

March 1960

READING 6

ALL GROUPS

RELATION OF IV to III

PART 1

We have reached the most important point in our study of the Seven Principles, for it is the point at which we can begin to do something, begin to make a change. But we must be especially careful to understand what it is we are trying to do. Upon that understanding will depend our whole future. To make sure, let us take a look at the human brain. That indeed is very difficult to depict, for the brain is a most complicated three-dimensional universe confined in a small space.

But let us think of it first in a very simple way, as consisting of a stem with a bulb at the top end surrounded by a reflector. The stem is called the *brain-stem*. The 'reflector' is called the *cerebral hemispheres* filled with white matter consisting of fibres connecting every part of the thin outer sheath of nerve cells (or 'grey matter') with every other part.

The first thing we notice is that the chief difference between the brain of man and that of animals lies in the great size and complication of his *reflector*. By virtue of this he *can become* a self-observer, a self-knower. The biologist, de Chardin, put it this way: 'Admittedly the animal knows. *But it cannot know that it knows*: that is quite certain. ... In consequence it is denied access to a whole domain of reality in which we can move freely. ... Because we are *reflective* we are not only different, but quite other... It is not a matter of change of degree but a change of nature. ...'

Notice, however, two cautionary points: first, *reflection* does not mean *thinking* but something more like reflecting light. Secondly, de Chardin takes too much for granted. Because we are so *made* that we *can* be reflective, it does not mean that we do it. That requires long discipline and the 'know-how'.

To enable us to understand what being 'reflective' would mean in this sense, I have traced out a simple composite picture of the human brain (in coronal section – Figure 1– taken from a number of text books. A, B, C & D are the parts of the brain-stem (all included in Principle III):

- A. Spinal Cord.
- B. Hind-brain with its vital centres.
- C. Hypothalamus which, through the pituitary body, governs the chemical regulation of the organism.
- D. Is the 'great central head-quarters' to which all impressions from within, or from without, are brought. This could be the 'place of power', the 'place of light' in the Third Principle, but in us there is little power and little light.

Now take a look at E, the reflector. Anyone who has tried to be absolutely quiet and simply reflect himself and his surroundings, will realize that our mind (for the frontal part of this reflector is all we know and call 'mind') – this reflector, is doing everything in the world but reflect. Every group of impressions is at once converted into train after train of associational thoughts (along the white matter – the fibres in the picture). It is as if we possessed a lantern and

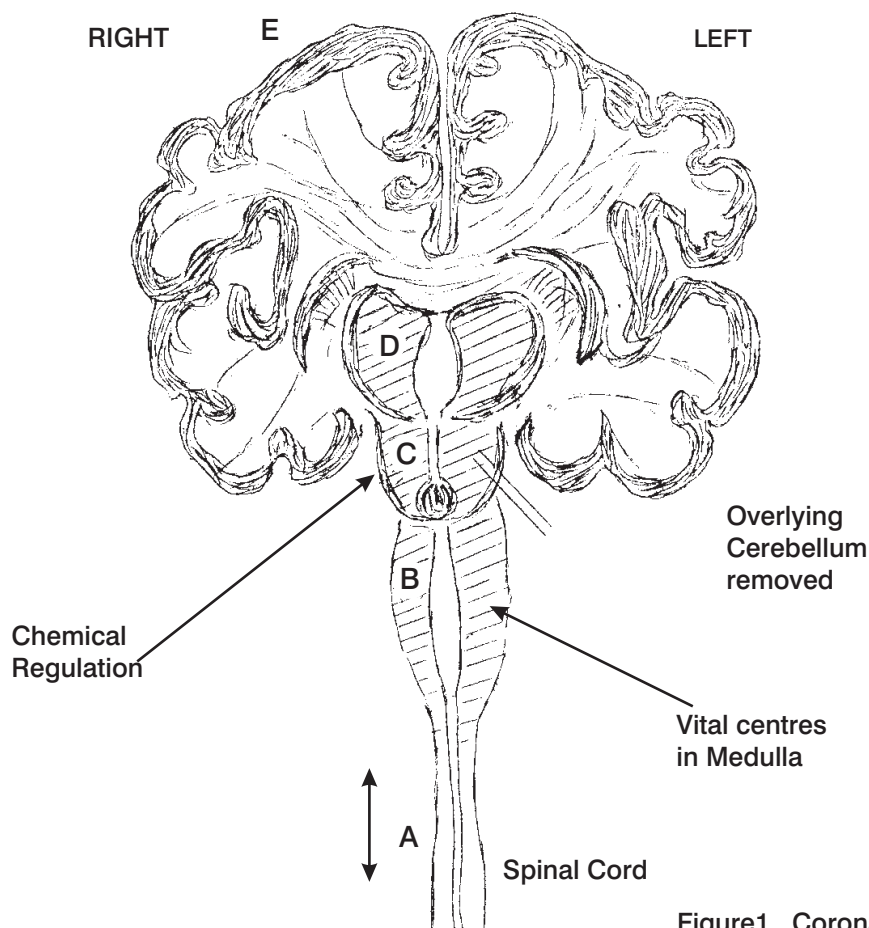


Figure1. Coronal section of Brain

a screen, but the lantern is dull and the screen is continually in movement. All the activities of life tend only to separate the reflector from the source of light.

