

12 July 1965

READING 9

‘WHO AM I?’

PART 1

Many of you have noticed that, when practising some special method such as the Meditation or the Dervish Turning, there sometimes occurs a striking change in the feeling of ‘I’. This is one of the surest signs of progress and merits further study.

The first point to keep in mind is this: it can quite readily be observed that man’s nature is threefold, and words like ‘head’, ‘heart’ and ‘hand’ are used to describe its three parts which correspond to the physiologist’s three divisions of the nervous system. It would be generally conceded that man lives in a house of three rooms. Until recently the existence of a Fourth Room was quite unknown; but research in the 1950’s revealed that there is a complex mechanism in the brain devoted to attention and consciousness irrespective of any specific function like thinking, feeling, body sensations or skills. It was called the ‘non-specific alerting mechanism’, but its existence is already being forgotten, and its importance, has been missed. In fact, the Fourth Room contains the capacity of self-awareness. Whenever anything ‘rises into consciousness’, it means it has entered the Fourth Room and partly engaged our attention.

The second point is that we have absolutely no direct control over this ‘feeling of I’ which is fitful and transitory, generally governed merely by chance, and usually absent just when we most need it. Sometimes, however, the threat of danger may cause one to ‘come to oneself’, to ‘pull oneself together’; but without that man may be said to be quite unconscious for half his life (when he is asleep), and that during the other half his consciousness of himself is always changing. It is perhaps the chief object of a School such as ours to enable people to extend and acquire control over this feeling of ‘I’; and this is the meaning of the terms ‘Self-realization and Self-remembering’.

At a meeting in London on December 18th 1930, Mr. Ouspensky gave a very clear short summary of the subject. After answering some questions he said that,

... when speaking of ‘I’, it was necessary to realise that, in our System, ‘I’ could be spoken of in five ways, on five different levels: Man in his ordinary state is a multiplicity of ‘I’s. This is the first meaning. When he decides to start work, an observing ‘I’ appears.

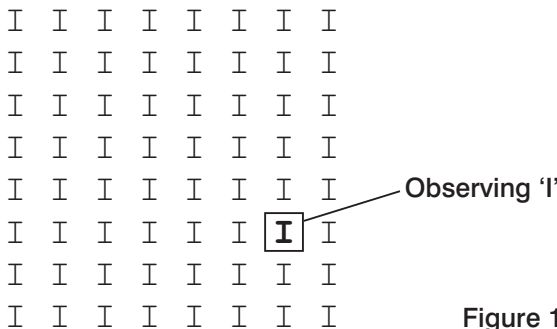


Figure 1

It is worth pausing to ask ourselves what this observing ‘I’ is meant to observe, what he is capable of seeing? It was put like this in a Psychological lecture in the 1930’s: Till he starts to observe man is convinced that he has individuality, that he has a Permanent ‘I’ with Will and Consciousness. When observing ‘I’ appears he sees that:

He is not *one*, he has not *one* 'I', he consists of hundreds of different 'I's, many of whom do not even know one another.

Every wish, every desire, every 'like' and every 'dislike', every opinion and every tendency, every belief and every disbelief is an 'I'. And each one of them has his own will and his own resistance to the will of other 'I's. These 'I's are divided into groups. Some of these groups are permanent and legitimate, i.e. they correspond to the divisions of man's natural being. Other groups are artificial, invented, imaginary; and they play the most important, and sometimes a most negative, part in human life. We shall come to these groups later.

Now I want to emphasise two facts.

First, I want to repeat what was said before about the absence in man of one permanent controlling 'I' different from other 'I's. All 'I's are equal; it is better to say that they are equally weak. Each of them can occasionally conquer other 'I's, each of them can become Caliph for an hour and then be replaced by another 'I'. None of them can do much good, but almost every one of them, in one hour or even less, can do so much harm that all the other 'I's will have to pay for it all their lives.

NOTE

Recently we have had special opportunities for observing changing 'I's. Here are just two examples:

1. Training in the Dervish Turning requires the would-be Dervish to come and practise every morning at 7 o'clock for six weeks. Some have to come a long distance, and one man who has an hour's drive into London testifies to the number of different 'I's which appear at 6 a.m. to dissuade him from this extraordinary imposition. Only a paramount and undisputed resolution has made him do it each day!
2. In Meditation from the beginning we have 'to come out of what we are *not*, in order to begin *to Be what we are*.' First and foremost we are *not* those 'many 'I's'; we have to leave them all behind, until there is only the observing 'I' to know whether one is truly meditating or not. If this is well and truly done over quite a long time, then the discovery of the Ultimate Observer, 'Real I', and its expansion to merge with the Infinite will follow much as Mr. Ouspensky goes on to describe.

One of us (C.L.) expresses these two stages in the following diagram:

Stage 1. Can be taken to represent the descent through all the different 'I's to the 'silence' in which contact with one's real nature can be made if Observing I alone remains.

