

25 March 1963

## ESCAPE FROM PRISON

### PART 1

I have just had a letter in which the writer asks, in effect, whether we are really escaping from our prison or whether we are merely content with making it a little more pleasant to live in. So many Teachers and Systems, he says, just decorate the prison cell and don't get you out of it.

This is a very important question that each of us must keep asking. It comes up many times, for instance, as one looks through all these forms recounting experiences of the meditation. Certainly 50% at least are actually getting out of prison; they get glimpses of the free world which they carry with them and so naturally pass more of their lives out there. But the other 50% are mostly sitting in the prison either making it more comfortable or the reverse!

The question is: Why don't more prisoners escape? It seems to me that it is because we don't know what the prison really is. So many people think of the prison in terms of externals – an unhappy marriage, a busy routine life, physical sufferings. But those things were never a bar to Heaven; quite the contrary:

Come unto Me all that travail and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.

That's not the prison at all – that's just the whip and spur to make us want to escape from our own inner prison:

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room,  
And hermits are contented with their cells,  
And students with their pensive citadels;  
Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom  
Sit blithe and happy; bees that soar for bloom  
High on the highest peak of Furness fells,  
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells;  
In truth the prison unto which we doom  
Ourselves no prison is ...

If we could see that our prison is not an unchangeable external brick wall, but something as intangible as a feeling of 'I', of separateness, a state of identification – then we could step through its shadowy walls at will. We'd then see that the way of escape from our prison is *'through the looking-glass'*: quite literally. We sit and shut our eyes and when we do this we look into the looking-glass and see the reflection of all our thoughts and feelings. But don't be content to sit there looking. Go *through* the looking-glass like Alice:

Let's pretend there is a way of getting through it somehow Kitty. Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze so that we can get through. Why, it is turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It will be easy enough to get through – She was up on a chimney-piece while she said this, though she hardly knew how she had got there. And certainly the glass *was* beginning to melt away so like a bright silvery mist. In another moment Alice was through the glass and had jumped lightly down into...

the Real World. It was the same world only seen the other way round! And, you remember,

almost the first new thing she saw was that the chessmen down in the hearth among the cinders were alive and walking about two by two!

That, on a bigger scale, is one of the lessons the Fully Realized Man has been trying to teach us. That is the meaning of this Ladder – out of prison in Seven Steps. Therein lies also the future of Humanity. I said to him once:

Suppose Realized Men were there to help at important moments in the history of Humanity, so that Humanity might not keep taking those wrong turnings (like the religious life becoming separate from the ordinary life of the householder), would not even Adam learn not to eat the apple and get expelled from Paradise?

S. When we think of Creation, and revolution of Creation, we see only the external, physical changes; the coarse matter taking different shapes which merge one into another. But being outside all that, Atman and the Knowledge are Eternal, they never die. So what they hold always remains there; it's always there. They don't have to go anywhere to collect it. For them Time-and-Space is immaterial, so if a Creation is made and dissolved, for them it is nothing but just a play going on and on. Atman holds the Knowledge and this passes into certain people who are prepared to receive it, and so make the Knowledge known to Humanity. This is how the Eternal Knowledge is being passed from Creation to Creation.

#### COMMENT

And the miracle is that this Atman is oneSelf – the Eternal Knowledge is there within us if we like to step through the shadowy prison walls. One drop of Sattva makes two drops, two drops become four – that is the way through.

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#### PART 2

People are asking about Inner Octaves and about Resonance. Experiments and good observation will show. As an example, say very slowly to yourself at different times, some words like these:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Sometimes there will be nothing but the words; but at other times one will resonate with the inner octaves, pictures, ideas, a whole teaching about the conduct of one's life and about learning to Do...

(other examples?)

#### PART 3

The School of Meditation is getting more and more in tune with the unprepared people who come to their weekly talks. This was how the talk at the most successful recent meeting began:

Mr. G. ...We will start by considering what we mean by meditation – a word used often very lightly and covering a multitude of different things – usually meaning something about applying one's mind to something. But what is meditation? What does the School mean by it? On the other hand, first a method whereby man can fulfil a basic need – a need in every man. Because of this, methods of meditation have been known

since the dawn of history; it is applied to man's full development. Very simply, it is a technique that turns the attention inwards to the Source, to the Source of power, the energy, to the creative Source which is in everybody.

