

28 June 1965

READING 7

PART 1

As soon as we begin to escape for short periods from the sad world of Repetition, we begin also to taste a new emotion which changes our attitude to everything. But we also find ourselves amazed and perplexed by the speed with which the good thoughts and feelings and physical well-being inevitably evaporate, leaving us just where we were before, with the added frustration of the sense of failure. But when we realise that the cause of this lies not in personal failure but in the structure and chemistry of the human machine and begin to understand the mechanism, we cease to accuse ourselves and then we find that escape is not so difficult as it seems. The difficulty is due to ignorance, and new scientific discoveries throughout the world are supplying the facts which were missing in the 1930's when we used to hear Mr. Ouspensky say things like this:

To begin with, in the Emotional Centre there is no natural negative part. The greater part of negative emotions are artificial and are based on thinking and instinctive processes which are quite unrelated to them but are transformed by imagination and identification... All these emotions really come from... changes in inner organs and tissues.... External events and inner realisations do not produce emotions; they produce inner reflexes [which are interpreted by us as sensations and emotions].

(P.D.O. 4th Psychological Lecture)

The new knowledge which is now becoming established proves these 'inner reflexes' to be electrochemical changes. And it links together the nervous activity of the forebrain, with the hormones of the endocrine glands, and the DNA molecule ('genetic constitution') in the nucleus of every cell of every organ in the body. At present this knowledge lies buried in different scientific journals; but we hope gradually to present you with the evidence. For now it is enough to realise that the *repetition* of every strong sensation or emotion and every thinking process tinged with emotion, sets up a chain of chemical reactions over which we have no control whatever. The System calls all uncontrolled thinking by the general term '*imagination*', and it calls by the name '*identification*' the 'loss of identity' caused by being 'taken possession of' by a sensation or emotion. It is these two which set up those 'reverberating circuits' and chemical chain-reactions which wreck our lives, frustrate our aims, and bind us to the wheel of Recurrence.

With this in mind we can see the wisdom of the urgent advice the Shankaracharya gives us to 'turn quickly away from the darkness towards the Light'. If we realise that 'happiness is the very nature of the Atman', we understand that in order 'to know ourSelves' we must have 'Positive Emotion', and it is worth re-reading the following passage with which that lecture of Mr. Ouspensky's continued:

Positive emotions such as 'love', 'hope', 'faith', in the sense in which they are usually understood, i.e. as permanent emotions, are impossible for a man in the *ordinary* state of consciousness. These emotions require higher states of consciousness; they require inner Unity, Self-consciousness, permanent 'I' and Will. *Positive emotions are emotions which*

cannot become negative. But all our pleasant emotions such as joy, sympathy, affection, self-confidence can, at any moment, turn into boredom, irritation, envy, fear and so on. Love can turn into jealousy or fear of losing what one loves, or into anger and hatred; hope can turn into day-dreaming and the expectation of impossible things, and faith can turn into superstition and a weak acceptance of comforting nonsense.

Even such emotions as a purely intellectual emotion, i.e. the desire for knowledge, or an aesthetic emotion, i.e. a feeling of beauty or harmony, if they become mixed with identification, immediately unite with emotions of a negative kind such as self-pride, vanity, selfishness, conceit and so on...

These negative emotions are a terrible phenomenon. They occupy an enormous place in our life. Of many people it is possible to say that all their lives are regulated and controlled, and in the end ruined, by *negative emotions*. At the same time, negative emotions do not play any useful part at all in our lives. They do not help our orientation, they do not give us any knowledge, they do not guide us in any sensible manner. On the contrary, they spoil all our pleasures, they make life a burden to us and they very effectively prevent our possible development *because there is nothing more mechanical in our life than negative emotions*.

Negative emotions can never come under our control. People who think they can control their negative emotions and manifest them when they want to, simply deceive themselves. Negative emotions depend on identification; if identification is destroyed in some particular case, they disappear. The strangest and most fantastic fact about negative emotions is that people actually worship them. I think that, for an ordinary mechanical man, the most difficult thing to realise is that his own and other people's negative emotions have no value whatever and *do not contain anything noble, anything beautiful or anything strong*. In reality negative emotions contain nothing but weakness and very often the beginning of hysteria, insanity and crime. The only good thing about them is that, being quite useless and artificially created by imagination and identification, they can be destroyed without any loss. And this is the only chance of escape that man has.

If negative emotions were useful or necessary for any, even the smallest, purpose, and if they were a function of a really existing part of the emotional centre, man would have no chance, because no inner development is possible so long as man keeps his negative emotions.

In School language it is said on the subject of the struggle with negative emotions: *Man must sacrifice his suffering*.

'What could be easier to sacrifice?' everyone will say. But in reality people will sacrifice anything rather than their negative emotions. There is no pleasure and no enjoyment man will not sacrifice for quite small motives but he will never sacrifice his suffering. And in a sense there is a reason for this.

Many people have nothing but negative emotions. All their 'I's are negative. If you take negative emotions away from them, they simply collapse and go up in smoke.

And what would happen to all our life without negative emotions? What would happen to what we call art, to the theatre, to drama, to most novels?

