

6 May 1963

READING I

PART 1

Our subject for those still learning the System this Summer is to be:

‘THE RHYTHM OF THE UNIVERSE’

Our System gives a beautiful and precise account of all that it is necessary to know about this. Nowhere else will you find the Truth expressed in such a way as to enable you to understand the basic ideas of all other religions and teachings.

In a Chinese scroll written by a painter fourteen hundred years ago the Six Canons or tests of a painting were laid down. The first of these six has been translated:

‘1. Rhythmic vitality, or Spiritual Rhythm in the Movement of Life.’

The Chinese words also carry the meanings:

‘The Life-movement of the Spirit through the Rhythm of things’, or again
 ‘The Union of the rhythm of the Spirit with the movement of living things.’
 (From: *The Flight of the Dragon*, Laurence Binyon,
Wisdom of the East, John Murray, 1911)

Knowledge of this rhythm is real knowledge; living according to this knowledge would mean change of Being; both together give Understanding. Clearly Understanding must come before Doing, which would mean ordering all one’s actions according to the ‘Spiritual Rhythm in the Movement of Life’.

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Our System begins to describe the Rhythm of Creation in exactly the same way as does the Holy Tradition, which from the dawn of history centred round the System of Meditation which we have been given.

All events in the Universe are the result of the dance of three Cosmic Forces; but in the Absolute the Three Forces are One (Figure, overleaf). Here there is one Will, uniform and individual. When this single Will, the Will of the Absolute, creates *All Worlds*, energy becomes three-fold, but an atom of matter remains one. When this matter conveys the Positive Force it is called Carbon; when it is the vehicle of Negative Force it is called Oxygen; and when it is the medium of the Neutralizing Force it is called Nitrogen. Nitrogen is intermediate in density between Carbon and Oxygen. Matter taken without regard to Force or to the changes occurring in it is called *Hydrogen*, and the ‘Hydrogen number’ describes all the properties of matter at any level, as the primordial atom divides and divides from the centre outwards.

In succeeding weeks this part of the Teaching will be developed in the light of present-day conceptions of energy and matter.

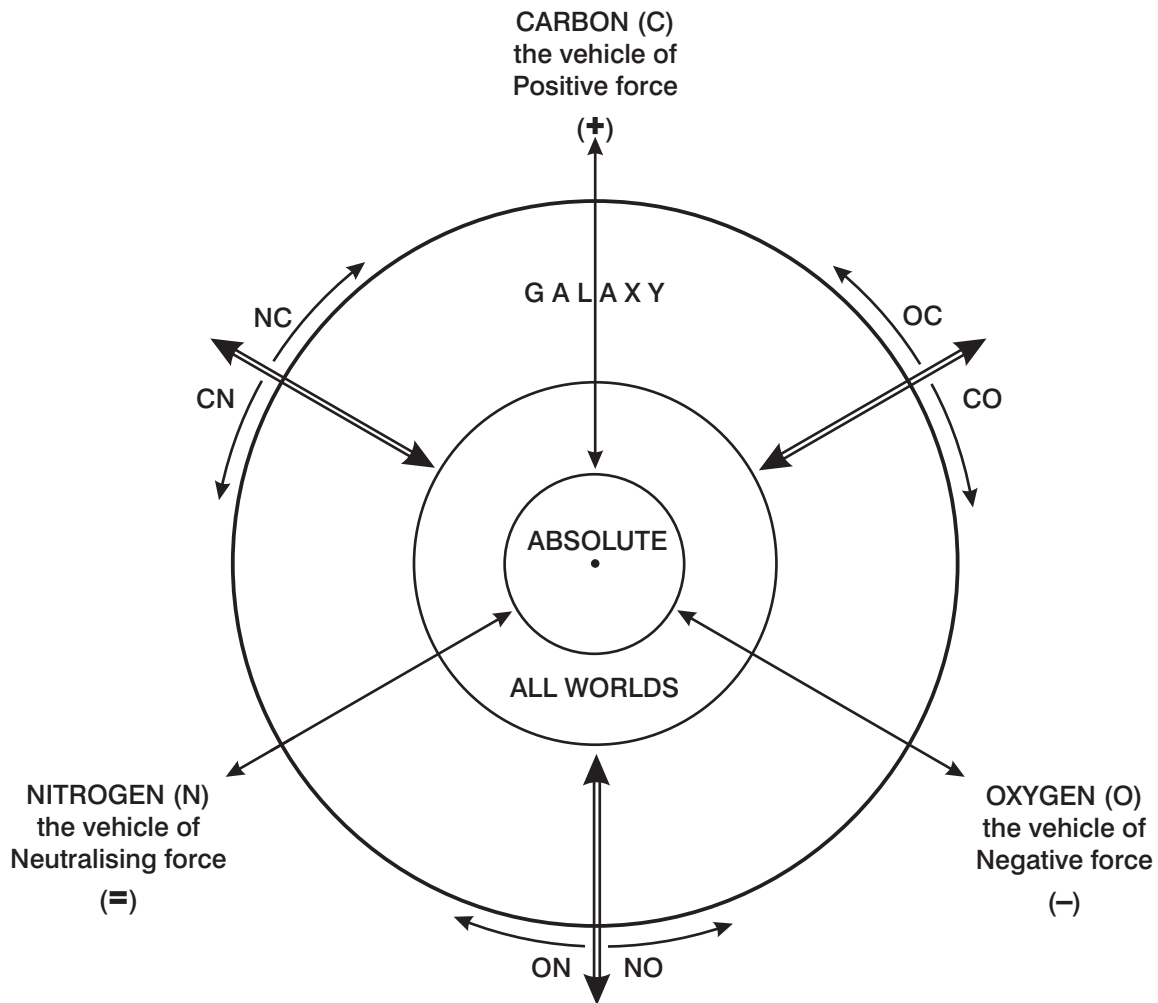
We can end tonight with this quotation from the Bhagavad-Gita in the language of the Holy Tradition of the Meditation and made available to us by Vyasa (one of its Founders). Here Rajas corresponds to Carbon, Sattva to Nitrogen, and Tamas to Oxygen. These are the Three ‘Gunas’ or aspects of matter in relation to the Three Forces:

Now hear from me the three kinds of happiness:

That in which by practice one rejoices and which puts an end to pain; which at first is like venom but in the end like nectar, that happiness is based upon Sattva, born of the knowledge of the Divine Self.

That which from the attachment of the senses to their objects is at first like nectar, but in the end is like venom, that is the happiness based upon Rajas.

And that happiness which both at first and afterwards obscures the Divine Self, which arises from sleep, indolence and heedlessness, is based upon Tamas.



Figure

PART 2. (FOR SPECIAL GROUPS ONLY)

Those who are already well-acquainted with our System can achieve these aims by memorising this diagram (Figure above), and using it to lift their minds above the perplexities and entanglements of life with the prayer of St. Patrick in their hearts:

I bind myself to a strong strength, to a calling on the Trinity, to a Threeness and a Oneness in the creation of the world.

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They do not now need to go through the theory again unless they want to. They will perhaps prefer to find a *practical* application of this Symbol to their own lives. For them it might prove very stimulating to join me in thinking out what would be the continuation of Mr. Ouspensky's cinema drama *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* seen from where we are now. Of course there might be a number of different continuations (possibly all true for different people). I have, myself, written two – one based on the Meditation, and this one couched in more general terms.

It must be remembered that the Magician is seen, not as any living person, but as a symbol of 'Real I', the Divine spark in each one of us, the Universal Self, the Truth, the Atman. The realization of this Eternal Presence, and its remembrance at important moments, would provide the third Force needed to resolve the conflict of the two opposing forces in our lives.

General Version

Chapter 1. The New Life of Ivan Osokin

The Magician is speaking to Osokin at their last recorded conversation:

'There is a Dervish song which goes like this:

Through four renunciations
Ascend to perfection.
Leave life without regret.
Expect no reward in heaven.'

'Do you understand what that means? Most people can go only by this way or by one of the similar ways. But here, now, you are in a different position. You can talk with me. You can know what you have to give up and what you may get for it.'

'How can I know what I can get? And how shall I know what I have to give up?'

'You can know what you may get through the realization of what it is you want. For some very complicated reasons which are all in yourself, you happen to have guessed a very great secret which people generally do not know. By itself your guess is useless because you cannot apply it to anything. But the fact that you know this secret opens certain doors for you. You know that everything repeats again and again. There have been other people who made the same discovery but they could make nothing more of it. If you could change something in yourself, you would be able to use this knowledge for your own advantage. So, you see, you do know what you want and what you may get.'