All great religions and teachings refer to methods of meditation or methods of Self-development. This is the aim of these religions, of these teachings, of great philosophies; and although they refer to these methods, never are they actually described. Just as teachings are written down and preserved by the written word, actual practical methods of meditation are preserved and passed on simply by word of mouth; passed on by word of mouth or given through people; but they learn them from the Teachings or Traditions. Meditation is not a teaching, not a religion, not a cult; it is a practice. It can satisfy a basic need in anyone; only these methods are not described.

What do the great teachings tell us about them? Do they point direction?

In **St. Luke** we read:

And when Christ was demanded of the Pharisees, when the Kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

Neither shall they say, "Lo here!" or, "lo, there!" for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' (Chapter 17)

**The Buddha:**

Put your lamps unto yourself;  
Hold to the Truth within yourself;  
That is the only lamp.

**The Upanishads:**

God made sense turn outwards; therefore man looks outwards not unto himSelf. Now and again a daring soul desiring Immortality looks back and finds himSelf.

...

Have you noticed from these quotations from completely different teachings always we have this reference – 'The Kingdom of God is within you'; ... Could we see, then, that the basic need of all men is to find themselves, and to find themselves could we see that the direction is to look within? Could we go further, and say that a technique of meditation is very simply a method of looking within – the turning of the attention to the Source of all possibilities within?'

## PART 4

You might like to hear the end of the story *The Conference of the Birds*:

### Reception at the Royal Court

When the birds heard this account of the difficulties in their way, they realised that the burden of their mission was too heavy for their tiny shoulders, a mere handful of bones as they were. Their souls became restless and many gave up their lives in the very first stage. The rest advanced with patience and courage, and continued their march for years. Several died on the way; others were drowned in the sea; others, again, sacrificed their souls on the

summit of the mountains; several were roasted by the heat of the sun, several fell victims to the jackals and tigers in the wilderness. A good many died of thirst in the forest; others went mad with hunger and committed suicide. Some lagged behind, disabled by fatigue or wounds; others could not move forward, dazed by the wonders and mysteries of the path. Some were enchanted by the charming scenery, and began to enjoy themselves, forgetting that they were out in quest of the Simurg. Thus, of the millions who had set out upon the quest, only thirty birds succeeded in completing the journey and reaching the palace of the Simurg. Weary and worn, they were without feathers, without hair, full of pain and agony. Heart-broken, soul-stricken, they reached the seat of the sovereign. They beheld His Majesty without form or quality and beyond the reach of human intellect or understanding. Then flashed the lightning of independence and a hundred worlds were consumed in one instant. Dazed and perplexed they saw that in that realm thousands of luminous suns and millions of moons and stars were like a tiny atom of dust. 'O, how strange!' they exclaimed, 'when even the sun is like an obscure atom before His Majesty, how can we hope to be seen in this place? O, the pity of it! What agonies have we endured during the journey! Here, a hundred skies are like a particle of dust. It makes no difference whether we are here or not.'

At last the Honourable Usher of the Royal Court came out of the palace. He saw the birds standing before him without a feather or a hair, utterly travel-stained, crippled and stupefied.

'Who are you? he asked. 'Where do you come from, and what brings you here? What is the name of your tribe and of what use are you, a handful of bones, to the world?'

'We have come here,' said the tiny beings, 'because we are anxious to be admitted to the presence of the Simurg and to do Him homage as our king. It is a long, long time since we started on this journey, and only thirty of us have survived out of millions. We have come all the way full of hope that we shall be admitted to the Royal Presence.'

The Chamberlain replied: 'Whether you exist or do not exist is immaterial to the Sovereign of Eternity. Millions of worlds filled with myriads of creatures are like an ant at the door of the King. What, then, will your place be before Him? Better return, you handful of paupers!'

