

**Regarding the riddle of perception
(LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA, 1/10/78)**

2,500 years ago, in a master class of descriptive psychology, Buddha developed one of the most important problems concerning perception, concerning the consciousness that observes perception, on the basis of a method of registers. This sort of psychology is very different from the official psychology in the West, which works instead with explanations about phenomena. If you take any work on psychology you will see how, given a phenomenon, they immediately give a number of explanations about the phenomenon. But of course, they don't give the correct register of the phenomenon itself. And so these psychological currents (as time passes and they adjust their models and their data, as their knowledge increases or decreases) explain psychic phenomena in different ways. And so, if we were to take a work on psychology of 100 years ago, we would find much naiveté that could not be admitted today. This type of psychology, with no center of gravity, depends in great measure on the contributions made by other sciences. For example, a neuro-physiological explanation of the phenomena of consciousness is interesting, and it is a step forward, but in no time we are going to find another more complex one. In any case knowledge advances as far as explanations go.

But, with regard to the description of the phenomenon itself, such explanations neither add nor subtract anything. Nevertheless, a correct description made 2,500 years ago allows us to be present at the appearance of the mental phenomenon just the same as though it had been made today. In the same fashion, a correct description given today will no doubt serve for many years to come. This type of descriptive psychology, not explanatory psychology, is based on registers which are similar to all who follow the description. It is as if these descriptions made all men contemporaries even though they are very separated in time; and of course, it also makes them neighbors in spite of being in very distant latitudes. This type of psychology is, additionally, a gesture of reaching out to all cultures (irrespective of how different these may be) because it does not emphasize the differences among them, nor does it try to impose the model of one culture on others. This type of psychology brings human beings together, instead of separating them. It is then, a good contribution to the understanding among the different people.

Let us continue with our theme. It looks like Buddha was in a gathering with a group of specialists and, by means of a dialogue, he developed what was later known as "The Riddle of Perception".

All of a sudden, Buddha raised his hand and asked one of his most remarkable disciples: "Ananda, what do you see?"

With his sober style, Buddha asked and answered questions each time with precision. Ananda was for more exuberant in his descriptions. Therefore, Ananda said: "Oh noble Master! I see in front of me the clenched hand of the Illuminated."

"Very well Ananda, where do you see the hand, and where do you see it from?"

"Oh Master! I see the clenched hand of my noble master. I see the fist, of course, outside myself and from within myself."

"Very well Ananda, what do you see the hand with?"

"Of course, Master, I see the hand exactly with my eyes."

"Tell me, Ananda, is the perception in your eyes?"

"It is truly, venerable Master."

"And tell me, Ananda, what happens when you shut your eyes?"

"Noble Master, when I shut my eyes, perception disappears."

"That Ananda, is impossible. Is it that when this room is darkened, and each time you see less, perception disappears?"

"That is so, Master."

"And tell me, Ananda, when this room remains in darkness and, nevertheless, your eyes are open but you see nothing, has perception disappeared?"

"Oh noble Master, I am your cousin! Remember that we were brought up together and that you loved me very much when we were tiny. So please do not confuse me."

"Ananda, if the room is darkened, I cannot see the objects, but my eyes are still functioning. If I shut my eyes, I cannot see the objects, but my eyes are still functioning. In this way, if there is light beyond my eyes, I see the light, and if there is total darkness, it all remains in darkness. And so perception does not disappear by simply shutting my eyes. Tell me, Ananda, if perception is in the eye and you imagine that you see my hand, where do you see it?"

"Master, surely it will be that I see it by imagining it also from my eyes."

"What do you mean to say Ananda, that imagination is in the eyes? That is not possible. If imagination were in the eyes and you imagine the hand inside your head, you would have to turn your eyes backwards in order to see the hand which is inside your head. Such a thing is not possible. So you will have to admit that imagination is not in your eyes. Where is it then?"

"It must be then that vision, as well as imagination, are not in the eye, but behind the eye and, therefore, when I imagine, I can imagine backwards, and when I see, when I perceive, I can see what there is in front of the eyes."

"In the second case, Ananda, you would not see the objects, but rather your eye..."

And so these types of dialogue continued. With 'The Riddle of Perception' the registers become more complicated, solutions are presented, but also stronger objections are given, until finally Ananda, deeply moved, asks Buddha for an adequate explanation of this question of vision, imagination and consciousness in general. Even though Buddha is very precise in his descriptions, his explanations are given in an extremely roundabout way. In that way, he closes that chapter of the *Surangama Sutra*, one of the most interesting works dealing in these studies.