Unfortunately there is no chance of negative emotions disappearing by themselves. Negative emotions can be conquered and can disappear only with the help of School Knowledge and School methods. The escape from negative emotions is a part of School training and is closely connected with all School work.

(P.D.O. 4th Psychological Lecture)

[In your discussion don't analyse your negative emotions. Speak only of quick recognition and immediate escape. Only when we escape do we realise how semi-negative we are most of the time, and then we just can't be content to stay like that!]

PART 2. ESCAPE FROM NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

For your researches on the Knowledge necessary to escape from negative emotions or transform them into positive, the following quotations may help. They come from someone who knew Mr. Ouspensky well before I did:

I remember a conversation about changing negative emotion into positive emotion of years ago. It was at a meeting at which Mr. Ouspensky said that by that time (the date of the meeting) we had the right *not* to have negative emotion. He said that up to then all we could hope to do was not to express it, but from then on we must learn not to have it. He gave a method which was very practical.

As soon as one was threatened with negativeness, we must summon to our minds *everything* we had heard about negative emotion: for instance, that it was negativeness which kept us as we were; that we would *never* change so long as we kept on having it; that it wasted the precious energy of energy of emotion which we needed above all for growth and understanding; that it was an enormous price to pay for a few moments indulgence in it; that it made the shape of our lives and prevented even ordinary good things happening and ruined relationships, etc., etc. And to add to the catalogue anything we found real in our experience and useful.

The reason I am writing about this is because it works in the most amazing way. I had an extraordinary experience of this soon after he spoke of it. I felt mounting up in me a wave of very intense negative emotion – quite justifiably, from the ordinary point of view. I remembered what he had said, and I made real and active in me all I knew of negativeness, its effects and the System's Teaching about it. (Mr. O. had said: 'Do it quick, quick...') I can still remember the extraordinary change in me. It was physical as well as emotional and mental. The physical feeling was like the feeling of warmth creeping up quickly over one when one has been very cold and gets into a hot bath; exactly like this, all over me. And then the marvellous relief of being rid of this really violent (and reasonable and justifiable) indignation and anger, and at the same time a sort of joyful understanding of the person who had caused it and no particle of resentment. It was absolutely wonderful.

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Prevalent negative emotions vary, of course, from time to time. I would say now that among us, apart from worry about various stresses (usually connected with 'love or money'), our favourite negative emotions seem to be those stemming from remorse and disappointment at falling short of the target we have set ourselves; and this leads inevitably to annoyance with other people who are doing the same. During the early history of our branch of the Work (in World War I and after), people were taught to be very rough with themselves and others; and today one can clearly distinguish those groups which continue in that narrow way and can keep clear of them.

The following quotation in a letter from St. Francis de Sales to a pupil of his (1607) shows that he took the same line:

One of the good uses that we should make of gentleness is that whereof the subject is ourselves, never fretting at ourselves or at our imperfections; for though reason requires that when we commit faults, we should be displeased and sorry for them, yet we must remain ourselves from having a displeasure which is bitter and sullen, fretful and angry. Wherein many commit a great fault, who, when they give way to anger, are annoyed at having been annoyed, are vexed at having been vexed, and at having fretted; for by this means they keep their hearts preserved and steeped in anger; and although the second anger may seem to destroy the first, yet it serves as an opening and passage for a new anger on the first occasion which presents itself; and moreover, these fits of anger, fretfulness and irritation which we have against ourselves, tend to pride and have no other source than self-love which is troubled and disquieted at seeing ourselves imperfect.

We must then have a dislike for our faults which is peaceable, dispassionate and firm...

For myself, if, for example, I had a great desire not to fall into the sin of vanity, and if notwithstanding, I had fallen deeply into it, I would not seek to reprove my heart in this manner:

‘Art thou not miserable and abominable, that after so many resolutions thou hast suffered thyself to be carried away by vanity? Die of shame, raise no more thine eyes to heaven, blind, shameless that thou art, traitor and disloyal to thy God!’ and such-like things; but I would rather reprove it in a reasonable and compassionate manner: ‘Well, my poor heart, here we are, fallen into the ditch which we made so firm a resolution to avoid; ah! let us arise and leave it for ever; let us implore the mercy of God and trust that it will help us to be more ourselves again on the path of humility; courage! henceforth let us be more on our guard, God will help us, *we shall do well enough*’...

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Finally, the founder of the Quakers, George Fox, wrote to Oliver Cromwell’s daughter in these words:

Friend, Be still and cool in thy own mind and spirit from thy own thoughts, and then thou wilt feel the principle of God to turn thy mind to the Lord God, whereby thou wilt receive His strength and power, from whence Life comes, to allay all tempests, blusterings and storms...

What the Light doth make manifest and discover, temptations, confusions, corruptions, distempers, do not look at the temptations, confusions, corruptions, but at the Light which discovers them, that makes them manifest; and with the same Light you will feel over them, to receive power to stand against them... For looking down at sin, and corruption and distraction, you are swallowed up in it; but looking at the Light which discovers them, you will see over them. That will give victory; and you will find Grace and strength; and there is the first step of peace...

So there is plenty of precedent for this very practical attitude!

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