'Now the question of what to sacrifice and how to sacrifice. You say you have nothing. Not quite. You have your life. So you can sacrifice your life. It is a very small price to pay since you meant to throw it away in any case. Instead of that, give me your life and I will see what can be made of you. I will even make it easier for you. I shall not require the whole of your life. Twenty, even fifteen years will be sufficient. But during these years you must belong to me – I mean, you must do everything I tell you without evasions and excuses. If you keep your side of the bargain, I shall keep mine. When this time is over you will be able to use your knowledge for yourself. It is your good luck that you can be useful to me just now – not at once, certainly, but I can wait if there is anything to wait for. So now you know what you have to sacrifice.'

'There is something else which may be said. People who make the same guess that you have made have certain advantages and certain disadvantages in comparison with other

people who guess nothing. Their advantage is that they can be taught what other people cannot be taught, and their disadvantage is that, for them, time becomes very limited.

‘An ordinary man can turn round and round on the wheel and nothing happens to him until he finally disappears.

‘Again, there are many things you do not know about this; but you must understand that in the course of time even the position of the stars in relation to one another changes – and men depend on the stars much more than they realise though not in the same way as they think, if they think about it at all. Nothing remains the same in time. But a man who has begun to guess the great secret must make use of it, otherwise it turns against him. It is not a safe secret. When one has become aware of it, one must go on or one will go down. When one finds the secret or hears about it, one has only two or three, or in any case only a few more lives.

‘You must understand that, for reasons of my own, I am interested in such people in the same way as I am interested in you. But I can offer my help only at one particular moment and only once. If my help is not accepted, a man may not find me next time. It may sound strange to you, but the fact is that sometimes I see people who would like to come to me, walking along this street, but they cannot find my house. That is why I told you before that you may want to come to me again but not be able to.’

‘What happens to those people who cannot find your house?’

‘Oh, they have other possibilities, but you must understand that every possibility is always more difficult than the preceding one; there is less and less time. If those people do not find new guidance and new help very soon, their lives begin to go down, and after some time they cease to be born and are replaced by other people. You must understand that they become useless, sometimes dangerous, because they know the great secret and remember many things; but all that they know, they understand in the wrong way. And in any case, if they have not used their chances before, then each time their possibilities become fewer.

‘Now you must think about yourself. Fifteen years seem a long time to you because you are still very young. Later you will see that it is a very short time, especially when you realise what you can get for it. So go home and think. When you have understood and put in the right order everything I have said, you may come here and tell me what you have decided.

‘I can only add one thing more. Like everyone else, you think that there are different ways of doing the same thing. You have to learn to understand that there is always only one way of doing a thing; there can never be two ways. But you will not come to this easily. For a long time you will have a great deal of inner argument. All this has to be destroyed. Only then will you be ready for real work. And understand another thing: only when you are useful to me will you be useful to yourself.

‘I must also warn you that there are many dangers on the way, dangers about which you have never heard – or heard quite wrongly. A long time ago I met a very disagreeable gentleman who is sometimes pictured with horns and hoofs. He is not so big as some people make him out to be, but his chief occupation in life is to hinder the development of people who have guessed the great secret. And my occupation is to hinder him. So you must understand that very powerful forces will be opposed to you and you will be alone, always alone. Remember this.

‘Now go, and come back when you have decided. Take as much time as you like, but I advise you not to delay too long.’

Chapter 2. Nearly fifteen years later

Osokin took the decision to give fifteen years of his life to the Magician; he has played an active part in his Work; has studied and tried to put into practice his System of Knowledge, has helped to organise Groups and has worked with other people to change his Being. He has tried to do everything the Magician tells him without too many evasions and excuses.

Now on one of his visits to the Magician he is saying:

'You were right. This has made all the difference.' 'Yes,' says the Magician, 'you are very different. You don't talk so much now and you are able to listen to me.' Osokin laughs, 'I'm full of questions, of course, and I hope I shall listen to your answers! There is one all-important question which has been forming in my mind. You asked for fifteen years of my life. What then? You have been making me realise, haven't you, that there is some decision I have to make now?'

The Magician nods. 'How would you put it yourself?' he asks.