The unfortunate pilgrims were so disappointed at this reply that they nearly died. They began to weep and lament and said, 'If we have not permission to reach the Court of the Simurg, we have no desire to retrace our steps. Will the great King reject us with contempt upon this road? Can such an insult proceed from Him, and if it does, will it not turn into honour?'

So fervent was their grief, so heart-broken their lamentation that they were admitted to the presence of the Sovereign. But, first of all, a register was placed before them, in which every detail of the deeds that each one of them had done, or had omitted to do, from the beginning to the end, was carefully entered. Seeing this list of transgressions, they were annihilated and sank down in confusion, and their bodies were reduced to dust. After they had been thus completely purged and purified from all earthly elements, their souls were resuscitated by the light of His Majesty. They stood up again, dazed and distracted. In this new life the recollection of their transgressions was completely effaced from their mind. This was *baqā* after *fanā*, immortality after perishability, life after life's loss, eternal existence after extinction.

Now the Sun celestial began to shine forth in front of them, and lo! how great was their surprise! In the reflection of their faces these thirty birds of the earth beheld the face of the Celestial Simurg. When they cast furtive glances towards the Simurg, they

perceived that the Simurg was no other than those self-same thirty birds. In utter bewilderment they lost their wits and wondered whether they were their own selves or whether they had been transformed into the Simurg. Then, to themselves they turned their eyes, and wonder of wonders, those self-same birds seemed to be one Simurg! Again, when they gazed at both in a single glance, they were convinced that they and the Simurg formed in reality only one Being. This single being was the Simurg and the Simurg this Being. That one was this and this one was that. Look where they would, in whatever direction, it was only the Simurg they saw. No one has heard of such a story in the world. Drowned in perplexity, they began to think of this mystery without the faculty of thinking, but finding no solution to the riddle, they besought the Simurg, though no words passed their lips, to explain this mystery and to solve this enigma of *I* and *Thou*.

The Simurg thereupon deigned to vouchsafe this reply to them: 'The Sun of my Majesty is a mirror. Whoever beholds himself in this mirror, sees there his soul and his body, sees himself entire in it. Soul and body see soul and body. Since you, thirty birds, have come here, you find thirty birds in the mirror. Had you been forty or fifty, you would have beheld forty or fifty. Completely transformed though you be after your journey, you see yourselves here as you were before. At the beginning of your journey, you were numerous, but only thirty of you are able to see Me, and what you see is your own selves. How can any frail human being approach my presence? How can an ant's eye be lifted to the Pleiades? Has any one ever seen an insect lifting up an anvil or a gnat seizing an elephant with its teeth? All that you have known and seen is neither that which you have known nor that which you have seen. What you have said or heard is neither this nor that. If you have succeeded in crossing the valley of the spiritual road, if you have been able to do good deeds, you have only acted under compulsion from Me and you have thus been able to see the face of My essence and of My perfections. It is well that you have been able to do this, ye thirty birds. Remain bewildered, impatient and astonished. As for Me, I am more than thirty birds. I am the very essence of the Simurg. Annihilate yourselves in Me joyfully and gloriously so that you find yourselves in Me.'

Thereupon the birds lost themselves for ever in the Simurg. The shade thus vanished in the Sun. Neither the traveller remained, nor the guide, nor the path. Finding the Simurg they found themselves and the riddle of *I* and *Thou* was solved.

(The End)

Irreverent thoughts of course come to one's mind like 'Couldn't all that wastage of birds have been avoided? Suppose the Hoopoe had known about the meditation, wouldn't hundreds of birds have got there – and in much less time and with more feathers?'

But if we take the birds as 'Many 'I's' in each of us, then this story remains relevant and moreover it illustrates vividly that System aphorism to which we turn our minds each Easter-time:

A man can be born; but before he can be born he must die; and before he dies he must first awake.

What has to die? Why, many of our 'I's', like many of those birds. We shan't miss them, they are just habits and identifications, useless and often most unpleasant. But the thirty faithful 'I's' will win through and be transformed.

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