When we display the hand, we see the hand outside, but from the inside. That is, the object appears to us in a place different to the point of observation of that object. If my point of observation were outside, I could not be aware of the fact that I am seeing anything. Therefore the point of observation must be inside and not outside and the object must be outside and not inside. But if on the other hand, I imagine a fist inside my head, it so happens that the image as well as the point of observation are both inside. In the first case, the hand which I see outside from inside; it seems as though the point of observation coincides approximately with the eye. In the second case, when the hand is inside, the point of observation does not coincide with the eye because, if I were to represent the hand inside my head, I could see it from my eye towards the inside and from the back of my head towards the inside. I am also able to see my hand from the top, from the bottom, and so on from many angles. That is to say, that in the case of a representation and not of a perception, the point of observation varies. Therefore in the case of a representation, the point of observation is not fixed by the eyes.

If I now imagine my hand coming out from the center of my head through the back, I'm still imagining my hand from the inside of my head, in spite of representing my hand outside. One could think that, at some stage, the point of observation leaves the head, but such a thing is not possible. If I imagine myself, for example, as if I were looking from in front of me, I can represent this which is looking at me, from where I am, from here. I can also imagine what I look like as seen from over there, from that other point of observation. Nevertheless, in spite of locating myself in front of me, I obtain the register from within myself, from where I am. I cannot say that when I look at myself in the mirror, I see or feel myself inside the mirror. I am here looking at myself over there and I am not over there looking at myself here. One could be confused and believe that, because one is facing the representation of oneself, the point of observation is out there and not here. And not even in that case is such a thing possible. In particular experimental circumstances (such as in an isolation tank), upon certain perceptual registers decreasing, one loses the notion of the "I". Upon losing the notion of "I," when one has no reference of the tactile limit, one sometimes has the impression that one is outside and that one can even see from over there. But if you observe the register carefully, you will see that this tactile-cenesthetic projection, in any case does not place the register outside of oneself, but rather that one does not have an exact notion of the point of register, because the limits have been lost.

So then I see the hand outside myself and from myself, or otherwise I see the hand within myself and from within myself when I imagine it. We are apparently dealing with the same space. There is a space where the objects that I observe are located, and we can call this space the space of perception. But there is also another space where the objects of representation are located and this space does not coincide with that of perception. The objects that are placed in these two different spaces have different characteristics. If I observe my hand I see that it is located at a particular distance from my eyes. I notice that it is nearer than other objects, but perhaps farther away than some other objects. I see that there is a color corresponding to the shape of my hand. Even though I may imagine other objects surrounding my hand, the perception is stronger. But now I imagine my hand. My hand may be in front or behind a certain object. I can very quickly change its location. My hand can become very small or it can become so large that it can practically cover my whole space of representation. The shape of my hand can change and I can also vary its color. Therefore, the location of a mental object in the space of representation can be modified according to my mental operations, whereas the location of objects in the external space can also be modified, but not according to my mental operations. No matter how much I think that this pillar is moving across this room, as a representation, such a thing is possible, nevertheless, perceptually it has its permanence. There are then great differences between a represented object and a perceived object. There are also great differences between the space of perception and the space of representation.

Let us suppose that I now shut my eyes and I represent my hand. It's clear what happens when I represent my hand inside my head. But what happens when I close my eyes and remember my hand which was outside my head. Where do I represent my hand now that I remember it? Do I represent it inside my head? No, I am representing it outside my head. And when I remember objects which I previously saw, how is it that I am now able to remember them in the same place where they were, that is to say, located in an external space? It is acceptable to remember an object and locate it inside my head, but this question of remembering an object which is not inside my head but outside it, and what is more, when my eyelids are shut; what sort of space am I looking at? It must be either that the objects which I am remembering are inside my head, yet I believe I see them outside, or otherwise it must be that, on shutting my eyes and remembering objects, my mind goes outside of my internal space and reaches the external space. Such a thing is not possible. I distinguish properly between internal objects and external ones. I distinguish properly between the space of perception and

properly between internal objects and external ones. I distinguish properly between the space of perception and the space of representation. But the register is confused when I represent the objects in their external location, that is, outside my internal representation.

