

18 February 1963

PART OF THE CONVERSATION ON MONDAY, 11TH FEBRUARY

(Work Party)

Q. Does whether we are awake or not depend upon the middle compartment?

Dr. R. Yes, the middle compartment refers to the nervous system of the individual upon whose sensory apparatus impressions are falling at a given time. It can be entirely unconscious – the impressions are falling and he goes through all sorts of actions as a result without knowing anything about it; or it may involve other centres – impressions may wake him up; he may be conscious of their *significance* and his actions may be appropriate to that significance. *It all depends on that middle compartment.* But if that middle compartment is *integrated* so that a person is *more conscious* and *does not fluctuate all the time*, then what impressions he will select and attend to will be selected by him from a given situation and the appropriate action taken. So that middle compartment is very important; it is the only thing that really we can work on consistently. Situations arise, very often too late to do anything about them; but if we work consistently on our *Being* – what *we are* – then what we take from the situation will be more profitable – it follows naturally.

Mrs. F. (room) This seems very wonderful to me, and shows the difference in people's worlds, because if they select one sort of impression it is quite a different world from what someone else lives in.

Dr. R. Yes, I agree. We have started by speaking quietly about the middle compartment, but of course the differences possible are infinite between a person of no receptivity and a fully Realized Man.

Q. Are you saying in one case the first compartment can be Active or Passive or Neutralizing?

Dr. R. I am starting first of all with the *middle* compartment, and I am saying that a person may be in an utterly inert state, unreceptive; or he may be in an active state, and everything in the environment which shows activity will be added to by him; or something quite different – he may get the *inner vibrations*, the *emotional content* of the situation and *increase it*.

But of course *situations* themselves are different – sometimes very active vibrations, sometimes a very heavy atmosphere, and sometimes they have a specially emotional content; so in each of these his sense organs will be taking different things – from different situations the *intake* will be different.

Q. So what is in the middle compartment goes a long way to deciding what goes in to the first one?

Dr. R. Yes, we are usually too late to decide what comes in; things happen so quickly in life. But if we are *working* on the middle compartment, then we can be confident that we will get the best out of whatever situation arises; and this gives a strange kind of feeling of *serenity* and *confidence*.

Q. What can you do if you feel you are unreceptive – you don't seem to have enough energy to get out of it?

Dr. R. Well, we have to recognise two possible causes of being unreceptive: We may be unreceptive because we are absolutely worn out, in which case it is no good for pressure to be applied, for it will only tire you more. We have to tell the difference between what is just laziness (when strong measures are needed!) or real tiredness (we should know ourselves well enough to know that), so that we can avoid the mistakes like those made, for instance, by my profession. If Doctors could recognise when the non-response of the patient is due to torpor – when active measures are needed to get him out of it, or when it is due to exhaustion of his reserves of energy, in which case he has to be treated very gently and an operation might kill him! There are moments when you have to take violent measures quickly, but there are moments when any violence can kill; and owing to the lack of understanding about the Three Forces they have only their own past experience to rely on, and if they have not met such a situation before they are at a loss, or may make a fatal mistake. This happens all too often. How nice it would be if one could learn to taste the characteristics of different combinations of the Gunas so as to size up such a situation.

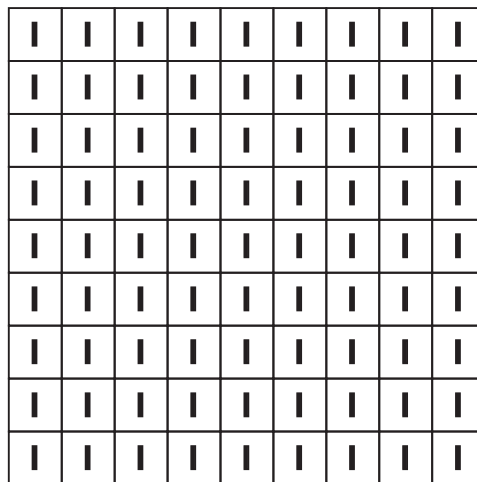
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Now, I want to interest you in this middle compartment from a slightly different point of view, but still on the subject of the ‘many becoming One’, because that *integration* is one of the most important aspects of what can be done about that compartment. I would like to introduce it in this way:

