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A MAN'S NAME IS LEGION

INTRODUCTION

One of the great differences between pseudo (external) religion and Real Religion is in the understanding that each man is not *one* but many. No thought of this fact ever enters into any of the external forms of religion that we know today; yet it is implicit in the inner practice of all of them. When the Moslem constantly repeats the name of Allah; when the monk at Mount Athos carries out the continuous internal prayer; when the Brahmin repeats a mantra; it is all in recognition of the fact that there is One who never changes, whereas he himself is always changing.

On this matter our System, the Christian Gospels, and the Holy Tradition – to which our practice of ‘meditation’ belongs – are in complete agreement.

SECTION 1

Hear first of all the original account from the System as we were given it (November, 1915):

Very often, almost at every talk, G. returned to the absence of unity in man.

‘One of man’s important mistakes,’ he said, ‘one which must be remembered, is his illusion in regard to his I.

‘Man such as we know him, the ‘man-machine’, the man who cannot ‘do’, and with whom and through whom everything ‘happens’, cannot have a permanent and single I. His I changes as quickly as his thoughts, feelings and moods, and he makes a profound mistake in considering himself always one and the same person; in reality he is *always a different person*, not the one he was a moment ago.

Man has no permanent and unchangeable I. Every thought, every mood, every desire, every sensation, says ‘I’. And in each case it seems to be taken for granted that this I belongs to the Whole, to the whole man, and that a thought, a desire, or an aversion is expressed by this Whole. In actual fact there is no foundation whatever for this assumption. Man’s every thought and desire appears and lives quite separately and independently of the Whole. And the Whole never expresses itself, for the simple reason that it exists, as such, only physically as a thing, and in the abstract as a concept. Man has no individual I. But there are, instead, hundreds and thousands of separate small I’s, very often entirely unknown to one another, never coming into contact, or, on the contrary, hostile to each other, mutually exclusive and incompatible. Each minute, each moment, man is saying or thinking ‘I’. And each time his I is different. Just now it was a thought, now it is a desire, now a sensation, now another thought, and so on, endlessly. *Man is a plurality.* Man’s name is legion.

‘The alternation of I’s, their continual obvious struggle for supremacy, is controlled by accidental external influences. Warmth, sunshine, fine weather, immediately call up a whole group of I’s. Cold, fog, rain, call up another group of I’s, other associations, other feelings, other actions. There is nothing in man able to control this change of I’s, chiefly because man does not notice, or know of it; he lives always in the last I. Some I’s, of course, are stronger than others. But it is not their own conscious strength; they have been created by the strength of accidents or mechanical external stimuli. Education, imitation, reading,

the hypnotism of religion, caste, and traditions, or the glamour of new slogans, create very strong I's in man's personality, which dominate whole series of other, weaker I's. But their strength is the strength of the 'rolls' in the centres. And all I's making up a man's personality have the same origin as these 'rolls'; they are the results of external influences; and both are set in motion and controlled by fresh external influences.

'Man has no individuality. He has no single, big I. Man is divided into a multiplicity of small I's.

'And each separate small I is able to call itself by the name of the Whole, to act in the name of the Whole, to agree or disagree, to give promises, to make decisions, with which another I or the Whole will have to deal. This explains why people so often make decisions and so seldom carry them out. A man decides to get up early beginning from the following day. One I, or a group of I's, decide this. But getting up is the business of another I who entirely disagrees with the decision and may even know absolutely nothing about it. Of course the man will again go on sleeping in the morning and in the evening he will again decide to get up early. In some cases this may assume very unpleasant consequences for a man. A small accidental I may promise something, not to itself, but to someone else at a certain moment simply out of vanity or for amusement. Then it disappears, but the man, that is, the whole combination of other I's who are quite innocent of this, may have to pay for it all his life. It is the tragedy of the human being that any small I has the right to sign cheques and promissory notes and the man, that is, the Whole, has to meet them. People's whole lives often consist in paying off the promissory notes of small accidental I's.

'Eastern teachings contain various allegorical pictures which endeavour to portray the nature of man's being from this point of view.

'Thus, in one teaching, man is compared to a house in which there is a multitude of servants but no master and no steward. The servants have all forgotten their duties; no one wants to do what he ought; everyone tries to be master, if only for a moment; and, in this kind of disorder, the house is threatened with grave danger. The only chance of salvation is for a group of the more sensible servants to meet together and elect a *temporary* steward, that is, a *deputy steward*. This *deputy steward* can then put the other servants in their places, and make each do his own work; the cook in the kitchen, the coachman in the stables, the gardener in the garden, and so on. In this way the 'house' can be got ready for the arrival of the real steward who will, in his turn, prepare it for the arrival of the master.

