

14 June 1965

READING 5

Have you any observations to record from occasions during the week when you were free from 'repetition' and 'movement in Time' and could see the world (as in Figure 1, Reading 4) in terms of expansion and contraction of your own consciousness alone?

One way of prolonging this state of mind is to recall how our minds change in relation to certain Truths, which remain eternally the same; and it would perhaps be refreshing this week to look back at something we just touched on before Easter (in the paper 1965/14 of the 15th March).

We asked the question: 'What are some of the characteristics of more Objective states of Consciousness' and continued: 'One such is the feeling of *difference* between false and True, illusion and Reality. You begin to see yourself pretending, putting on an act... With this you begin to be aware of what are called "Self-evident Truths", Truths which seem to arise spontaneously in very different people at different times and in different places. Can you mention some of those? Probably only in a moment when you are rather less subjective.' We put these questions, if you remember, to you at a meeting here on Monday, 15th March; and it happened to be Irene Nicholson's last day here from Mexico.

A month later we had the following from her:

17 April 1965

Would this be of any use to throw out as a suggestion for people to toss about? As I was flying across the Atlantic, and then across the USA, some questions about self-evident truths formed in my mind and I began to see them in relation to the Diagram in the way I have set this out:

'Self-evident Truths'

What are these 'self-evident truths' that are talked about? In the world of the confusion of tongues there exists no such thing.

One man may know he is asleep, but another will deny it hotly. One may have proved to himself that he has no Will, no Consciousness, and no Permanent I, and another will be certain that he has all three and that there is no need to work for them. A young politician assured a member of our groups recently that he was completely realized and fully in control of himself and of his immediate surroundings. The implication was that, given sufficient rope, he could bring all his fellow-men to the same happy state!

Of course in the world of material objects there are certain self-evident truths which even this young politician would be able to see. We do not need any further proof that fire burns, than to put our hand near a flame. The taste of sugar and salt, of pain and pleasure, of kicks and kisses, all speak for themselves. But when we leave the material world there seems to be nothing but disagreement everywhere.

Self-evident truths, then, must belong to the Ladder of Self-Development. As we rise from step to step there will be more of them, and they will change in quality, becoming all the time deeper and more objective; moreover, *two people on the same step will be unable to disagree*. (This is the mark of what Mr. Ouspensky called 'Understanding').

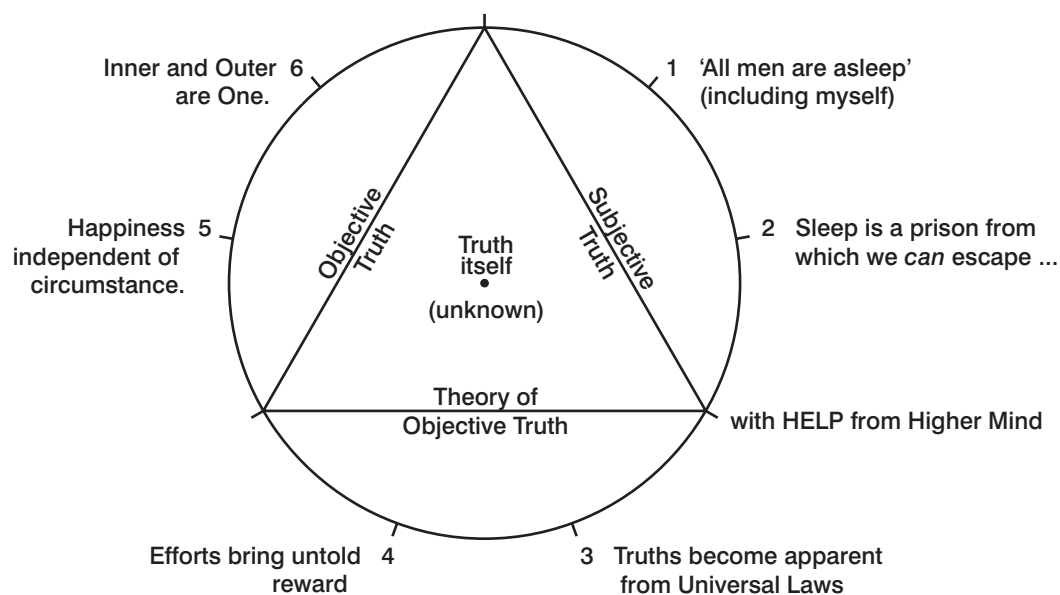


Diagram of Self-evident Truths

A man who has not even begun to feel the 'good impulse' will, as we have noticed, be quite sure that he possesses Consciousness, Will and Permanent I, that he can do, and that the world revolves around him. But once we are firmly on the first rung of the Ladder we begin to get glimpses of certain truths about ourselves. On this rung the 'self-evident truths' will often be negative in character. We are *not* awake, and all men are asleep with us. We can *not* 'do', and this is the state of humanity as a whole. We do *not* have Will.

