

20 February 1967

## READING 4

## PART 1. 'THE DISCIPLINE OF SELF-RESTRAINT'

Those bigger meetings we've been having were meant to stir us all up, put us on the stretch, make us work for Self-realization, make us think on a bigger scale, and put our thoughts into words. They didn't achieve very much partly because we may have tried to arrange them in the wrong way, and partly because we fell asleep again so quickly – a few in the audience could have helped but got bored instead!

Must we always fall asleep so quickly? Why do we fall asleep? It can be from *exhaustion* of our limited supplies of Spiritual energy. Though periods of more intense effort are valuable for getting over a particular obstacle, and are often provided in this Work, we must all remember that we can't keep them up for long. The other, perhaps more general, reason why we fall asleep is *complacency*. We accept our laziness about diving deep within to get the energy from the Treasury, and we settle for the inevitable compromise. Or, even if we are scrupulous and attentive about that, we are complacent about our ignorance – our ignorance about ourselves. We're still so ignorant about ourselves that our progress remains difficult and slow.

During the first talk we had on our last visit to the Shankaracharya he gave some illuminating answers about exhaustion and complacency from the point of view of Meditation (though it applies equally to all our efforts):

Q. With the growing feeling of love, many want to meditate without consideration of time. Is it good to continue longer?

S. How encouraging that many have a love for Meditation! But here's a word of caution: If you find something good in the way of rich food, it is possible to have more of it, and for some time to digest it, but not for very long; for then comes the indigestion which can be very bad!

The instructor must watch and see that such situations are under control. For even if somebody *does* enjoy those extra hours, he will almost certainly be subject to a kind of self-satisfaction; congratulating himself that, after all, *he* has achieved it! This feeling is very dangerous.

[We used to be told that this is the meaning of the Prayer: 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil', which was called 'Second Sleep'.]

Q. Yes. Why *is* it that one falls flat on his face directly he congratulates himself?

S. The feeling of achievement makes it seem that he deserves a rest for a while. But rest destroys momentum, and leads very easily to sleep, when it is necessary to keep awake – the fall is near.

A story is told to children, of a race between a hare and a tortoise. From the start the hare ran fast and covered a long distance. Looking back he couldn't see any sign of the tortoise. So because he had plenty of time, he sat down in the shade of a tree to rest, and fell asleep. So sound was his sleep that the tortoise managed to finish the course before the hare woke up!

Thus the tortoise, who does the two half-hours regularly and well, reaches his goal in the end; whereas the hare may not.

In summary, the desire for Meditation must be kept alive as long as needful by the *discipline of self-restraint*.

[And the same applies to any intensive efforts we undertake, or we shall be victims of 'second sleep', which monks call '*accidie*' or 'Spiritual fatigue', for from this a second awakening is more difficult.]

## PART 2. THE MECHANISMS OF MEMORY

Now for our ignorance about ourselves! The most important subject on which we remain ignorant is *Memory*, so greatly stressed by Mr. Ouspensky. In his day very little was known to science about the mechanisms underlying memory, but now much more up-to-date knowledge is becoming available. If we knew more of those mechanisms it would certainly be more possible to 'Remember Ourselves'.

This week we can only make a beginning, because there are many different components to the memory process; but even a little study sheds much light on other matters, such as the relation between the Physical, Subtle and Causal levels.

We can begin with the *Causal Level* in the top room of the brain, which we can regard as comprising the cerebral hemispheres or 'Prosencephalon'. The middle room would then contain the 'Central brain' or Diencephalon; and the lowest room the 'Brain Stem', which passes below the skull into the spinal cord. Across the middle of the middle room we put a dotted line (Figure 4), which represents the 'Threshold of Consciousness'. Above this line we can be directly, though only relatively conscious; but of anything below this line we cannot be directly conscious at all.

