weave of awareness whose infinite patterns make up the texture, warp and woof of the universe:

"It is as if the universe were a multidimensional cloth with infinite patterns, and figures that did not remain flat but sprang alive, lived, moved and died, and came alive again, while the fabric of which they were made never wore out but miraculously revitalised itself and rewove its parts...And I know that I am cut from the same cloth".