

Brilliance and Intelligence

Being is such a wondrous reality. It manifests to our perception as the universe we find ourselves in, and it also manifests its pure qualities in our experience of ourselves, as the deep treasures within our souls. We call these pure qualities of Being the aspects of Essence. Each is a perfect manifestation of Being.

Our universe, in its totality, is the way Being presents itself to our experience. In this retreat, we will be working with and exploring an essential aspect that is one of the wonderful possibilities that human beings can experience and be. We will investigate a particular manifestation of this universe, which also is a particular manifestation of ourselves, of who we are. In itself, this aspect is a wonder, with its own beauty; but when it is realized, it also adds beauty and radiance to everything in our world.

For me, talking about and working with this aspect feels like the universe having fun. This quality of Being is an amazing thing to talk about and delve into. So for us to work hard to get enlightened or get free as we move into this exploration would be laborious and miss the point. What we will be doing instead is participating with the universe in the universe enjoying its own beauty. Why not?

When the manifestations of the universe are seen as essential aspects, each one is perceived on its own as magnificent. Each is also seen to have both profound and practical value. Being beautiful and being useful go together. And part of the beauty is the recognition of the practical functioning of the universe. We can see that the universe functions in a way that is precise and aesthetically appealing.

In our work here, we will try to penetrate the veils of our usual beliefs and fixations about what we know, veils that make everything appear old, stale, and boring. "Oh, yes, I know this. This is the world; this is how things work," we smugly think. We all grow up believing that we see the universe as it actually is; we do not suspect that our perception is largely determined by our accumulated beliefs, feelings, past knowledge, and conditioning. How the universe actually is and how it really functions is hidden from our perception. We need to penetrate

our familiar knowingness and open ourselves to the unknown, to the mystery. Then, when we see the mystery of the universe in a fresh way, it is possible to see that the way it functions is exquisite.

Learning about Being—studying it, exploring it, realizing it, or connecting with it—is not a matter of trying to get rid of problems or trying to get somewhere because you desperately need to. Rather, if we recognize that the universe is truly a wonder to explore, this exploration can become the most enjoyable activity possible. It is enjoyable and fulfilling because we are doing nothing but perceiving, experiencing, and learning about what we are, and about reality and the truth of the universe. Seeing how things really are is seeing the beauty and magnificence of existence.

Each aspect of Essence has many characteristics and qualities. When I refer to an aspect by a certain name, I do not mean to restrict its meaning only to the quality described by that particular label. For example, the aspect of Loving-kindness has in it the qualities of warmth, gentleness, softness, sorrow for the presence of suffering, a natural inclination to help, empathy, sympathy, and so on. Some aspects, such as the one we will study now—Brilliancy—have more primary characteristics than others, which means that there are many ways to recognize these aspects. We will begin today with the quality most central to this aspect: intelligence.

Usually, we think of intelligence as something useful, something handy, something that helps. While that is true, it is also true that intelligence is the exquisiteness of Being and its beauty. It is the exquisiteness of our Being that makes us intelligent. When you perceive how Being manifests in its various dimensions, you realize that intelligence is always part of its manifestation. The exquisiteness of its appearance points to the majesty of intelligence, a complete and awesome presence.

The quality of intelligence is intrinsic to all of Being, to all of Essence, to all of the universe; it is not limited to this particular aspect. The aspect of intelligence is like a distillation or focusing of a general quality of the universe in one specific, precise, exact, very clearly delineated presence. You feel it as the pure presence of intelligence. It is absolutely that quality; the intelligence is in clear relief. Other aspects of Essence have intelligence; for example, the aspect of Love has

intelligence in it—but that is not one of its dominant qualities, which are sweetness and softness. That is why I think of each aspect as a Platonic form, the prototype of a specific quality. Each aspect is the essence of that quality.

Usually, we think that some people are intelligent, some are not so intelligent, some are more intelligent than others, and so on. We are aware that there are grades and variations of intelligence that can be measured and that may relate to the development of the physical brain. However, I'm not talking about intelligence as a capacity of the brain. I see the aspect of intelligence as the living consciousness that accounts for intelligent functioning, any kind of functioning. Most likely, the more a person actualizes this essential aspect and the more it affects the brain, the more gray matter is activated. I don't know the exact relationship between the essential aspect and the gray matter. But what I want to emphasize is that there is something more intrinsic about intelligence than the presence of gray matter, the cells themselves, or our mental faculties.

What is intelligence? When we recognize that someone is intelligent, what does that mean? Does it mean that her mind is bright and transparent? Does it mean that she can think clearly? Does it mean that she makes good decisions? Does it mean that her perceptions are precise and accurate? Does it mean that she functions efficiently? Does it mean that she has a high IQ? Each of these characteristics is a manifestation of intelligence, or a functioning that reflects intelligence. But what is intelligence itself? As we continue we will see that intelligence is in fact a specific quality of essential experience. It is not a by-product of the brain's functioning but a manifestation of Being itself.

When we focus on intelligence experientially—that is, as a psychological process, we find it impossible to describe. We don't really know what intelligence is. We normally only think of its products—a good idea, a good insight, clear perception, an intelligent action. We know what an intelligent action is, what an intelligent solution is—but what is intelligence itself? What is it that makes the solution an intelligent solution or the action an intelligent action? We say, "Well, it's effective." That is true; there is effectiveness and economy in intelligence. But even more significant than those is the presence of elegance.

It is well known in scientific research that even though efficiency and accuracy are significant measurements of the usefulness of a solution or theory,

what establishes the presence of intelligence in the idea is beauty. You see the presence of intelligence in an action when there is grace—an elegance that gives the action an exquisite quality. Yes, the action is clear and specific and does the job; but more than that, it is an action that reveals beauty and elegance, like a flash of lightning brilliantly illuminating a landscape.

This element comes into play when there are several possible scientific theories about a certain subject, each of which could be true. In the absence of experimental verification, one way to decide which theory is more likely to be correct is to consider elegance. It is assumed that the more elegant the theory is and the more beautiful its formulations, the closer it is to the truth.

But elegance is a characteristic of intelligence, which means that we have not yet described exactly what intelligence itself is. We supposedly measure it with intelligence quotients; but what is actually measured is not intelligence itself but its capacities, the products of intelligence. What is measured is how fast you think or how good you are at making connections. What we want to study is the specific element that is common to intelligent action, intelligent thinking, intelligent communication, intelligent research. What is it that makes all of these intelligent?

As I said, intelligence is a basic quality of the universe, and a fundamental quality of Being and of the human soul. While intelligence exists in every aspect, it is very specifically, very precisely revealed in the aspect we are working with. You wouldn't call this aspect the Love aspect. There is love in it, but referring to it as the aspect of intelligence is more accurate. Yes, there is clarity in it, but intelligence describes the quality better. And there is discrimination in it, but the primary flavor here is intelligence. You see, you can have clarity without the quality of intelligence, you can have discrimination