

1 July 1968

READING 8

INTRODUCTION

The Ladder of Seven Steps is an empirical description which is the simplest way of conveying what men who have climbed the whole distance have themselves experienced. But what, in fact, is it attempting to describe? First of all it gives an account of the change in Perception which occurs as consciousness widens and deepens, consciousness being defined as 'experienced integration'; it is based on the laws according to which the brain's computer mechanisms count impressions (not only from the outside world but from within also) as more and more units of the brain work together in unison.

Let us begin with this contemporary statement of the problem by the Professor of Physics at Yale University:

There are physical effects which by now are reasonably well understood which somehow link the object (observed) with the layer around consciousness called the body. The study of the interactions between the object and the body falls under the principles of physics. Now the miracle in all this, at the present time, does not reside within this field of interaction between the object and the body; the miracle occurs when anything that takes place in the body emerges within consciousness. We don't know how this happens at all.

(Henry Margenau in *Science and ESP*, Ed. J.R. Smythies, 1967)

Sir Charles Sherrington (1950) had previously put the problem graphically as follows:

The physical basis of mind encroaches more and more upon the study of mind, but there remain mental events which seem to lie beyond any physiology of the brain. When I turn my gaze skyward I see the flattened dome of sky and the sun's brilliant disc and a hundred other visible things underneath it. What are the steps which bring this about? A pencil of light from the sun enters the eye and is focused there on the retina. It gives rise to a change, which in turn travels to the nerve layer at the top of the brain. The whole chain of these events, from the sun to the top of my brain, is physical. Each step is an electrical reaction. But now there succeeds a change wholly unlike any which led up to it, and wholly inexplicable by us. A visual scene presents itself to the mind; I *see* the dome of sky and the sun in it, and a hundred other visual things beside. In fact, I perceive a picture of the world around me. When this visual scene appears I ought, I suppose, to feel startled; but I am too accustomed to feel even surprised.

It is a far cry from an electrical reaction in the brain to suddenly seeing the world around one, with all its distances, its colours and *chiaroscuro*.

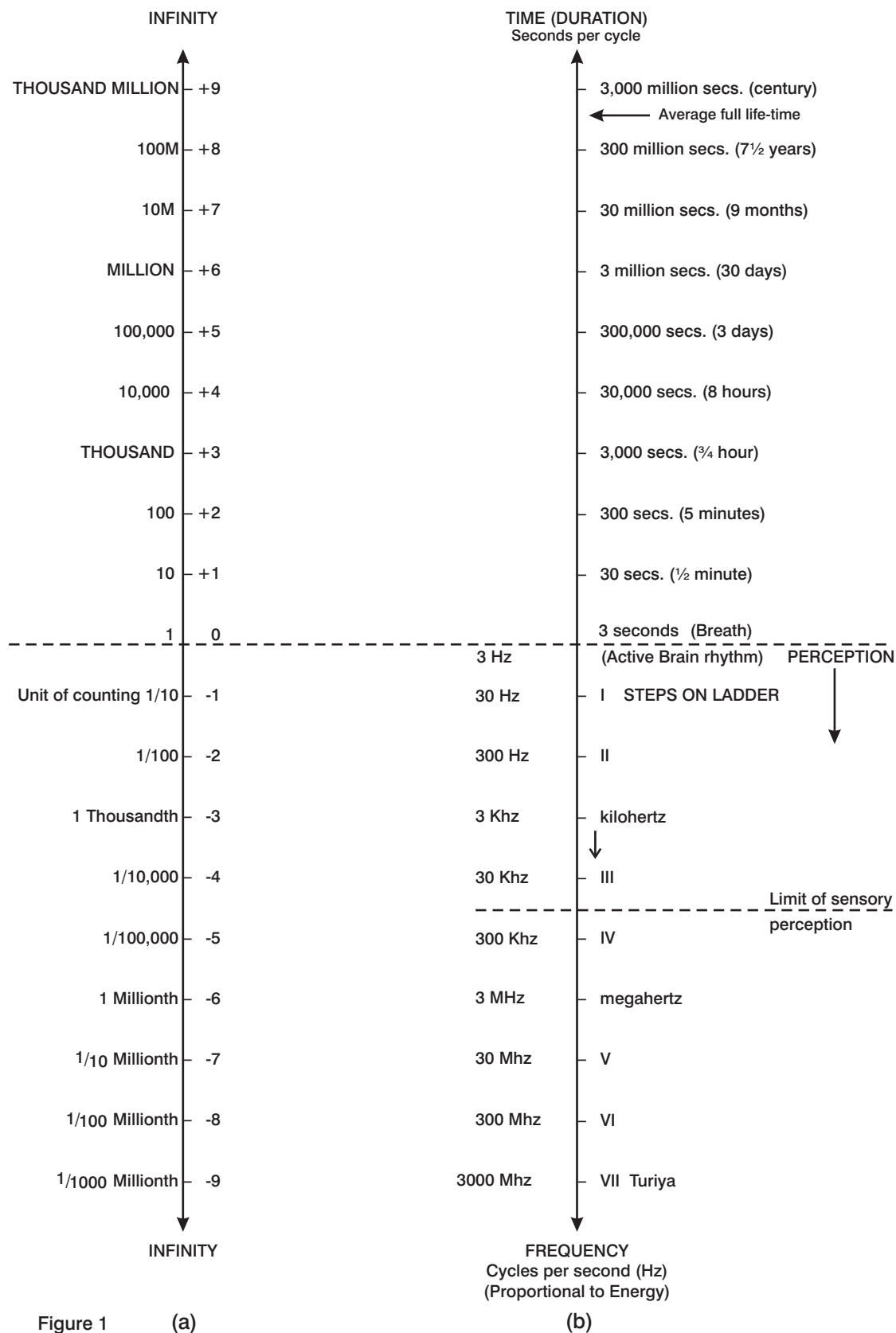
(In *The Physical Basis of Mind*, Ed. P. Laslett, Blackwell 1950, pp. 3–4)

