

7 November 1966

## READING 4

## WILL

In Part 4 of Reading 1 reference was made to the 'other side of the penny'. One side of the penny is the selection of good impressions and the cultivation of certain higher impressions of Truth, love and happiness which come all too rarely; the other side is the cultivation of better and better *expression* of those things in our behaviour; our thoughts, words, postures and movements. We feel that we all have much to achieve in this respect, and indeed it is most important for 'the road to Hell is paved with good intentions' and it is difficult to be happy if one is aware that one is not living up to one's professed ideals. We have been reminded from time to time of the prayer which belongs to our System: 'O God the Creator and you that work with Him, help us to remember ourselves so that we may avoid *all involuntary actions* through which alone evil can become manifested'.

When we first came here and heard the teaching, we were told that men behave, not as men, but as machines; and that all the troubles and complications of human life (so obvious today) are due to this fact. What does it mean? Look at the daily papers; take some public figure such as a Prime Minister; if you knew everything about this man, his heredity, his upbringing, his education, beliefs, desires and friends, and if in addition you could know all the pressures exerted on him from outside, then his thoughts and actions would be entirely predictable, no choice and no will. He doesn't think, speak and decide but *it* thinks, *it* speaks, *it* decides; just as *it* rains or *it* snows. Of course since none of us can have this God-like knowledge about anyone, the words and actions of people are a continual surprise to us – but that's only ignorance. When it comes to larger and larger groups of people, works employers, unions, ministers, governments and crowds, these are even more subject to mechanical laws like the Laws of Accident and Probability.

There was also a story from the *Philokalia* which I shall have to quote from memory and stand open to correction. Two brothers were brought to St. Anthony the Great, desiring to be his followers. He asked them, 'If a man smites you on your right cheek, can you turn to him the other also?' They looked at each other and said, 'We are not able to do this.' He asked again, 'If you cannot turn the other cheek, can you accept the blow without flinching?' Again they said, 'No, we cannot do that.' 'Then,' said St. Anthony, 'can you at least refrain from returning blow for blow?' They looked down, ashamed, and said, 'We are afraid we cannot even do that.' 'Take these people,' cried St. Anthony to those about him, 'and brew them some medicine, for they are ill.'

But all this, that man is a machine and has no Will, refers to ordinary life outside, and something new must begin from our first contact with a School. We use the word 'IT' for the machine, the word 'I' for what is above the machine and the body. In the Shankaracharya's words, 'Through the meditation we begin to be what we are, we must come out of what we are *not*'. Through using all the efforts we can and all the help we get to 'come out of what we are not', we cultivate and strengthen Will. I am reminded of the attention Mr. Ouspensky gave to this in a letter (October 25th) from someone who met him before I did, which recalls a statement made at one of the first meetings in this house near the end of 1938:

It was at a small meeting in the left-hand studio (as you enter)... Someone spoke about Will and our situation in regard to this, according to the System teaching. I always remember with such gratitude and relief that Mr. Ouspensky said at once that the moment we tried to work we had to exercise some will. All we tried to do, stopping turning thoughts and useless talk, not expressing negative emotions, trying to self-remember, directing attention, etc., all these efforts went against the stream of mechanicalness and needed a degree of will. I felt also that this implies that it wasn't only in our work here that this kind of will was to be exercised, but by anyone who was trying in any way to control their lives and order their inner world and their behaviour according to any system or code... There had been something paralysing to me in the idea that I had no vestige of will – as we were told in the beginning...

Yes indeed, and the only reason for going back to the idea of common man as a complete machine is to remind ourselves that it isn't quick or easy, for all the forces of mechanicalness in life on earth are arrayed behind 'every idle word'. So we mustn't lose heart or accuse ourselves but just happily keep going.

Coming back to this very moment today, November 1966, we are learning a lot about the 'cultivation of Will'. The meditation was the sweetest, gentlest and simplest way of cultivating Will that most of us had ever met. All that makes the meditation onerous or difficult from time to time is just part of 'anti-will', just the mechanicalness of life or our own nature. Directly it touches our hearts, it becomes a 'labour of love' which is no labour at all. Quite soon we come to think of Will as 'Love' and then everything is much easier. But remember, we all have our ups and downs, and if one of our friends happens to be 'down' one week, we must exert all the will we have not to go down with them. Someone saw a notice on the back of a car in the road, 'Don't follow me, I'm lost'!

To those who have willingly chosen the more rigorous discipline of the Mevlevi Turning, all this applies with added force. Indeed it gives the rest of us tremendous encouragement in the immense potency of 'Will' to see them overcome all obstacles in keeping up their initial six-weeks training, and we also admire their friends and members of their families who make it possible for them. Again it is what for many of us makes every Mukabeleh such a moving experience. But I'm sure the turners will agree that they won't be getting the full results of this splendid short-cut if, immediately afterwards and all the rest of the day, they relapse, forget the idea of cultivating Will (or Love), and blow off all their hard-won energy in a great counterblast of mechanicalness!

Finally, we must remember that there are many wrong ideas in ordinary thought about Will. Those of us who read the Gospels will find great value in asking ourselves the question: 'In what ways did Christ (as depicted there) manifest Will?' It's so very *passive*, in the face of all those in whom power is ordinarily vested, the Pharisees and Priests, Herod, Pilate, the Sanhedrin – the proud and active representatives of worldly 'Will'; and it is perhaps brought out most clearly in the *Hymn of Jesus*. But there is one of His similes which I commend to you since it specially refers to Will.

Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.  
(St. Matthew 7: 24–25)

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