What are the stages? First, make the reflector reflect – (see Figure 2) where the double-headed arrows are the ‘lines of attention.’ Note that the reflector would then reflect both the outside and the inside world – only one effort called self-remembering, self-reflecting or self-knowing.

Soon, however, we find this is not enough. There’s nothing much to see on the screen; the reflection is very dim – a poor show! What then? We must turn on the power, we need more light.

But the beauty of the situation is that the very act of polishing the mirror and of remembering the source of light will gradually produce the power and direct it to the right place. It doesn’t matter what one is doing, *one must know one is doing it*. One must also spend at least as much time in the day polishing the mirror as one does in washing and adorning the body.

Finally, if one practises self-reflecting at a time when the energy is there in the upper brain-stem, namely when one is emotionally roused, then the mirror will have something to reflect – very lively pictures will appear on the screen!

The whole process is well described in a translation of a Sufi work: (*The Mystic Rose*, F. L. Cartwright, Heinemann, 1925):

... And the Sheikh having entered his private room returned from it bearing a Magic Mirror, which he placed before the Disciple, saying: ‘Look therein, and tell me what thou seest.’

The Disciple gazed into the Mirror and exclaimed: ‘I see nothing therein but a Chaos of shapeless forms!’

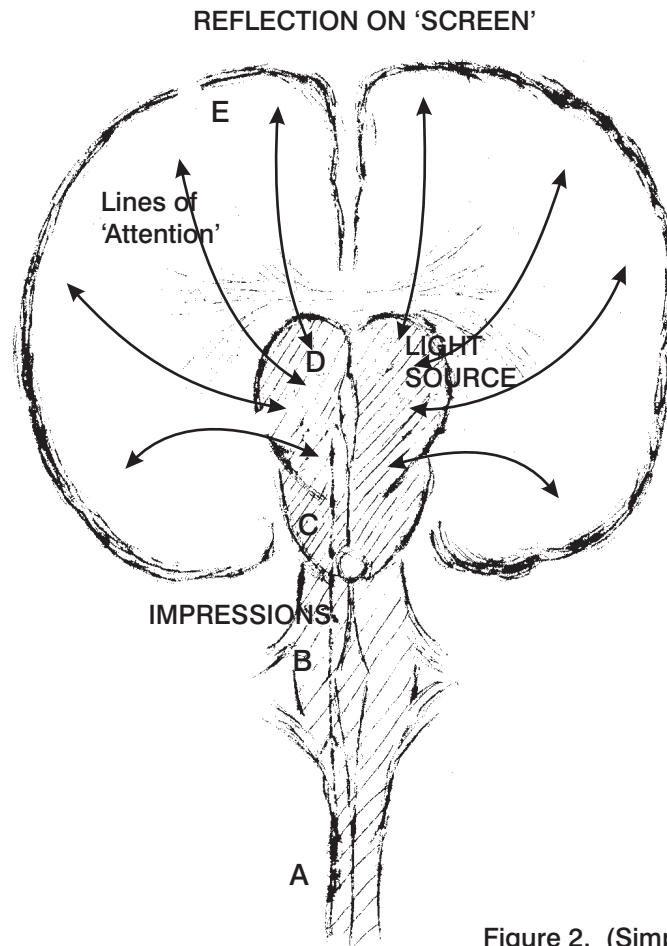


Figure 2. (Simplified Form)

The Sheikh replied to him to continue and gaze, and presently to the Disciple the Chaos seemed to concentrate itself into a form, and by degrees the form assumed clearer outlines, and then two eyes appeared, and the shape of a head, and the curve of a lip, until finally the image was complete, and the reflection of the face was perfect in the Mirror.

Then the Disciple exclaimed: 'Indeed, now I see my face perfectly reflected in the Mirror.'