And the problem that those eminent scientists were formulating in relation to sensory impressions becomes even more baffling in relation to the extrasensory images and communications which make up so large a part of the content of the mind and its memory stores.

Belonging to our System of Knowledge we have a Symbol which is based on a circle of nine points (and therefore called the Enneagram) and which, amongst other things, depicts the code used by the human mind in counting any units which are countable and presenting the results to our conscious experience. According to the Shankaracharya (who is a great authority on the

Enneagram), we have to understand something of this counting code and then we can forget the figures and keep to the principle involved.

We must first, however, make a scale showing the way the brain's computers count increasing numbers and how different parts of the brain use different units of counting. The principle is much the same as that of a 'slide rule' or of the odometer in a car, only (not having those



mechanical aids) the brain keeps things simple, using whole numbers and regarding fractions as vulgar! Briefly, the law (which has been known for about a century though it has fallen into disrepute), is that the brain does not count in simple arithmetical progression, but it counts the powers to which a given number (called the *base*) has to be raised as numbers get bigger and bigger. Figure 1 shows such a scale (to the base 10) – Figure 1(a) on the left is the general scale for counting in *any* units, and Figure 1(b) shows how that scale applies to counting *time* (the number of seconds per cycle) with its inverse, *frequency* (the number of cycles per second, [Hertz]). You will see that all the figures below the mid-line are all contained in a single fundamental unit characteristic of the observer – they represent not *repetition in time* at all, but repetition outside of our time. Though the numbers above the mid-line are appreciated by our consciousness as ‘passing time’, those below are not felt as ‘time’ at all, but in various other ways like dark and light in relation to colour, or tones and harmonics in music, or recorded instrumentally as radio waves or heat.

So far we have not brought in anything to do with *movement* at all. The scale works perfectly well in the absence of movement, as is shown when you put the Seven Steps of the Ladder of Self-realization into the lower half of Figure 1b. The steps represent *states of perception* which can be experienced simultaneously.

(Pause for discussion)

But the Enneagram takes us much further. It can solve for us quite simply the difficult problem of a *changing world*, a world of movement perceived ‘in time’ which, as we learnt from the Greeks, is based on ‘the circular process of coming-to-Be’. The Enneagram combines all that we have said in one picture, for it shows the Law we mentioned in circular form. As enunciated by Fechner in the latter half of last century, ‘In order that [experienced] sensations may change arithmetically in equal steps, the stimulus [coded impressions] must change in equal ratios in a “geometric series.”’ The equal steps round the circumference of the Enneagram show that series in relation to anything the brain counts, including units of time or frequency. Though the nine-pointed circle shows a decimal system of counting, the brain can use different bases simultaneously, 2, 3, 8, 10 etc., and the Symbol enables us to go easily from one to another. Though there are countless uses to which the Symbol can be put, there is only time here to show the familiar diagram of the Ladder of Self-realization expressed in terms of increasing frequencies of his perceptive apparatus as the consciousness of the observer deepens. (Figure 2, overleaf)

Consider this picture first in relation to sitting still and beginning to meditate. At first you are aware of ‘Passing Time’ – a moment (3 secs.), 30 seconds (half-a-minute), 300 seconds (five minutes) up to 1800 seconds, which is half-an-hour – with all its changing contents, its sensory impressions like sounds and messages from different parts of the body, its thoughts, associations and feelings. But you are following the rhythm inward and away from all those movements, which you would be noticing if your attention were straying in their direction. Meanwhile your perceptive apparatus is changing its units, leaving the active rhythm of the cortex with its 3 Hz waves, and past the 10 Hz alpha or resting rhythm, just as you would be leaving the ripples on the surface of the sea by going below the surface. A third of the way (between Steps 2 and 4), you feel the peace that comes when the perception is not registering cycles a second, but something like kHz (a thousand cycles a second). And about the half-way point at the bottom

