

4 November 1963

READING 5

PART 1

Some of you are asking, 'What really is this 'Good Impulse' that starts the Ascent of the Ladder? How do we recognize it? How do we catch it?

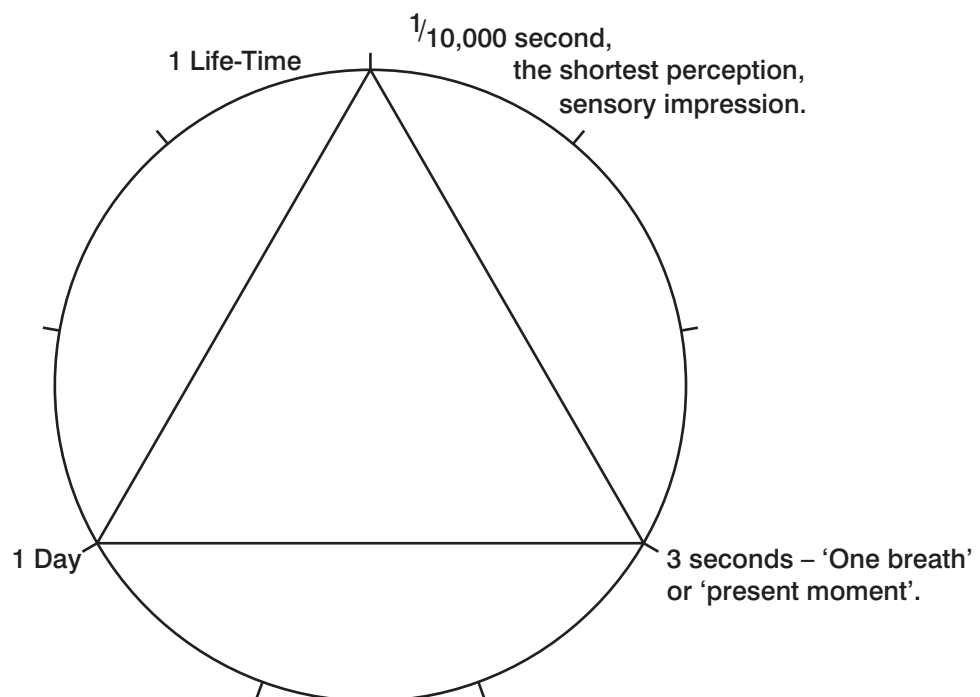
After a little time in the Work we get the impression of a small voice calling to us often and often, trying to be heard. We are apt to become aware of it when we change from one activity to another; when the Attention is for a moment disengaged and before it gets caught up again.

It is well described in the 4th Chapter of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, which again emphasises the 'Here-and-Now-ness' of Self-realization:

This work asketh no long time e'er it be once truly done, as some men ween; for it is the shortest work of all that man may imagine. It is never longer nor shorter, than is an atom: the which atom, by the definition of true philosophers in the science of astronomy, is the least part of *time*. And it is so little that for the littleness of it, it is indivisible and nearly incomprehensible... for it is neither longer nor shorter, but even according to one only stirring that is within the principal working might of thy soul, the which is thy will. For even so many willings or desirings, and no more nor no fewer, may be and are in one hour in thy will as are atoms in one hour. And if thou wert reformed by Grace to the first state of man's soul, as it was before sin, then thou shouldest evermore by help of that Grace be lord of that stirring or of those stirrings. So that none went forby, but all should stretch into the sovereign desirable, and into the highest willable thing: the which is God.

If you want to relate this 'stretching' or 'expansion of the moment' to the Symbol, you can from this point of view write the units of 'Time' round last week's diagram thus:

Every 120° here represents a multiplication by 30,000 – 30,000 of these shortest impressions or 'atoms' in one 'present moment'; 30,000 moments in one day of 24 hours; 30,000 days in a life-time.



And what is more it fits with our experience. For suppose you catch this impulse and start with resolution to obey it (as, for instance, one might start to meditate), the first noticeable thing is a change in the breathing. This, as we have been told, signals a chemical change – the washing out of accumulated acids from the organism by a few deep breaths so that gradually the breathing and heart-beat become almost imperceptible, the machine running with the greatest economy.

And since many, if not all, of the functions of the body are geared to the breathing and the heart-beat, we see and experience in very fact an ‘Alchemy of Happiness’ – the chemical process by which the mercury is stilled to silence and the silver melted. A similar alchemy can be brought about by the *movement* of the turning Dervish.

Thus it is that the catching of the shortest possible impression can expand a moment into a day or even a whole life-time, for Alchemy is brought about like that and not by dreaming of past or the future lives.

Strange that practical people, people who try to *do* something, even though not brilliantly clever, as the world knows it, so often agree about those difficult subjects over which philosophers and scientists endlessly dispute.

PART 2

To return to the Ladder. What is the meaning of the Third Step at which, we were told, certain ‘crystals have been forming in the organism, so that the pull of the external life is diminished’? In one of Mr. Ouspensky’s psychological lectures given here in the 1930’s, he said that ordinary man (without a School) is motivated entirely by outside influences from his environment like a marionette pulled by strings. But after some time in the Work, he begins to feel movements starting within himSelf and quite independent of external influences, so that he gradually becomes motivated from within.

This morning I received the translation of the Shankaracharya’s very full answers to eight questions we recently sent him about the Meditation. These will be studied fully at our small 6 o’clock meetings on Wednesdays as they are both inspiring and practical. All these answers are related to the Ladder and all have a bearing on this question we have just been asking.

Perhaps you would like to hear this one now:

Q.2 What did the Maharishi mean when he said that any desire or wish, when held to the exclusion of all else, would realize itself?

Answer. Instead of wasting energy in futile efforts to fulfil the many petty desires, the emergence of one real desire envelops everything, and all the little desires become submerged in it. For example, when one gets to the great river Ganges, one doesn’t need the little taps for water. Just so, when the great desire for Self-realization springs up and inspires and encourages one to move towards discipline, then this paramount desire leads one slowly and step by step on to the higher levels of the Ladder, until one reaches the complete Realization and union with the Eternal Absolute.

* * *