How can I distinguish an object represented inside my head from an object represented or remembered outside

my head? I am able to distinguish one from the other because I am aware of the limits of my head. And what defines these limits? This limit is given by the tactile sensation, and it is the tactile sensation of my eyelids which enables me to distinguish whether an object is represented inside or outside. If this were the case, the object represented outside is not necessarily outside but located in the most superficial part of my space of representation, which is what gives me the register, translated into a visual image, that the object is outside. But the reference of the limit is tactile and not visual.

Representation is so powerful that it even modifies perception. If you look at that curtain back there and you imagine it very near to your eyes, you will notice that when you again take a look at the curtain, you will need a few moments before your sight readjusts. That is, you imagine that the curtain is very near to you and by imagining this, your eyes adjust to the imagined curtain and not the real one. And on the contrary, if you imagine that you are able to see through the curtain and you imagine a building on the other side, and after that you take another look at the curtain, you will notice that your eyes have to readjust. If they readjust it's because they were adjusted differently. This occurs because your eyes have had previously adjusted to the distance of what you were imagining, not what you were perceiving. Images, representation, adjust even perception. If this is so, then the data of perception can be seriously modified according to the representation that may be acting at the time. It could happen that our system of representation could modify the perception of the world in general in a way that is not exactly what we believe it to be. This is especially true when we consider that phenomena located in the space of representation do not coincide with phenomena located in the space of perception. Knowing that the phenomena of representation modify perception, perception could therefore be altered according to the system of representation. And when I say "altered," I am not referring to particular case of alteration, but rather to perception in general. This observation has enormous consequences because if my representation corresponds to a particular system of beliefs, then with certainty I will be modifying my vision and my perspective regarding the external world of perceptions.

It is thanks to perception that I am able to direct my body toward different objects. But I can also orient my body towards objects thanks to representation. If instead of being represented outside, objects were represented inside my head, I would not be able to orient my activity towards those objects. When I am on the level of vigil and my eyes are open, my point of observation coincides with my eye and not only with my eye but also with all the other external senses. But when my level of consciousness decreases, my point of observation becomes more internal. This happens because, as the level of consciousness decreases, the range of perception of the external senses diminishes, and the register of the internal senses increases. Therefore, the point of view (which is nothing but the structure of the data from memory and from perception, upon data from external perception diminishing, and internal data increasing), this point of view becomes internal. The point of view becomes internalized with the fall of the level of consciousness, and by doing so fulfills the following function: that while in sleep, images does not trigger its charge and move the body towards the outside world. If all images that appear to me in sleep were to mobilize the activity towards the world, then sleep would not be of much use as far as the restructuring the daily activities. Unless I find myself in a state of somnambulism, or of altered sleep, in which I talk, move about, become agitated and, finally, I would get up and walk off. Such a thing is possible because the point of view, instead of becoming internalized, remains in a more external location following the representations.

If due to a problem with my own contents, my point of view is pushed towards the periphery, or if due to external stimuli, my point of view is required at the periphery (in spite of me being in the level of sleep), then my images will have a tendency to locate themselves in the most external point of the space of representation and therefore, they would have the tendency to trigger off their signals towards the external world. During deep sleep the point of observation, as well as the images, become even more internalized and the structure in general of the space of representation is modified. In this way, when I am in vigil, I see things from myself, but I don't see myself, whereas in sleep I usually see myself in the dream. On occasion, many people do not see themselves in dreams, but instead they see in a way similar to the way they perceive the world in daily life. This happens because their point of view is displaced towards the limits of representation. They don't have a quiet sleep. But if the point of view does become more internal, then I see myself from the outside when I represent myself in my dreams. And this does not mean that my image is outside of my head. What happens is that my point of observation has become more internal and I see on the screen, the film of the representation, where the image of myself appears. But I don't perceive the world from myself as I do in vigil, rather I see myself doing things. The same thing happens with old memory. If you remember yourselves when you were 2 years old, or 3, or 4, you do not remember yourselves as seeing the objects from yourselves, but instead, you see yourselves doing things or being among determined objects. Old memory, as far as images are concerned, as well as

representations in deep sleep, separates in depth the point of view. This point of view is none other than the "I." The "I" moves. The "I" locates itself in one or another level of the space of representation. The world is seen from the "I." The representations are seen from the "I." The "I" is variable. The "I" adapts the representations and the "I" modifies perceptions, all according to the example we have given.