From time to time increasingly one has noticed (especially just after the meditation) a strange but rather familiar sensation – difficult to put into words. One sees one consists of all these different ‘I’s, but above and around one is quite another ‘I’; *one is not alone*. At these moments one feels that one is in the presence of a *bigger Being*, and at one time lately this was so vivid that I recalled a diagram which I had once seen – I did not know where. I ran it to earth, and it comes from a meeting before I met the Work, in 1930 (only two or three people in the room were there at the time), when Mr. Ouspensky was speaking about five or six different meanings to the word ‘I’ as one went from ground-floor level to full development. We will put it up serially like this: (Put up diagram in stages as referred to in the Reading):

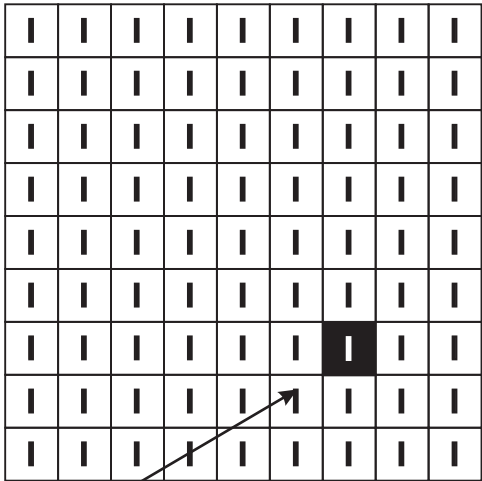
When you begin to know yourself through the Work you realise that you just consist of ‘Many ‘I’s’ – no one ‘I’ there for any length of time, no particular ‘I’ on which you can rely in a crisis; one ‘I’ making promises, and other ‘I’s’ having to pay for them. (Figure 1)

Well then, he says that when the decision to Work is made you set up a ‘watchman’ (we use that word), and one of these ‘I’s’ is on duty as watchman as often as possible (Figure 2). When there is a hint of danger this ‘I’ takes up his station, and that



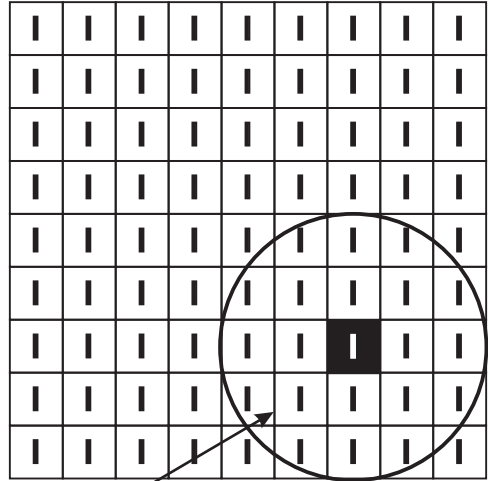
‘Many ‘I’s’

Figure 1



'Watchman'

Figure 2



'Deputy Steward'

Figure 3

really is the beginning of a *new feeling of 'I'*. You try to have that one there – not admitting all comers in the way – with thoughts and feelings of being a little selective at dangerous moments.

Now this 'I' has a number of friends and acquaintances, and it was from these friends and acquaintances that Magnetic Centre was formed that brought you to look for the Work, and this big group of 'I's has now to become Deputy Steward with the help of a School. (Figure 3)

The meaning of the expression 'Deputy Steward' varies with your position on the Ladder, but first the *School* has to act as Deputy Steward. Later, when you get a Deputy Steward of your own – during the Fourth Stage of the Ladder – these 'I's crystallize and become permanent so that a man on the Fourth Stage of the Ladder does not fall down, does not depart from his Centre of Gravity.

At a certain stage, however, you become aware of something which knows some *bigger feeling of 'I'* – that knows what is right, what is wrong; and the first thing you become aware of is that circle round the 'Many 'I's', which in the story of the house and the servants is called 'Steward' (Figure 4). Steward knows the *Will* of the Master and can gradually set the house in order so that the Master will come and live there. Of course, each of these steps comes in degrees. At first it is very intangible, difficult to recognise; later it gives a

