

24 February 1964

READING 6

NOTES ON MEMORY

The word 'memory' comes into your observations quite frequently; but it must be remembered that memory can be of very different kinds, most of which do not interest us particularly.

Many kinds of memory are just built into the machine and are the basis of habit. Experimental Psychology from the beginning of the century has been fascinated by the ability of rats to get through a maze even when every sensation has been gradually eliminated. How? The machine is very clever and machine-made memory is a very powerful influence in our lives.

It was Bergson who distinguished two kinds of memory (though he was wrong in claiming that one was dependent on the brain, and the other was not). The former he called 'mechanical' memory, and it comprised such things as ability to write, to speak, and ride a bicycle, to swim, to tie a bow – any one of which might vanish as a result of localised brain injury. The latter he called 'true' memory, and it comprised the total recollection of incidents and events in our own lives. We see now why the latter never vanishes with any local injury (though it does if the whole brain is silenced, as by an anaesthetic). For even your memory of the man you met yesterday is not in terms of any one kind of sensation – the image of his face has been recorded in the visual part of the brain, the sound of his voice in the auditory part, the recollection of his hand-grip in another part, and so on. The memory lives in the whole of the brain.

Now apart from all the different kinds of memory that serve the machine, there seems to be a central Store of Memory that is difficult to tap, but when recalled often seems to run counter to the machine. Though we have all (if too rarely) experienced this, perhaps the most graphic description occurs in St. Luke 22: v. 60:

And Peter said, 'Man, I know not what thou sayest.' And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And Peter *remembered...* and went out and wept bitterly.

Even this kind of memory (described there as alerted through the senses) is not the last word about memory. Is it, for instance, possible to remember *before the cock crows*?

Wouldn't that save us a lot of weeping? This kind of premonition is mentioned by several people as occurring more frequently since the Meditation. No claims are made of absolute certainty; indeed what would be the use of premonition if the event were *bound* to happen? Not uncommonly it feels like a realisation, accompanying a few moments of Consciousness, of the probability of such an event emerging from existing circumstances. One may then be able to take avoiding action.

Rarely it is a real Memory coming from the Essence – that is, inborn. To recall this Memory is the subject of Plato's *Meno*[†]. This is one of the great advantages of long and intelligent work on the 'setting up of Attention'. At a certain step of the Ladder of Self-Realization it becomes quite natural. The following glimpses of the world in which the Essence lives were recorded in the first thirty of the fifteen hundred forms returned by meditators this time last year:

[†] Since, then, the Essence is Immortal and has been born many times; since it has seen all things both in this world and the other; there is nothing it has not learnt. No wonder then, that it is able to recall to mind goodness and other things, for it knew them beforehand.

A peace that passes all understanding.

It has opened one's eyes to the world around – and often brings serenity, peace and warmth.

It is noticeable how from time to time, 'things occur to one', or small realizations take place during or soon after meditation. Also, how, when done purposefully but briefly during a situation it can help.

Have particularly noticed this calmness when things become somewhat difficult.

A period of deep peace towards the end of a half-hour.

Very strong feeling of balance and deep confidence immediately after some periods of meditation.

Have the feeling of plenty of time. Can move more slowly but get through more work.

Under the general hurly-burly of life there is a feeling of some consistent thread which is positive – this can become thin or lost, but returns.

A flashing glimpse of a deeper meaning to life – but it is elusive and afterwards I can't remember.

Things which before seemed difficult are sometimes now seen to be very simple.

At the end of a Meditation I once experienced a flood of joy so strong that I felt it with every sense. I seemed to know for the first time what real 'Joy' meant.

Twice I have had a taste of what I suppose may be called 'higher emotion'. Once I was rather frightened, but the second time it was wonderful.

We should like more examples from you now of these different kinds of knowing. If you don't meditate, in order to get such examples you will have to devote adequate time each day exploring this 'world where the Essence lives' by some other route.

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Progress in Self-realization is greatly helped by persistent efforts to recall and keep in mind that a state of great happiness and efficiency exists always within one, and that one is separated from it chiefly by forgetfulness.

CONCLUSION

The distinction between 'specific memories' built into the machine and the varying degrees of general Memory, bringing in the whole brain, enables us to understand Mr. Ouspensky's teaching about the relation of Memory to Consciousness:

What memory means in a technical sense (he said in one of his Psychological Lectures) I shall explain later. I simply want you now to turn your attention to your own observations of your memory. You will notice that you remember things differently: Some things you remember quite vividly, some very vaguely, and some you do not remember at all. You only *know* that they happened. ... You will be astonished when you realise how little you actually remember. And it happens in this way, because you *remember only the moments when you were conscious*. You will understand better what I mean if you try to turn your mind back as far as you can to early childhood, or in any

case to something that happened long ago. You will then realise how little you actually remember, and how much there is concerning which you simply *know* or heard that it happened.

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So whereas the specific memories are determined by different functions separately learnt, the General Memory is connected with different states of Consciousness.

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