'The comparison of a man to a house awaiting the arrival of the master is frequently met with in Eastern teachings which have preserved traces of ancient knowledge, and, as we know, the subject appears under various forms in many of the parables in the Gospels.'

(*Fragments* pp. 58–61)

SECTION 2

At Step 5 on the Ladder one may have increasing realisation that the whole Story of the Gospels can be taken psychologically as an account of the Many 'I's in a man. The Twelve Apostles (including Judas), the disciples, the fickle crowd, the scribes and the pharisees, the publicans and the sinners; the Mary and Martha, the devils who are cast out; Pontius Pilate, the High Priest; the crucified thieves; all these exist embryonically in separate 'I's in each of us, and all are related in some way to the 'Real I', the Eternal figure of Christ.

Many of the stories and parables, too, only attain a transforming power when they are taken in this way. The Centurion, the Woman of Samaria, the Prodigal, Son, Dives and Lazarus, the Unjust Steward, the Husbandmen in the Vineyard, from all these we can learn something about our Many

'I's. And when we see the same 'I's in other people we begin to lose the sense of separateness!

But perhaps the passage closest to the Eastern story of the house and the servants is the following from St. Luke: (Ch. 12: v. 35–48):

Let your loins be girded about, and your *lights* burning;
And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.

Blessed *are* those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto Him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of meat in due season?

Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens; and to eat and drink, and to be drunken;

The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for *him*, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not *himself*, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many *stripes*.

But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few *stripes*. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

SECTION 3

Though the Shankaracharya's whole System is based upon the Realization of 'Real I', the Atman, he did not in my hearing use the term 'Many I's', but spoke instead of 'many conflicting wills', as in the following talk:

Realized Man and common man have different types of will. Common man has, many, many wills. Realized man has one Will, and unless that is accomplished he doesn't embark on a second one. The measure is that very few wills are capable of completion; Realized man has real Will and can accomplish it; common man has different wills at different times and most of them are never fulfilled.

One can see that 'consciousness' and 'will' are different aspects of the same thing – Unity (one Consciousness, one 'I', one Will) or plurality (Many 'I's, and therefore many conflicting wills).

Frequently since hearing him I have had sudden and unexpected realisations that the symbolism of his stories and illustrations have inner meanings expressive of the 'Many 'I's' in a man. The following is a notable example:

Once a King announced that he would give his kingdom to any person who would come to him by 4 o'clock. All the people heard it and thought it a good idea to go and meet him at 4 o'clock and get the Kingdom. But what the King did was this. In his capital city he put beautiful shops containing everything that can be had, jewellery, gold, silks, toys and everything that anybody would want to have, and at every gate and in every quarter of the city there were people to give away all these things without payment, all free.

Thousands of people started out to come and get the Kingdom which the King had promised to give away, but they let themselves be persuaded to go to the shops and be given free all that they wanted and just enjoy themselves. So they lost themselves among the golden ornaments, silks and jewels, the beautiful clothes. But one man did not listen to anyone of those people. He went straight without letting anyone dissuade him and he just went through and met the King at the appointed time and demanded the kingdom, which the King duly gave him. The moment he took over the Government, he issued an edict to arrest all those people who were taking those things without paying for them, and put them to useful work.

The realisation that all this is to happen inside oneself at two periods of the day is, for me, of great assistance in the meditation. At the beginning a few 'I's (the servants who realise the chaotic situation in the house) get to hear of the meditation and eventually bring the man along to the Initiation – some other 'I's doing their best to oppose this step, while the vast majority remain quite indifferent. The Initiation ceremony is designed to extend the interest and desire to meditate among as many of them as possible. Even so, for a long time, when one sits down to meditate one is aware that only a small minority persistently try to keep one at it, while all sorts of other 'I's are interested in other things. But this state of affairs must not be allowed to persist. The sensible group of 'I's must elect a Deputy Steward who will be the man that doesn't listen to any of them and goes straight through to the King at 4 o'clock, to get the Kingdom. And as soon as he gets a taste of it he must 'issue an edict to arrest all those 'I's who are taking things without paying for them, and put them to useful work'.

The Keertan music is meant to stir up all the inert and lazy 'I's in the Instinctive and Emotional rooms who would otherwise never be reached by the meditation.

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