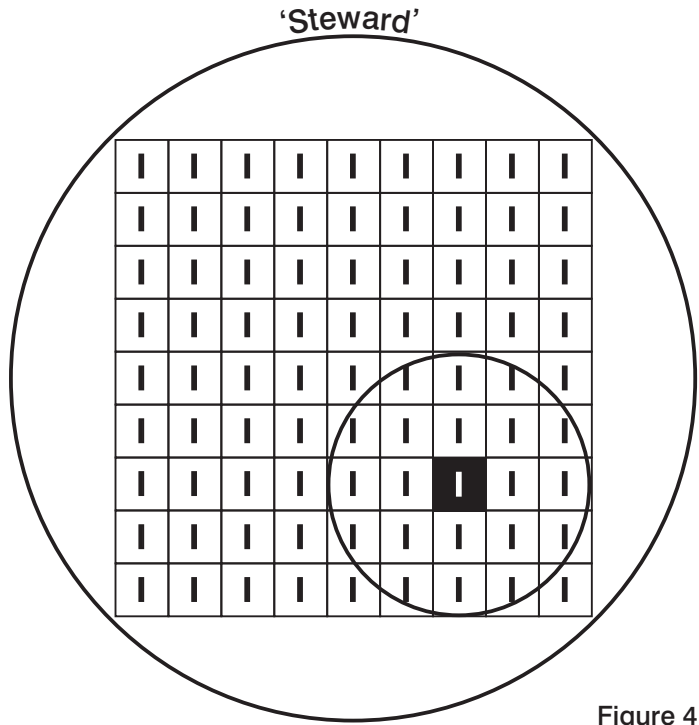


Figure 4

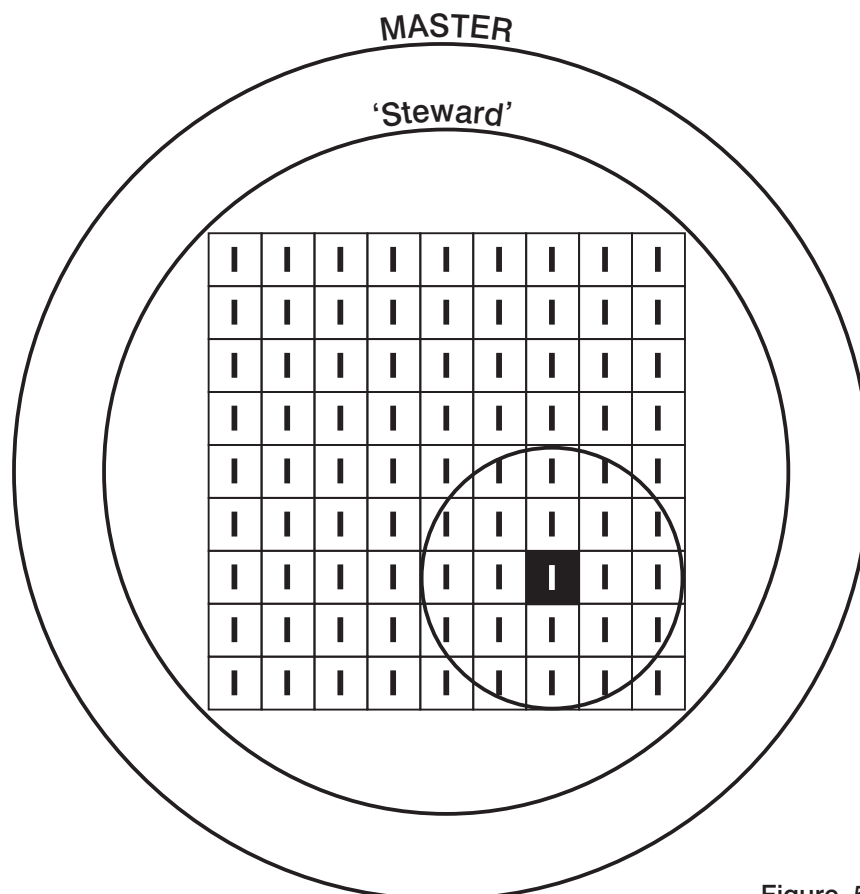


Figure 5

feeling which in religious language is felt as 'Guardian Angel'; and then finally near the top of the Ladder, when a power – something miraculous and Divine – is felt as the Master Himself. (Figure 5)

Now these things at first are felt only at very important moments – sometimes only in moments of life and death – and one meets with quite a number of accounts of that strange feeling of not being alone in people who have been pushed almost to extremity. I don't know if you have read the account of the famous climber – Hermann Buhl – who performed the feat (which perhaps will always remain unique) of going to the top of the 26,000 foot mountain, Nanga Parbat, alone. He gives a vivid account of this very feeling. Having used up all his energy in getting to the top and down a few hundred feet, darkness suddenly descended and he had to spend the night in that hazardous spot:

It was a stance with room for both feet on it; ... I should have to spend the night standing up ... I had a rock face, angled at from 50–60 degrees as a back rest. I could have done with my heavy pullover, but that was far away in the rucksack which I had left behind down there... my left hand clutched the ski-sticks; I hoped they wouldn't escape my grip, for I should need them, how I should need them! My right hand clung to that solitary hold. I looked at my watch again – it was nine o'clock... utter weariness crept over me. I could hardly stay upright and my head kept falling forwards, my eyelids pressed on my eyes like lead, and I dozed off...