The Sheikh said: 'Even so the Eternal gazing into the Mirror of Imperfection manifesteth Himself by slow degrees, for the Mirror being imperfect, cannot grasp the Perfect Beauty of the Face at once. This is the Mystery of Time, which deriveth from the Mystery of the Desire of Manifestation, for were the Mirror perfect the Manifestation would be instantaneous, which the mind cannot conceive, and the Eternal be Eternal in Himself, stagnant and unmanifested.'

The Disciple, still gazing into the Mirror, said: 'O Master! if I gaze longer in the Mirror shall I see more perfectly?'

The Sheikh, taking the Mirror away from his Disciple, said to him: 'The reflection cannot be more perfect than the object which is reflected. The condition of thy Soul allows not the Mirror to show thee more than thou canst understand. When thou has trodden the Path unto the end and reached the Aim, then will the Mirror disclose to thee the Glory of Paradise, and the beauty of the Angels, and the Archangels, and the Mysteries which lie yet beyond them.'

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PART 2

The late Sir Charles Sherrington, surely one of the 'least fanciful of men,' has a purple passage in *Man on his Nature* (pp. 176–178) based on the symbolism of illumination of what he called the 'roof-brain' and we have called the 'mirror':

A scheme of lines and nodal points, gathered together at one end into a great ravelled knot, the brain, and at the other trailing off to a sort of stalk, the spinal cord. Imagine the activity in this shown by little points of light. Of these some stationary flash rhythmically, faster or slower. Others are travelling points, streaming in serial trains at various speeds. The rhythmic stationary lights lie at the nodes. The nodes are both goals whither converge, and junctions whence diverge, the lines of travelling lights. The lines and nodes where the lights are, do not remain, taken together, the same even a single moment. There are at any time nodes and lines where lights are not.

Suppose we choose the hour of deep sleep. Then only in some sparse and out of the way places are nodes flashing and trains of light-points running. Such places indicate local activity still in progress. At one such place we can watch the behaviour of a group of lights perhaps a myriad strong. They are pursuing a mystic and recurrent manoeuvre as if of some incantational dance. They are superintending the beating of the heart and the state of the arteries so that while we sleep the circulation of the blood is what it should be. The great knotted headpiece of the whole sleeping system lies for the most part dark, and quite especially so the roof-brain. Occasionally at places in it lighted points flash or move but soon subside. Such lighted points and moving trains of lights are mainly far in the outskirts, and wink slowly and travel slowly. At intervals even a gush of sparks wells up and sends a train down the spinal cord, only to fail to arouse it. Where however, the stalk joins the headpiece, there goes forward in a limited field a remarkable display. A dense constellation of some thousands of nodal points burst out every few seconds into a short phase of rhythmical flashing. At first a few lights, then more, increasing in rate and number with a deliberate crescendo to a climax, then to decline and die away. After due pause the efflorescence is repeated. With each such rhythmic outburst goes a discharge of trains of travelling lights along the stalk and out of it altogether into a number of nerve-branches. What is this doing? It manages the taking of our breath the while we sleep.

Should we continue to watch the scheme we should observe after a time an impressive change which suddenly accrues. In the great head-end which has been mostly darkness spring up myriads of twinkling stationary lights and myriads of trains of moving lights of many different directions. It is as though activity from one of those local places which continued restless in the darkened main-mass suddenly spread far and wide and invaded all. The great topmost sheet of the mass, that where hardly a light had twinkled or moved, becomes now a sparkling field of rhythmic flashing points with trains of travelling sparks hurrying hither and thither. The brain is waking and with it the mind is returning. It is as if the Milky Way entered upon some cosmic dance. Swiftly the head-mass becomes an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern, always a meaningful pattern though never an abiding one; a shifting harmony of subpatterns. Now as the waking body rouses, subpatterns of this great harmony of activity stretch down into the unlit tracks of the stalk piece of the scheme. Strings of flashing and travelling sparks engage the lengths of it. This means that the body is up and rises to meet its waking day.

Dissolving pattern after dissolving pattern will, the long day through, without remission melt into and succeed each other in this scheme by which for the moment we

figure the brain and spinal cord. Especially, and with complexity incredible, in that part which we were thinking of, the roof-brain. Only after day is done will it quiet down, lapse half-way to extinction, and fall again asleep. Then at last, so far at least as the roof-brain, motor acts cease. The brain is released from the waking day and marshals its factors for its motor acts no more.

DISCUSSION. Questions:

Does this picture of the brain make any difference to your view of your aim in doing the daily exercise?

Can you suggest any ways of bringing the reflector and the source of light into better relationship?

Can you see any new meaning in the following parable? (Matthew 25, v. 1–13):

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him.' Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, 'Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.'

And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he answered and said, 'Verily I say unto you, I know you not.' Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

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