'Quite shortly,' answers Osokin, 'it seems to me that I have to choose between two alternatives. Do I escape from the wheel altogether, 'leave life without regret'? Or do I have to come back: go through it all again in order to pay the debts I haven't yet been able to settle?'

'That,' replies the Magician, 'is the decision that has to be made by anyone who reaches a certain step on the Ladder that leads to Eternal union with me. Yes, you'll have to decide pretty soon, for on what you decide will depend how you spend the last three months of the time you give to me.'

Osokin gets up and paces the room. 'But,' he mutters to himself, 'I'm almost exactly in two halves on that question. Half of me longs to be rid of the whole thing for ever; this half can't bear the thought of all those missed opportunities, all this frustration, the boredom of all that time at school... But the other half longs to have a chance to put things right. Take mother, for instance. Couldn't I free her from all that suffering? Does she have to die so young and so unhappy? And Zinaida? Were we not meant for each other? Are we never to meet again?'

Sitting down and turning to the Magician he says, 'How can I decide? There's so much we don't know. Tell me what I need to know in order to decide.'

The Magician pauses a moment before replying: 'In relation to this decision there are at least two kinds of people – those for whom *it is possible* to go away from this life altogether, those who would not be missed; and there are the people *upon whose presence at a given time depend certain inescapable events*. Children have to be born; the lives of other people may grow out of their life or may be inextricably mixed with it; though even here there is much that can be and has to be adjusted, for sudden, unforeseeable cataclysms and accidents often demand such adjustments. And why do you suppose that your relationship with Zinaida (for instance) would end if your body is not born again?'

'Finally, have you considered that if you were born *at a different time* you might be far more useful and enjoy far more success? Many able people owe their ill-success only to their coming on to the world's stage too early or too late. You still think in absolutes – either fade out, or be born again in exactly the same place and time.'

Osokin appears animated and interested. 'How one-track our minds are! Certainly we are still blind kittens. It's Fate or some higher Consciousness, not me, that will do the deciding. It seems to me from what you have said that I might be one of the people who *could* escape altogether; and yet I'd dearly love to be useful! Suppose you decide that I could be useful to you and to my friends

if I were sent back again to the same point in time and place, what would be necessary in my remaining three months with you?’

The Magician replies slowly and with emphasis: ‘You have to learn to *do*. Things must not be allowed to *happen* to you any more. Now I give you a task. Take three months’ leave from all other work. Devote yourself during this time to silence and meditation and all that I have told you to practise. Above all, try to *remember me*. When you remember me I shall know it. If you ask questions they will be answered. You will find that you past life will at certain moments appear before your mind like a film on the screen. Especially you will remember the cross-roads in your life, for all life consists of streets where you have no choice, with a certain number of cross-roads where change of direction is possible. You will try to decide what can be escaped and what *has* to be gone through. For though you cannot change many external events – political crises, other people’s actions – yet your own thoughts, feelings and actions *can* be changed, and indeed many of them have already changed. *Above all, you must get rid of your own particular brand of negative thinking.*’

Osokin asks, ‘What are cross-roads?’

‘Cross-roads,’ replies the Magician, ‘are situations where you can be useful to me. You may have the chance to get into a more advantageous position – take a different job, for instance, where you can give me more help; or you may meet some person in whom I am interested. At those moments particularly you must remember *me*. Everything lies in that.

‘But with regard to all those parts of your life which are inescapable and which cannot be changed, you must have formed an attitude of mind which will take you through them without deviation from your aim or loss of your intimate connection with me. You are to accept them with detachment as useful and necessary. You will not struggle fruitlessly against them – but keep your head above water. You will remember that I am always there to prevent you from sinking.

‘Now go. We shall meet like this in three months’ time. You can tell Zinaida about it, but no one else.’

Chapter 3. At the Magician’s in three months’ time

Osokin comes in looking cheerful, like a man whose mind is made up. He has seen clearly and beyond doubt that there are just two cross-roads in his life where, if he does what the Magician says, everything important in his life will be different. Most of the suffering and failure will be avoided; his mother (if she has to die young) will die happy; Zinaida will be his.

Osokin moves surely and confidently and makes no unnecessary gestures. No words are spoken. The Magician claps his hands three times.