But if this negative aspect of the 'self-evident truths' were all, we would have no incentive to move to the second rung – to make a 'Decision'. *Decision is based on the realisation that it is possible to escape from the prison; that (in the words of St. Paul) 'by myself I can do nothing but I am not justified thereby'; that it is possible to accumulate a number of small but reliable desires and bring them together into sufficient Will to last perhaps even as long as two minutes.*

On the right side of the triangle the 'self-evident truths' are concerned with ourselves. They are on a personal scale. The shock that takes us further is the realisation that we need the help of other people, that *nothing can be achieved without Higher Knowledge and help from men who have trod the same path before.* We know that nothing can change for humanity unless such higher help is available. This in itself is an extraordinary and startling truth which will be incomprehensible to a man who has not yet begun to climb the Ladder. He will ask, 'Where is this higher knowledge? Where are the proofs?'

But we ourselves are convinced. And in our efforts to go higher up the Ladder we discover some (at this stage) painful self-evident truths that are all embodied in the two great Laws which any true School will teach: the Law of Three which shows us that *no result can be achieved by an inappropriate action;* and the Law of Seven which explains *why all our efforts inevitably run down if they are not supported by parallel efforts deliberately applied at the points where the impulses fade off.*

These are the great self-evident truths which we learn on Step Three. They can be known only in School and through School discipline, and all our efforts are useless if they do not take these Laws into account.

On Step Four we begin to find that there *is* help, coming from above. We find to our astonishment that ‘Our Father in Heaven’ is bountiful, that He rewards us out of all proportion to the efforts we make. But of course *we must make what efforts we can*, as sincerely and consistently as we know how.

Already on the second side of the triangle we are beginning to learn the theory of certain Objective truths and we begin to receive a taste of the fruits of the practical application of these truths. Practical understanding will come on the third side of the triangle, on Steps Five and Six. The shock that will take us across the gap is the sudden realisation that the knowledge we have been accumulating is not theory but fact: fact as actual and simple as that sugar tastes sweet.

On Step Five we find the self-evident truths deepening to an extraordinary degree. We know, for instance, that *happiness can exist independently of all external circumstances*, however unpleasant; that *time and space are illusions of our senses*; that ‘*death is nothing*’, for we live again and again.

But we are still inclined to retain a certain dualism in our thinking. There is still ‘us’ and ‘the others’, our inner world, and the outer world. All this must evidently disappear on the Sixth Step where everything becomes One.

About Step Six we can speak only because already from Step Four we have had glimpses of it. But we cannot yet tell what it would mean to live on the third side of the triangle permanently. If we were there more constantly, our whole Being would be so permeated by these self-evident truths that every action, every word, every feeling would be a reflection of them and we could no longer trust the world of ‘many I’s’ – that world which on the lower rungs we began to fear and from which we longed to escape, but to which we have continued to cling through long habit.

On each Step we know *practically* the self-evident truths of that Step, and our lives change accordingly. On each Step we are slowly learning the truths of the Step above. We can even glimpse those truths that belong two Steps ahead. *But on a day when we stay on Step One we cannot know or understand truths that are self-evident and completely practical to the man on Step Four.* Truths spoken of by men on Steps Five and Six will appear sheer lunacy, or at best theoretical speculation having no practical value – the hypotheses of unrealistic dreamers.

That is why truths are self-evident only according to where we stand on the Ladder at any given moment. By what we know, by what we are convinced of, by where our confidence lies, we can tell precisely where we stand on the Ladder of Self-Development.

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(We have been encouraged in the past to draw up, each of us, a short ‘credo’ or statement of belief based on what at any stage we have proved for ourselves beyond doubt. This is valuable as a Truth about which we cannot argue whatever our state. Members of the Tuesday Work Party, for instance, might say: ‘I believe that negative emotions are only destructive, never useful; and moreover I know that I have been, and can be free of them. I believe that permanent freedom can be obtained by looking in the opposite direction towards the happiness that is independent of conditions.’)

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