I woke with a start and straightened my head up. Where was I? I realized with a pang of fright that I was on a steep rock slope high up on Nanga Parbat, exposed to the cold and the night, with a black abyss yawning below me... Oh God, where are my sticks? Keep calm! You've got hold of them. I clutched them in a grip of steel...

Time passed incredibly slowly... then behind a toothy mountain range in the far distance a streak of light broadened... day was dawning at last... I leant against my rock motionless, my right hand still clinging to the hold... my feet were like blocks of wood, my boots frozen stiff... I began to move again and got back into the gully. But now I really had to watch my step; everything was twice as dangerous under the smooth glaze of ice. I went down that gully for ages, still wearing a crampon on one boot.

During those hours of extreme tension I had an extraordinary feeling that I was not alone. I had a partner with me, looking after me, taking care of me, belaying me. I knew it was imagination, but the feeling persisted. ... I tried to regain the bed of the gully; but everything I touched came away. It seemed too great a risk, for one small slide or fall would be the finish of me, and I should certainly drag with me my companion and friend, non-existent though he be...

I went on down... succeeded in getting into the snow gully and... still further down to the bottom of the rocks. The whole of this time my companion was with me, that staunch companion whom I never saw, and *whose presence was more definite at danger spots*. The feeling calmed me, ... I knew that if I slipped or fell this 'other man' would hold me on the rope. But there was no rope; there was no other man. A moment or two later I would know that I was quite alone and dared not risk one moment's heedlessness.

... At seven p.m – forty-one hours after leaving the spot – I approached the tent... Hans now came to meet me... I was so parched I could not utter a sound.

(From Hermann Buhl's *Nanga Parbat Pilgrimage*, pp. 336–342)

Dr. R. (afterwards) I have condensed about six pages there, but it does give this feeling, which is akin to the first feeling of a larger 'I', which one reads of sometimes in people who went on to the end of their tether through difficult and dangerous conditions, and then it may never come back unless the situation comes back. But when one goes up the Ladder, that is the feeling one hopes to get and never to lose.

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But now looking at that diagram (Figure 5) there is another inference: supposing one takes all those 'I's as the people in this room. There is no such thing as *separate* people; we are separated because we have separate bodies and separate suits of clothes. But all of us really consist of the same thousand 'I's some of which are more emphasised in one person and some in another. Perhaps in a room like this, coming here we may forget about our many small 'I's and we may be united by a feeling of *One-ness* on a *bigger scale*, and the degree to which we realise this is the amount of this *Third Guna* – this Third Force which we have stored up in ourselves, and this will affect other people in the room. Does that again have what we sometimes observe? I feel it must do with several people, because the whole idea of going up this Ladder is to *lose this sense of separateness*. *The Master for us now is there all the time*. After some time in the Work we realise that it is our own *inattention* that separates us. Work such as this is big enough to mean something; Steward is available; meeting here we can transcend all these many tiresome little 'I's!

Finally, let's remember that all those 'I's in the diagram are in Personality which covers over our Essence, but Essence is One; it does not change; is the most permanent thing in us; but it is undeveloped. Perhaps in Figure 5 the larger circle refers to a situation where Essence has grown

to full stature and we come under Planetary or Angelic Influence – another meaning for the expression ‘Steward’.

PART 2

Others have found it very profitable to see features of different people as examples of ‘Many ‘I’s’ in oneself. This was put in the form of a famous allegory called *The Conference of the Birds* by Attar, perhaps the greatest of Sufi poets, which was written centuries ago. I suggest that you read parts of this to brighten your meetings, and here is the first instalment. The birds are represented as having the same quest as ourselves, namely Self-realization, and the Hoopoe is a very good expression of Deputy Steward.

Once upon a time, in the dim old days, all the birds of the world assembled in solemn conclave to consider a momentous question.