A Chinese, the Magician’s servant, comes noiselessly into the room. He has a long pigtail, and is dressed in a blue silk gown trimmed with fur, and shoes with thick felt soles. The Magician speaks to him in a low voice. The Chinese, moving silently, brings in and places before the Magician a small brazier of burning charcoal and a tall vase. The cat jumps down from the back of the Magician’s chair and walks out behind the Chinese. The old man dips one hand into the vase and with the other hand waves Osokin to the armchair. Osokin sits down.

Looking into the fire, the old man slowly pronounces some incomprehensible words, then, taking his hand out of the vase, he throws a handful of grey-green powder into the

brazier. At the same time he takes the hour-glass from the table, shakes it and turns it over. Aromatic and pungent smoke rises in a cloud above the brazier.

The whole room fills with smoke, and in it can be seen many moving forms as though the room were suddenly full of people.

When the smoke clears away, the old man is sitting in his armchair holding the hour-glass in his hand.

There is no Osokin.

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Pause for Discussion: Ask yourselves: 'Suppose this is to happen to me; what must I accomplish now in order to face my life again?'

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Chapter 4. Morning

An early morning in October 1890.

A dormitory in a boys' school. Rows of beds. Sleeping figures rolled up in blankets. Through an archway another part of the dormitory can be seen. Lamps are burning. Outside it is still dark. A clock strikes six. A school servant nicknamed 'Frog', a veteran of the Caucasian wars, appears at the far end of the dormitory and begins to ring a large bell as he walks along the wide centre passage between the beds.

The dormitory comes to life at once. There is movement and noise. Some of the boys jump up, throw off their blankets and others try to snatch another half-minute's sleep. A boy about thirteen jumps on his bed and begins to dance. Someone throws a pillow at him from the other end of the dormitory. The housemaster, a lanky German with a red beard, in a blue tailcoat with brass buttons, walks from one bed to another giving a tug at the blankets of those who are not getting up.

In a bed by the wall Ivan Osokin is sitting up staring about him in amazement. He looks like a boy of fourteen.

'Did I dream all that and what did it mean?' he says to himself. 'And what I see now, is this too a dream?'

'I went to the Magician and asked him to send me back. He said he would send me back twelve years. Is it possible that this is true? I took a revolver and went out of the house. I couldn't stay at home. Is it really true that Zinaida is going to marry Minsky? What a queer dream! The dormitory looks absolutely like a real one. I am not sure whether I want to find myself here in reality or not; it was pretty beastly here too. But how can I go on living? There is no Zinaida for me any more. I can't accept that; I never shall. I told the Magician I wanted to change my whole life and that I must begin again, a long way back. But supposing he really did send me back? It is impossible! I know it's a dream. But I will try to imagine that I actually am at school... Is it better now or worse? I don't even know what to say. Why does it make me feel so frightened and so sad? After all, it can't be so... But Zinaida... no, it really is a vicious circle, and I am indeed a schoolboy, which means I dreamed it all – Zinaida and everything else. Can that be true or not? Well, there are a thousand things I did not know and could not have known when I was at school...'

'But wait a moment. Didn't the Magician teach me to remember him? For a moment I must sit up with my attention fully on him...'

'Osokin, Osokin,' shouts his friend Memorsky. 'Why are you sitting there like an owl?'

Have you fallen asleep? (Osokin opens his eyes). Don't you hear, the German is taking the names of those who are not dressed? Get up, you devil's puppet!

(Osokin jumps out of bed and begins to dress as the German housemaster comes out from behind the archway – but this time there is no pillow! So all the old events of that first morning disappear!)

Osokin pauses a moment on the landing between the junior and senior dormitories.

A broad iron stair-case leading to the lower floor.

A round yellow clock on the wall. Under the clock stands Osokin, looking agitated and bewildered. Boys pass by him as they go to and fro. No one takes any notice of him.

'Am I going mad or am I mad already?' thinks Osokin.

'I am haunted by a nightmare – yet I cannot wake up. It is impossible that I'm really back at school. All this is too stupid. Yet when I look at that clock I have this nightmare, that I was told to stand there during breakfast, that I was attacked by a lot of boys and broke Klementieff's nose which bled all over the place. But why am I standing here at all? The Magician said, "Do what you have to do". I'll go down to breakfast – after all there's nothing to stop me now.'

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