Stage 2. (dotted lines) Shows the increasing manifestation of this Real 'I' or Atman as it passes through the seven gates from the separate to the Universal.

[NOTE: Please read this only to people who have been given the Meditation; these are C.L.'s actual Words:

You remember the Maharishi's diagram like this ('a', facing page), which indicates how the Mantra becomes finer and finer as it passes through various regions of the mind, eventually disappearing when it gets below the level of the mind's experience? I used to get worried by this diagram, and couldn't get along with it – in fact, the whole idea used to worry me quite a bit. Then suddenly one day I realised that the diagram was incomplete. The real diagram was a double cone like this (as in 'b').

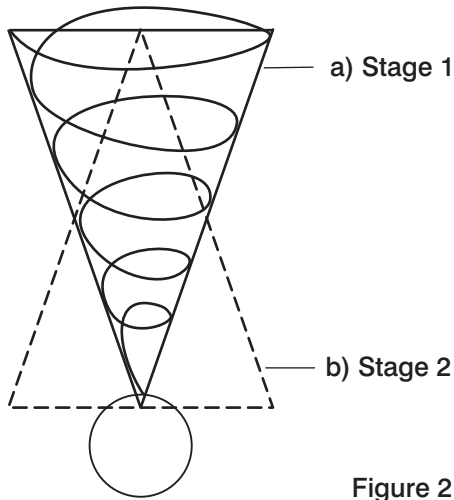


Figure 2

I wonder if you see what I mean? As the Mantra itself becomes less and less, the one who experiences it – oneSelf – comes into the picture more and more. When one begins the half-hour it is all Mantra and no Self; at the other extreme it is all Self and no Mantra! For as the Mantra becomes finer and finer the Self expands more and more. And when the Mantra reaches the bottom of the diagram and disappears, oneSelf becomes united with something much larger than oneSelf – the Universal Self, or however one likes to describe it.

As this was a great help to me, perhaps it might be to others. But isn't it interesting that you thought out this very diagram long ago, before we had the Meditation! And doesn't it explain that too!]

*

PART 2

In order to understand Mr. Ouspensky's further description, we must remind you briefly of the Eastern allegory of 'The House and the Servants'.

Man is like a house from which the Master is absent and in which 'there are many servants but no Steward in charge of them. Consequently the condition of the house is chaotic, none of the servants is doing his right work. One of the 'I's, seeing this shocking state of affairs, collects a few friends round him, who agree to appoint one of their number as 'deputy steward'. The deputy steward and his friends do what they can, and when the house is in some sort of working order, the Steward will come. The Steward knows the Will of the Master and can get the house in good order for Him to come and live there.

Mr. Ouspensky's description (with which we began) continues with the following diagram:

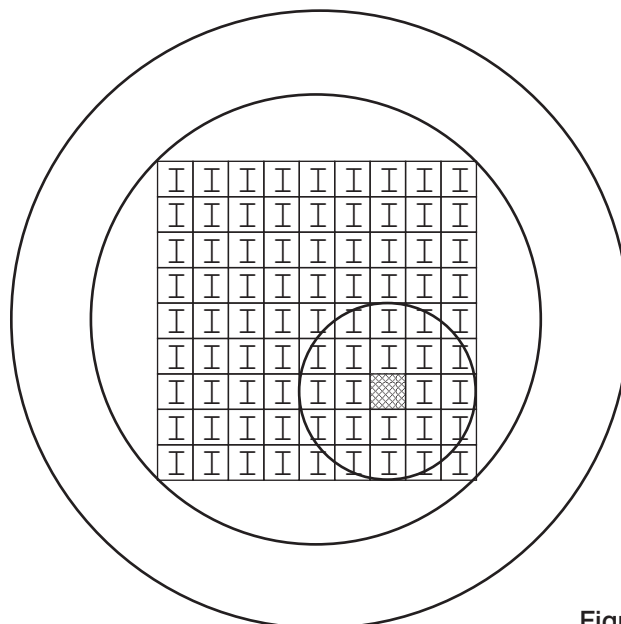


Figure 3

When he decides to work an observing 'I' appears. This is shown shaded in on the diagram (Figure 3). This is the second meaning. The next meaning, indicated by the smallest circle, is where 'deputy steward' appears who has control over a number of 'I's. The fourth meaning, indicated by the first circumscribing circle, is where Steward appears; he has control over all 'I's. The fifth meaning is that of Master. He is drawn as the big circle outside, as he has time-body; he knows the past and also the future, although there must be degrees of this.

[In your discussion try to relate as much of this to your own experience as possible – for instance, while Turning in a Mukabeleh.]

The whole of Figure 3 looked at from the physiologist's angle is the alerting mechanism at different stages. Felt psychologically it means successive changes in the feeling of I in the Fourth Room – 'the place where life can be regulated.'

* * *