

January 1960

READING 1

ALL GROUPS

PART 1

We are at one of those stages in history when all traditional beliefs are in the melting pot, and thinking people want to solve for themselves the riddle of existence.

Q. 1 What is it they chiefly need?

As always throughout history, the answer is '*Know Thyself*'.

But there are dozens of wrong ways in which these two simple words can be taken.

Q. 2 Why is it so important, and in what sense must one 'Know oneself'?

Four stages:

First: Get rid of the false picture – 'Imaginary I'.

Second: See oneself as one really is – a mass of conflicting 'I's.

Third: See oneself as one could be – unified, fully conscious of oneself.

Fourth: Realize that, if one were unified, one would be in contact with reality on a larger scale – 'Real' or 'Permanent I'. It is this to which the words 'Remember yourself' chiefly refer.

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The System uses the word '*Being*' to cover all that one *is*, as contrasted with the word '*Knowledge*' which covers all that one *knows*. It makes a clear distinction between *Understanding* and *Knowledge*, since Understanding is defined as the resultant of *both* Being and Knowledge. If one wants to increase one's Understanding, then, one must work to increase both Being and Knowledge. The outer circle of humanity is called the *Circle of No Understanding* because the importance of Being and the possibility of Change of Being is unknown or forgotten there.

Q. 3 What does a flash of Understanding feel like?

It feels like illumination and is accompanied by a feeling of At-one-ment.

Q. 4 What can it illuminate?

First, it makes one understand what one already knows. Secondly, it can light up the next step and show one what one needs to know next.

Q. 5 In order to get these flashes of Understanding, how do we work to change our Being?

Firstly, we try as often as possible to be aware of our Being, to take the limitations and the possibilities of one's Being into account in all the day's activities. During the coming session we shall try to study methods of 'Work on Being'.

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One of the most ancient fragments of writing describes all this in language we can understand and apply today:

A Chaldean Oracle

(Porphyry wrote of these oracles as old, but how old?)

Yes! there is THAT which is the end of understanding!
 Yes! there is THAT which you shall only understand
 At the mind's flowering time,
 When she shall leaf and bud and burst
 Into her fullest inflorescence of fine flowers.

But should you try to trammel up that mind
 And bind her,
 Confine her
 And strive to turn her inwards,
 Straining to understand THAT as merely something,
 You shall not understand it.

For there is a power of the mind's prime
 That rises like a sun, shining forth in all directions,
 And flashing with rays of thought at one with feeling.

Yet not with vehemence;
 Oh, not with vehemence strive to understand
 That end of understanding!
 No! not with the wide extended flame
 Of wide extended mind that measures all things –
 All things save One!
 For that very end of understanding
 Alone mind measures not.

Indeed there is no need of strain in understanding THAT;
 Hold still the vision of your soul in purity,
 Turned from all else;
 Make but your little mind
 Empty of all things else,
 Attentive to that only end, with but one aim,
 The aim to reach that end of understanding,
For THAT subsists beyond the mind.

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Let us try now to think on a larger scale. At certain points in history, it has been extremely important that the leaders of thought in the outer circle should understand a particular thing above all others. Schools have been accumulators or storehouses of right ideas and true points

of view, and at those moments in history when the outer circle had to understand something very important before further progress could be made, a School has sometimes been present which possessed the clue and knew how to impart it.

An example: For fourteen centuries the geocentric picture of the universe had been a great bar to understanding. Though in the third century BC Aristarchus of Samos (the Geometer who first made accurate measurements of the size and distance of the moon) maintained that the earth revolved round the sun, all the other Greek philosophers, and later the Egyptian, Ptolemy, maintained the contrary. What made Copernicus in the sixteenth century prove the truth and make possible all that followed? The inner history of that is so instructive to us now that you ought to hear the paper that embodies the evidence of the probable influence of a contemporary School.

Q. 6 What similar idea on a cosmic scale would it be most important for contemporary thought to understand?

The System says that 'Knowledge begins and ends with the idea of Cosmoses'. But though you already know quite a lot about this idea, you will certainly agree that it is very difficult to *understand*. This is chiefly because it is hard to understand what is meant by the words 'Time is different in different cosmoses', for understanding of this requires change of Being.

Q. 7 What wrong ideas have taken root at the present time which are the chief barrier to further progress?

Once some wrong idea takes root in the outer circle, it is terribly hard to get rid of. On the authority of Galen, they believed for fourteen centuries that arteries and veins contained air, not blood, until Harvey had a good look; and it was many years even then before he could convince the die-hards.

It took twenty-three centuries (from Hippocrates to Pasteur) to get rid of the false idea of 'spontaneous generation' in one small field of Biology – though (if we substitute the word 'accidental' for 'spontaneous') ideas equally erroneous are current in other fields of Science today.

It may help to think about the question of what wrong ideas chiefly bar progress today, if we conclude by reminding you of these four fundamental sentences:

Each cosmos is an animate and intelligent being.

Each cosmos is born, lives and dies.

From one cosmos alone, it is impossible to understand all the laws of the Universe; but three cosmoses taken together include in themselves all the laws of the Universe.

And remember that 'Time is different in different cosmoses'.

Finally,

Q. 8 How can we ourselves, in this School, understand the idea of Cosmoses enough to be ready (if occasion arise) to have some influence on the ideas of the people who direct current thought?

Q. 9 What evidence would need to be assembled, and how could it be best presented?

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