When I represent images located in one depth or another, for example, when I imagine that I am walking down some stairs toward the depths, or when I imagine that I am walking up some stairs, if I observe my eye, I will see that my eye goes up or down. That is, that in spite of the eye not really having anything to do with what I am doing because my operations are not related to external objects, in spite of this, the eye follows the

representations as if it were perceiving them. If I imagine my house, which is located at the left, my eye will tend to look in that direction and, even if my eye wouldn't look to the left, my representation would correspond to that place in the space. And the same thing would happen if I were to imagine my house in some other direction. And this eye, which goes up and down following the images, meets up with different objects in its movement. Because it seems that all the systems of impulse of the body are connected to the screen of representation that the "I" is looking at. So that in one part of the space of representation, we have impulses corresponding to a certain part of the body, and in another part of the space of representation, we have impulses corresponding to another part of the body, and so on. And you know that these impulses are translated, deformed and transformed.

In a well known example the following was observed: our friend begins to descend in his images, he does so by means of a tube, and while descending he suddenly meets up with a strong resistance. This resistance is the head of an enormous cat that prevents him from continuing descent along the tube. In order to get by, he caresses the neck of the cat and the cat suddenly becomes smaller. Simultaneously, our friend registers a distension in his neck and is then able to continue down the tube. That is to say, in this case, the cat is nothing else but the allegorization of a tension in the neck of the subject himself. Once the distension has been produced, then the system of signals of that image allegorized as a cat is modified, the resistance is reduced and our friend is able to continue descending. In another case, a subject begins to descend in his representations. Far down below, he suddenly meets up with a gentleman who gives him a small dark stone. Our subject begins to ascend and reaches the middle plane; let's say the normal everyday plane, but represented. Another gentleman comes and gives him a different object, but of a shape similar to the first object he saw down below. Our friend continues to ascend towards the heights, goes climbing up the mountains, becomes lost among the clouds and finds a sort of angel or something of the sort who gives him a more radiant object, a clearer object, but with similar characteristics. In all three cases, our friend observes the object in a precise point in the space of representation. The same object does not appear at one point here, at another point over there and at a third point over there. No, according to the plane where he may be, let's say that the object always appears in the middle part slightly towards the left. And our friend remembers that, of course, he has a artificial vertebrae which sends signals, even though he does not perceives it in the same way, and this signal is always translated into an image.

Therefore, the systems of allegorization transform the signals from the inside of the body and translate them into images in different points of the space of representation. It is not that the eye goes up and down in order to find out what is going on inside of the body. The eye didn't get into the esophagus, but instead the signal of a tension reached the screen of representation, without the eye ever going to that point. So then, as I descend, I go on sampling translations of different levels of the inside of my body. This does not mean that my eye introduces itself into my viscera and translates what it sees.

As one descends in the space of representation, it becomes darker and, as one ascends in this space, it becomes lighter, as you have known for a long time. This darkness in the descent and this clarity in the ascent is related to two phenomena. First, the increasing distance away from the optical centers. Second, with the habitual system of ideation and the habitual system of perception where we associate light with the sun in the sky, etc., and the lack of light with the depths. This undoubtedly works differently in places where the snow is almost continuously on the ground and the sky is dark, as the habitants of frozen and misty regions describe. On the other hand, there are objects in the heights which are dark, in spite of the space or representation being more illuminated and there are also objects in the depths of the space of representation which are light. Nevertheless, there are limit points in the ascent as well as in the descent of the space of representation. But this is a subject for another description.

We have seen 15 points: the 1) dealt with the location of the point of view with respect to outside objects; the 2) with the point of view if the object was inside; the 3) if the point of view was behind; the 4) dealt with the false point of view that appeared to be somewhere else, when one represented oneself from in front of oneself; the 5) showed what happened with the objects located in the most external part of the space of representation. The 6) showed the differences between the space of representation of the outside and of the inside, given by the tactile barrier that the eyes give; the 7) point dealt with the modification of perception by representation; in the 8) point

we saw what happened when an object was located inside and we tried to move the body; in the 9) point we saw the modifications of the space of representation when in vigil; the 10) point dealt with the modifications of the space of representation when in the level of sleep; in the 11) point we saw what happened with objects that corresponded to the internal space; in the 12) point we spoke about the space of representation and we saw that this space was related to different points of the inside of the body and that this space of representation was a sort of screen; in the 13) point we saw that when ascending in the images of the space of representation, it became brighter; in the 14) point we saw, finally, that when descending in the images of the space of representation, it became darker, even though this phenomena was subject to several exceptions. From here on after, a great number of conclusions can be extracted.