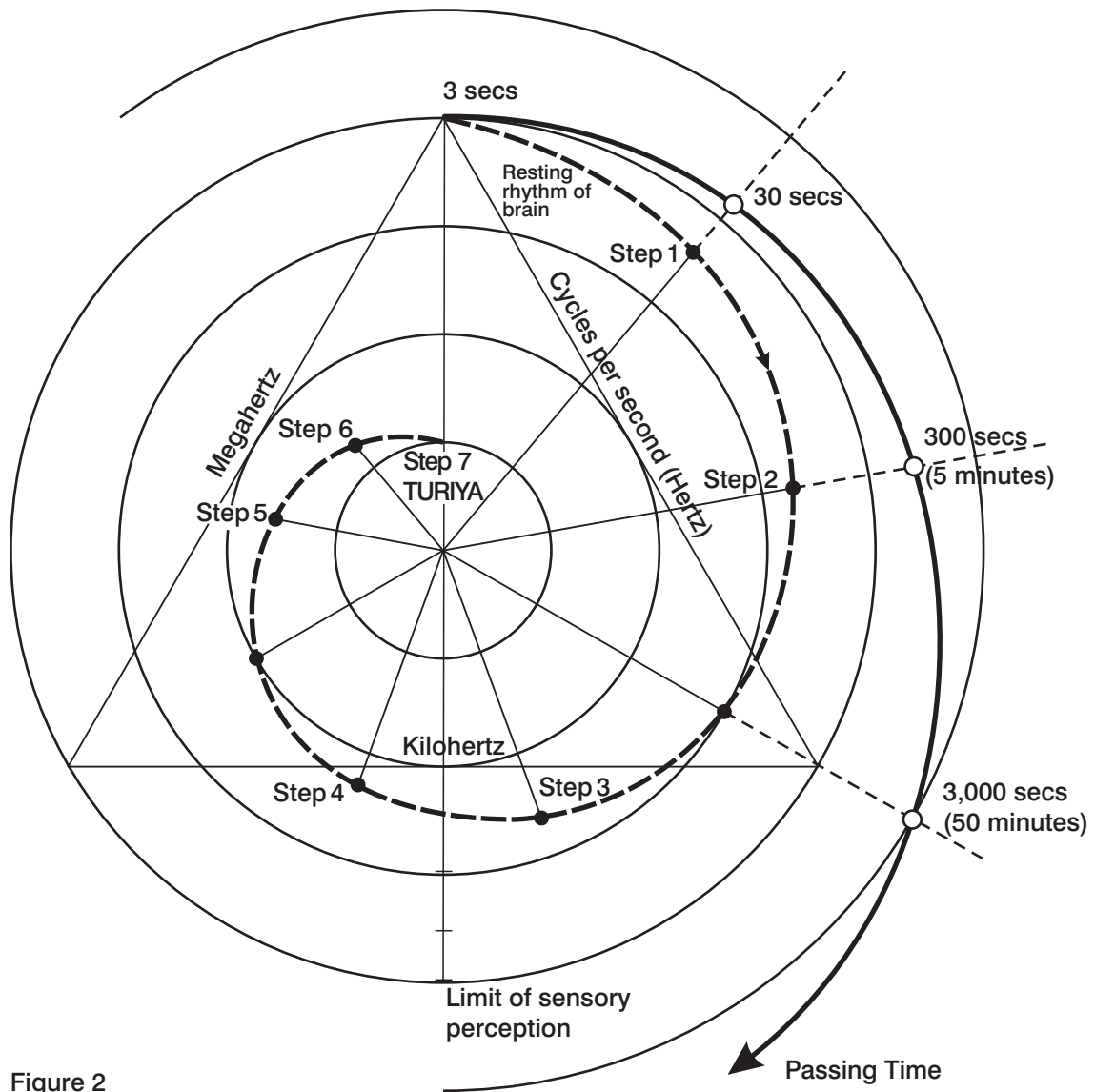


Figure 2

of the circle, you pass beyond the limit of sensory perception altogether. Meanwhile to your busy surface mind, the landscape has become more and more unfamiliar, so that it keeps trying to go back to the world of change and movement, which it regards as the real world. But at that point there is *no landscape* – there is nothing at all, and as the mind gets quiet, more unified and better educated, you begin to feel a new and delightful energy. By the next point this has integrated all the elaborate connections of the ‘alerting system’ so that you begin to be in touch with something ‘new’, but something very familiar indeed. You begin to Be – your own True Self – that ‘Self that lives in the hearts of all’, and you see that ‘nothing else matters’; for that Self was with you in ‘peak experiences’, in many deaths and lives before. That Self must come to occupy His throne.

The Ladder itself is a Truth which has appeared as ‘Self-evident’ to Conscious Men at many times and in many places:

Whoever finds the explanation of these words will not taste death. Jesus said: ‘Let him who seeks, not cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled, and when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the All.’

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