

11 February 1963

PART 1

We want just now to take hold of an idea which could transform our lives, remove all conflicts, give us all that we want. From this point of view the idea of Three Forces is about the most powerful of all ideas.

Let us see how this idea was formulated by Mr. Ouspensky just about the time when some of us first came to meetings:

January 9th, 1935

No new event can take place without three forces meeting at a certain place (at a certain moment). When we begin to observe things (systematically) we see two forces (action and reaction, excitement and depression, sleep and waking sleep). Sometimes we see the presence of the third, either in the form of result or as something accidental, or as something the action of which we cannot explain (e.g. an 'enzyme' or 'catalyst' in chemistry, or a 'gene' or a 'virus' in biology). But in our state of Being we are 'third force blind' (just as we are blind to the fact that this present moment has been before and will be again).

Why do we want to take hold of this idea especially now? Because we have made a close connection with a man who not only can teach us to *see* but can enable us to *Do*, that is to act on the basis of the Three Forces. For him this is also the most important idea in the world, but he confines his interest as far as we are concerned to the use of Three Forces in enabling each person to realize in full his own possibilities. In this context he calls the Three Forces the Three Gunas. Gunas do not apply to distant stars; they apply to a man's efforts to climb the Ladder of Self-realization, at the top of which Ladder the Three Forces are One. Until we find the Third Force in ourselves and create more and more of it, life will continue to be an unending conflict between desire and frustration, action and reaction (like European politics!), excitement and depression.

In his terminology excitement is called Rajas; inertia or depression Tamas; and the unknown third element is called Sattva. They are always flowing one into the other – never fixed. Their relative concentration is the deciding factor in all human affairs. The practical method recommended for us in the sort of lives we live is to take two short periods in the day and devote them to relief from both the activity and the inertia, for in that new direction will the Third Force, the Sattva, be found. Then this new force will transform our state of mind and our actions during the rest of the day, and we will be able to meet any situation with the required energy, do what is appropriate, and get the best out of it.

So let us begin by finding examples of opposing forces causing conflict, either unresolved or suddenly resolved by something unexpected. For instance, two people disagree. Suddenly they find agreement. What brought this about in one case, but not in others?

PART 2. THREE FORCES IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Section 1

One way to get a correct general picture of the Three Gunas is to go back to Plato and Aristotle's concept of 'excess and defect'. To take just one instance: in the first chapter of the *Historia Animalium*, Aristotle tells us that, within the limits of a 'genus', such as Bird or Fish, the difference between one form or species and another is of the nature of 'excess or defect'. Professor D'Arcy Thompson, having translated this classic as a young man, finally concluded towards the end of his life that:

Aristotle was thinking, *more Platonic*, of all the species of bird as mere... imperfect representations of or approximations to their prototype the ideal Bird (or *eidos*)...

So we may, as it were, survey the whole motley troop of feathered things only to find each one of them falling short of perfection, deficient here, redundant there: all with their inevitable bodily faults and flaws.

(Ref: *Excess and Defect* by D'Arcy W. Thompson, *Mind*, Vol. 38, No.149, 1928)

If we survey all the orders of Organic Life from kingdoms to individuals with this conception in mind, we inevitably come to the principles of Natural Selection and see that, when a genus or species or individual cease to be ideal for new conditions, they disappear. The mastodon and dinosaur have left but a few traces, and what may become of the species *Homo Sapiens*?

We gain just this impression from the many talks of the Shankaracharya on the Three Gunas – namely that 'Sattva' can be thought of as the ideal, 'Rajas' as excess and 'Tamas' as defect, but each time in its own context of a particular triad on the given scale.

Section 2

Man, like all other species of Organic Life which are endowed with alimentary, respiratory and nervous systems, lives by *three kinds of food* – what he eats, what he breathes, and the impressions he absorbs. Suppose that from this point of view we study the *1st Place* in the Triad of Intake-Output, namely what the individual is getting from the environment. On 11th October, His Holiness gave as an example of the Three Gunas the process of *eating*:

The *action* of eating is Rajas. The effect of the eating can be of two kinds: if it is moderate and well-regulated, then it gives a good effect, leading to happiness and good health, which we could say is Sattva. But if it is irregular or excessive it can lead to indigestion and some other diseases, which could be compared with Tamas.

We can take the hint but elaborate it a little: First, the right kind and amount of food must be available. It could be excessive, or defective, or ideal. Secondly, the intake must depend on the state of the man himself – a good healthy appetite, or excess resulting from the forms of greed or lack of control, or loss of natural appetite. This seems mainly to depend on the concentration of acid in the stomach – excess acid; normal; or absolute lack of acid as in sufferers from Pernicious Anaemia. From all this will follow the ideal body weight and physical energy, or different departures from the ideal. It's worth thinking about and finding a host of other examples.

(Conversation)

The *second kind of food* – the air we breathe – was not discussed because our questions didn't happen to lead in that direction. But we know quite a lot nowadays about the effects of lack of oxygen or CO₂ excess (the chief departures from the ideal concept 'fresh air at normal temperature and pressure').

Section 3

Then, on 17th October we pursued the subject of the Three Gunas in relation to *impressions received from the environment* from the following start given us:

All three Gunas are everywhere in the world – Sattva is everywhere, Tamas is everywhere, Rajas is everywhere. But when particular situations contain or arouse the dominance of one, then we feel it. Even in the West, where good people assemble, one can see the rising of Sattva and experience it. Here in India whenever we go to a Temple or holy place in the jungle or along the bank of a river; whatever we are in our natural state, the particles of Sattva which are concentrated in the atmosphere round these places, around a fully Realized Man, along the banks of the sacred river, around a Temple in the jungle, they unite with the Sattva in ourselves, and by this union, the ideal happiness is created and this leads to further development of Sattva. This is the sympathetic situation; in unsympathetic situations we are starved of Sattva.

Q. So, little progress being possible in unsympathetic situations, do we not want to try to collect where we are as much of this sympathy as possible?

A. Of course that is a matter of the greatest importance for the human race. But common men cannot do this; they are just controlled by the atmosphere and by the succession of external situations. But men who are on the Ladder, who have realized their possibilities to some extent, who can outweigh the other Gunas with their own Sattva; they can influence the situation and improve the atmosphere. But common men just follow the stream.

Q. But supposing we have in London a house (or houses) with a fine Tradition behind it; a house where we perform Initiations and guide the meditation; where we listen to high ideas, to your Holiness's words; where perhaps we hear special music; would not all this imbue that house with more Sattva and make it especially sympathetic to Realization?

A. Yes, all this does help to create the ideal situation; these activities form particles of Sattva in the atmosphere, and these particles in turn have this effect on everybody who comes within that circle. If somebody is receptive and sympathetic in feeling he will take them home and make them his own. He will begin to gain Realization from being initiated there, and from coming again and again to such a place. It is decidedly true that such things do affect the Essence of people as well as the atmosphere of the place.

IN SUMMARY there are three fruitful lines of thought here:

1. Manifestation of the Three Gunas according to the Platonic 'Ideal' with Aristotle's 'excess and defect'.
2. Application of this concept to experiments and observations on 'three kinds of food' received from the environment.

3. The very practical discrimination between what assists and what hinders the ideal environment for the individuals in a School like ours.

We reflect again that if part of mankind (or at least some individuals) do not qualify to receive the Higher Impressions which are independent of the perishable body, men will continue under the hard laws of Natural Selection and pay the penalty for their excesses and defects.

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