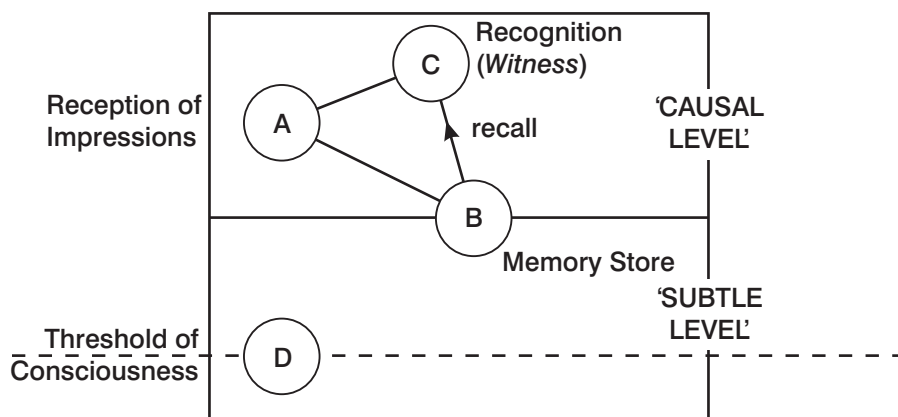


Figure 4

The top room is concerned with *Impressions*, those impressions of which we can be aware by attending to them at Will; or which force themselves upon our notice by engaging our attention. Let us regard all those impressions as entering the control-room of the 'Ministry of Impressions' at A. This is continually happening and a proportion of these is continually being stored at B.

The important factor from our point of view is the presence of a Witness (C) whose function should be threefold. First, he has to *recognise* and 'place' an entering stream of impressions in their correct pigeon-holes. Secondly, he has to *retain* those impressions he wants and dismiss those he doesn't want, so as not to clutter up the filing system of his

Memory Store. And thirdly, he needs to *recall* particular memories out of this store whenever he needs them. These three functions of the intellectual component of memory have become elaborately provided by Nature, and are to be observed to function with all degrees of scope and efficiency in all the species of Organic Life which have even the rudiments of cerebral hemispheres. *Recognition, storage, and recall* can take place with a minimum of consciousness. *But the scope and efficiency of the Witness can be increased enormously with the Self-knowledge he achieves; particularly the knowledge of what is useful to the Higher Self at any moment, and what is not.*

### Loss of Memory

Recent studies of *head injury* are teaching us a lot. Suppose you are ‘concussed’, that is, an injury causes total loss of consciousness for periods from a few seconds to several days. This means that the Witness has been knocked out; no incoming impressions are being recognised and no memories are being stored. This is *Stage 1*.

*Stage 2* is called the ‘stage of confusion’. You have recovered relative consciousness, you are recognising many incoming impressions, and you are recalling some of your memories, but all in a disordered way.

In particular, there is a blank period in the ‘recall mechanism’ stretching back from the moment of the injury. This is called ‘retrograde amnesia’, and the length of the blank period is usually proportional to the severity of the injury and the duration of the unconsciousness (*Stage 1*). You may have a memory blank of what happened in the few minutes before the injury, or it may be a blank up to a year or more. One extreme case was that of a schoolboy who had concussion, and it was discovered much later that there was a total blank of the whole of his life up to the injury, except for one scene of a workman crawling on the roof outside his window at the age of four. All the rest had to be reconstructed for him by what other people told him.

In *Stage 3* – the ‘stage of recovery’ – during this, the period of retrograde amnesia shrinks. It always shrinks in the direction from the past towards the moment of injury. In lesser injuries it disappears altogether; in others it shrinks to a minimum but this remains permanent. It has been found that even in the ‘electrical convulsion’ treatment [ECT] for schizophrenia, there often remain permanent blanks in the memory, and the length of the blank period is proportional to the number of convulsions given. This may be a good thing, for the patient may lose all memory of the painful period which brought on his illness; but at least it must be taken into account.

All this goes to show that *memory* comprises a ‘present’ mechanism tied to the presence of the ‘Witness’; and a ‘past’ mechanism. If the latter is damaged, the Witness, though present, will not be able to recall what he wants from a particular date in his memory store. We cannot go further in the study of memory, however, until we study its components in the middle and lower rooms of the brain – the ‘Subtle’ and ‘Physical’ levels, with which we will continue next time.

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