

24 October 1966

READING 2

The diagram of the three-storeyed house which we've been using this month to describe that part of us in which we feel 'I', has, as we said, two sides to it. There is the 'ego' (manifest to all who have studied themselves), with which we now are only too familiar; but there is also the great secret it contains, namely that behind the scenes lives the Real 'I' for which the whole of human life is a game of hide-and-seek.

Now the relation between these two – the apparent and the Real – is the most difficult thing in the world to describe, and yet, at the same time, the most important. It was the central theme of Mr. Ouspensky's 'Cinema-drama' – the relation between Ivan Osokin and the Magician. The study of comparative religions, philosophies, and psychologies, shows how easy it is to slip over into one or other extreme – either the dogma of the primitive tribal deity and of the far-away 'God out there' (which the Bishop of Woolwich set out to assail), or the supreme egotism of a materialist who sees nothing higher than himself. Another example of this was the postcard signed 'Atman', sent me by a young man after his first experience!

This same question was also the central theme of the Upanishads, and many are the similes and pictures by which they tried to get people to understand it. One (from the Katha Upanishad) was that of the Chariot; and others are used from time to time by His Holiness, as for instance the verse: 'Like the butter hidden in milk, pure consciousness resides in every being; it is to be constantly churned, with the disciplined mind as the churning-rod.' (Amrtabindu Upanishad, 20)

The difficulty, of course, is to avoid setting up dualistic conflicts like 'killing something in order to grow something different'.

For me at this time, the most helpful is the 'Metaphor of Two Birds on One Tree', which is contained in just two couplets of the Mundaka Upanishad, not used in my presence by His Holiness, but a favourite of the first Shankara's. In the original it is a marvel of pure poetry in very compact form; a literal translation might read like this:

Two birds of beautiful plumage, close friends and companions, live in intimate relation on the very same tree. One of them (full of movement) eats the sweet fruit; the other, without eating, watches.

That's the first couplet – and the tree with the twin birds, the tree of life or of the human psyche, is a well-known motif in oriental tapestries and carpets. In the next couplet the figure is interpreted and developed:

One bird (the separate-seeming ego), being deluded, laments, made sad by a feeling of helplessness because of not being the lord and master; but when he sees on the same tree that other, the Lord in whom all the pious take delight, and comprehends his greatness, then all his grief is gone.

For he knows that between himself and that other there is a fundamental identity.

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So the problem discussed last week of the three sources of identification, from which we all suffer in varying degrees, is really the problem of what deludes this restless fruit-eating bird into imagining he is monarch of all he surveys or feeling sad when he finds he isn't. For the common bird is always quarrelling and singing noisily, whereas the song of the rare bird, like that of the nightingale, is only heard when all the rest is silent.

Of course it is the identification, not useful activity, that is the trouble; and perhaps you remember this description by His Holiness of the Fifth Step on the Ladder of Self-realization:

The fifth stage is loss of identification. After regular glimpses of the Real Self, the attachment of the small self to body or possessions fades away. At this point there remains no *identification, association* or *attachment* of self to anything else.

(And this includes, of course, identification with habits of suffering – self-pity or whatever one's favourite negative emotion happens to be.) About this fifth stage His Holiness said:

This stage denotes that the man starts looking at things *as they are*. He gets right values for everything... He starts getting glimpses of the fact that he and the 'outside world' are one thing... It is quite possible, even before the fourth stage, to have glimpses of the next stage ahead; but as in ordinary education you have to pass from Primary to Graduation stage by stage, just so you have to take these steps and unless you pass one, you cannot go on to the next. Thus the completion of the fourth stage determines that the student does not turn back or leave the Work. The realization of the fifth stage gives assurance of unity with the material world – unity of Spirit with materiality.

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Thus the only point of comparing notes together as to how one chiefly gets identified, is to help each one see and eliminate the principle causes in himself – and leave it all behind.

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