

23 March 1964

## EASTER 1964

## READING 9

## THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

When, last November, we set out to find whether we could use the more recent discoveries of science to answer some important questions, we found that published descriptions of the mechanisms underlying waking from sleep could be understood in terms of day-to-day experience. We also found that they could be extended to describe experiencing Higher states of Consciousness. It is clear that now, at last, it has become possible to speak in current language of these things which at one time could only be expressed in special esoteric language.

But, inevitably, all our thinking and talking have gradually blunted the edge of our daily efforts to put into practice what is so easily talked about. In particular, we have come to talk too easily about 'alerting the Attention'. We need to remind ourselves that to reach a state of Attention fully alerted and controlled, we have first to die. To be free of the machine, all our identification with the machine has to die. That is experienced as a complete change of the feeling of 'I', a '180° turn of the mind', like the 'Hanged man' of the Tarot. A long time is needed to weaken the old attitudes to *oneself*; but at a certain moment, the death-thrust (the '*coup de grâce*') has to be given to us. Only then will a man escape for ever from the prison of his machine.

As always, examples and analogies of Spiritual laws can be found in the outer life. To freshen up the idea of 'fully alerted Attention' and escape from prison, it might help you to read some remarks made by a man who had the reputation of being escaper-in-chief from the prison camps of World War II. They come from his introduction to the collection of real-life stories he made after the success of his first book *The Wooden Horse*.

Here is the way he describes the central idea upon which he based this collection<sup>†</sup>:

I wanted to select that part of each story, not necessarily the climax, which holds for me the *moment of truth*.

This term which I have borrowed from the bull-fight is used to describe that moment when the combined efforts of the matador, picadors and banderillos have reduced the bull to such a condition of rage and fatigue that he may be finished by a sword-thrust. So far in the *corrida* it has been possible for the matador, by discreet handling of his cape, and aided by his team, to make his personal danger seem greater than it really is. But this moment admits of no bluffing. Bareheaded, alone with the bull in the centre of the ring, the matador must thrust his sword into exactly the place, the only place, where it will do its work. To do this he must incite the bull to charge or must himself move forward, so that his arm, passing over the sharp horns, can drive the sword between the shoulder-blades... In that moment of truth he knows that he is alone, and that his self-respect, his reputation and his life depend on the coolness and skill that he can command in the next few seconds.

Most of us at times of crisis know this *moment of truth*. It is the moment when one says to oneself, 'This is me, this is it'. There is a sudden strong acknowledgement of one's

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<sup>†</sup>*The Escapers* by Eric Williams, Fontana Books, pp. 26–28.

own identity. Small details become vividly etched on one's mind, so that while straining every nerve to meet and overcome the danger, one is at the same time aware of the fly buzzing against the window, the ticking of the clock on the wall, or the warmth and friendliness of the sun shining on one's hands. So acute are our senses at this moment, so vivid the impression made on our minds, that for ever afterwards a particular sound or smell will bring back with startling reality the scene, and all the emotion we felt at the time... Intense fear is usually the background to the moment of truth and with this fear comes a feeling of elation. This may be caused, my doctor tells me, by the sudden discharge of adrenalin into our bloodstream as our glands respond to the stimulus of fear. It may be caused by the fact that our animal instinct, designed to cope with far more danger than most of us experience in our civilized daily lives, takes control and swamps our inhibitions. Whatever the reason, in this moment every sense is alert yet time seems to have slowed down, and in telling about it afterwards if we do not fog the description with literary decoration, nor state what we think we should feel instead of what we felt, the account is almost bound to be a vivid one. This is how Robert Kee describes being shot down:

The guns and the searchlights were on to us at once. One of the first shells must have hit the port engine... Before I had completely realised that the port engine was out of action, we had spun. Our height was about eight hundred feet. I ceased to notice whether we were still being shot at or not. Out of the past a voice spoke clearly in my brain, 'You must push the stick well forward. It's a Hampden's only chance in a spin.' I pushed the heavy stick forward until it almost touched the instrument panel, pressed the full strength of my leg on to the rudder opposite the spin and waited. There could be no chance at this height. The snow and the frozen sea which had been waiting so patiently below came up to meet us. There was no panic. I thought: 'This is death. I am going to die.' Certainty brought calm. At the same time I felt that I had never lived so intently before. Death was the climax, not the end of life. This feeling was so strong that the force inside me seemed to overflow my personality. I thought that something from inside me that was not me would watch me die and would go on.

Then my ordinary little personality spoke; 'If you ever get out of this you'll have a story to tell'... But it was too late. Already through the glass of the cockpit I could see the smoothness of the white beach and the powdered whiskers of the dunes racing towards us... In a childish gesture of self-defence I pulled back the stick. Then darkness shattered all round me like a great black plate.

(from Robert Kee, *A Crowd is not Company*)

(Pause for Discussion)

We must realize the all-important fact that there is an exact equivalent when the 'moment of Truth' comes from *inside one*, and not from outside. We never know just when this is going to come, so we have to practise regularly the art of dying. People know now that this is the central meaning of the Mukabeleh of the Mevlevi Order of Dervishes which depicts death and resurrection; and they know it usually takes a Dervish seven years to reach the ecstasy of death and Union with Himself. They seem to forget that every half-hour of Meditation can provide a similar opportunity; for every half-hour can be a death, a dissolving into nothing. It's just

people's unwillingness to die in this pleasant and painless way that underlies all ill-success in the Meditation.

There is an aphorism in the System which says, 'A man can be born; but before he can be born he must die; but before he dies he must first awake'. That is of course the inner meaning of the Easter Story. It is contained also in a poem that came to one of us ready-made after Meditation and which apparently arose by a chance reading some days before in an old National Geographic Magazine of the Easter ceremonies in Athens:

### **Doubt no more**

In the dark upper chamber a music is sounding;  
 Keep watch on the windows, and guard the door.  
 'Christos anéste! Christ is risen!  
 Why didn't anyone tell us before

The meaning, the meaning of all the experience,  
 Children of Adam, you have in your store,  
 A place of Perfection, of Power and of Glory?  
 But why didn't somebody tell us before?

They told us, they told us in picture and story;  
 What more could they tell us? What more, what more?  
 'Christos anésté! Christ is risen!  
 Watch thou the windows and guard the door.'

In the dark upper chamber a Presence is stirring,  
 Though Thomas called Didymos doubt as before:  
 'Christos anéste! Christ is risen!  
 Reach hither thy finger, and doubt no more.'

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