Ever since the dawn of Creation the inhabitants of every city had had a king or leader, but these feathered souls had no king to befriend them. Theirs was an army without a general – a position most precarious. How could they be successful in the battle of life without a leader to guide the weak-winged party through the perils of earthly existence? Many an eloquent speaker addressed the assembly, deploring their helpless plight in plaintive terms, bringing tears to the eyes of the tiny ones, and it was unanimously agreed that it was highly desirable, nay, absolutely necessary, that they should place themselves without delay under the protection of a king.

At this stage, full of fervour, leapt forward the Hoopoe (Hud-hud) renowned in the Muslim scriptures for the part she had played as King Solomon’s trusted emissary to Bilqis, the Queen of Sheba. She had on her breast the crest symbolizing her spiritual knowledge and on her head shone the crown of faith. ...

‘We have a king, my friends,’ said she, ‘I have obtained an indication of His court; but to go alone in quest of Him is beyond my power. If, however, you accompany me, I think we may hope to reach the threshold of His Majesty. Yea, my friends, we have a king, whose name is Simurg, and whose residence is behind Mount Caucasus. He is close by, but we are far away from Him. The road to His throne is bestrewn with obstructions; more than a hundred thousand veils of light and darkness screen the throne. Hundreds of thousands of souls burn with an ardent passion to see Him, but no one is able to find his way to Him. Yet none can afford to do without Him. Supreme reliability, absolute fearlessness and complete self-effacement are needed to overcome those obstacles. If we succeed in getting a glimpse of His face, it will be an achievement indeed. If we do not attempt it, and if we fail to greet the Beloved, this life is not worth living.’ ...

On hearing this account of the Simurg, the birds lost all patience and were seized with a longing to set out at once in quest of the Sovereign Bird. They became His friends and their own enemies and wished to go forward in search of Him, but when they were told how long and fearful the road was they were completely unnerved and brought forward several excuses. These apologies were typical of the personal idiosyncrasies of the different species of the birds.

The first to retrace its steps was the Nightingale, known for his passionate fancy for the Rose and for the rapturous melodies in which he sings of his love. ‘I am so completely drowned in the ocean of love for my Rose,’ said he, ‘that I have practically no life of my own. How can a tiny thing like me have the fortitude to withstand the splendour of the Simurg? For me the love of the Rose is enough.’

‘Oh,’ cried the Hoopoe, ‘ye who stop short at mere appearances, being enamoured of external beauty only, talk no more of Love. Your love for the Rose has merely spread thorns in your way. Such a passion for transient objects brings naught save grief. Give up your fancy for the Rose. It mocks you at every spring and blossoms not for your sake. Your attachment for it is like that of the Dervish in the story I will relate to you.’

The Princess and the Dervish

A charming princess was the object of universal admiration. One day an ill-starred Dervish (mendicant) happened to pass by. He was so struck with her beauty that the piece of bread he was carrying in his hands slipped from his fingers. Greatly amused, the girl burst into laughter and walked off merrily. The Dervish was, however, so much enamoured of her smile, scornful though it was, that he could thenceforth think of nothing else but that smile. For seven long years he refused to move from the precincts of her palace. The attendants and servants of the girl were so much annoyed with him that they resolved one day to take his life. The princess, however, did not wish that the unfortunate man should be injured in any way. She, therefore, whispered to him in secret that if he wished to save his life, he had better leave the place forthwith.

‘Have I a life that I should think of saving it?’ asked the love-sick man. ‘On the very day on which you favoured me with a smile, my life was sacrificed to you. But pray, tell me why did you smile that day?’

‘Oh, you simpleton,’ replied the girl. ‘I laughed because I saw that you had not an iota of sense or reason.’

After the Nightingale had been thus admonished by the Hoopoe, the Parrot came forward and pleaded his inability to undertake the journey because he had been imprisoned in a cage, a penalty he had to pay for his beauty. The Peacock urged that he was quite unworthy of the Royal Presence because of the part he had played in the expulsion of Adam from Paradise. The Duck could not do without water, nor the Partridge without mountains. The Huma said he was gifted with the power to confer sovereignty on those over whose head he flew. Why should he give up such a lofty privilege? Similarly, the Falcon could not brook the idea of relinquishing his place of honour on the hand of kings. The Heron wished to stay in the lagoons, and the Owl in the ruins of which he was the undisturbed monarch. Last came the Wagtail with his excuses for his weakness and physical disabilities that made it impossible for him to embark on the journey.

Now ask yourself, have you any of these birds in you, and which chiefly?

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