

3 March 1969

## READING 6

### FALLING ASLEEP

There is a particular and all-important area of confusion just now in our inner work, our discussions and our way of living. This centres on a strange mental phenomenon which has been described in Eastern Systems as 'attachment' and in our Western Teaching as 'Identification'. We are giving these labels very variable meanings without stopping to enquire what we are really talking about. Can we, for a week or two, approach the subject like exploring unknown territory – a mysterious continent?

This attitude of exploring unknown territory was well expressed at a talk given by Mr. Ouspensky at Colet House in August 1939 – just thirty years ago. Let's get right back there in order to find out if we have learnt something in the thirty years since then!

#### **The State of Identification**

Q. I think I have not got the right idea about identification. It means that things control us and not that we control things?

Mr. O. Identification is a very difficult thing to describe, because no definitions are possible. Such as we are, we are never free from identifying. If we believe that we don't identify with something, we are identified with the idea that we are not identified. But you cannot describe identification in logical terms. You have to find a moment of identification, catch it, and then compare things with that moment. Identification is everywhere, at every moment of ordinary life. When you begin self-observation, some forms of identification already become impossible. That's why your friends will find you dull, because they are with one thing one moment, with another thing at another. They will say you are not interested in anything, that you are indifferent, and so on. In ordinary life almost everything is identification. The origin of the idea, the origin of the word, is very interesting. Certainly the idea exists in Indian and Buddhist literature. Generally it is called 'attachment' or 'non-attachment'. But, you see, I read these books before I met the System and did not understand what it meant. Only when I heard the System explanation much later, I began to see what it means. It is a very important psychological feature that penetrates the whole of our life, and we don't notice it because we are inside it. It is useless to try to find definitions. Find some examples. If you see a cat with a rabbit or a mouse, that is identification. The mouse can also be identified in some other way! Then find analogies to this picture in yourself. Only, you must understand that it is there every moment, not only at exceptional moments. Identification is an almost permanent state for us, it is the chief manifestation of false personality, and because of this we cannot get out of the false personality. You must be able to see this state apart from yourself, separate it from yourself, and that can only be done by trying to become more conscious, trying to remember yourself, trying to be aware of yourself. Only when you become more aware of yourself are you able to struggle with manifestations like identification and lying and with false personality itself.

Q. I find when I am identified it is nearly always with things inside me.

Mr. O. Perhaps you are right; perhaps you are not right; but it does not matter. You can think that you identify with one and really you are identified with quite a different

thing. It doesn't matter at all. It is the *state of identification* that matters. In the state of identification you cannot feel right, see right, judge right, and the subject of identification is not important: the result is the same.

Q. So the way to overcome identification...

Mr. O. That's another thing. It is different in different cases. First it is necessary to see; then it is necessary to put something against it.

Q. What do you mean by 'put something against it'?

Mr. O. Just turn your attention to something more important. It is necessary to learn to distinguish important from less important, and if you turn your attention to more important things, you become less identified with unimportant things. You must realise that identification can never help you. It only makes things more confused and more difficult. If you realise even that – that alone may help in some cases. But people think that to be identified helps them, they do not see that it only makes everything more difficult...

This is exactly our ordinary thinking. We think identification is necessary when actually it only spoils things. It is not a thing which has useful energy in it at all, only destructive energy.

Q. Is identification mainly emotion?

Mr. O. It always has an emotional element – a kind of emotional disturbance, but sometimes it becomes a habit, so one does not even notice the emotion.

Q. Is there a state between self-remembering and identification?

Mr. O. Different sides of the same thing. Not remembering is identification. If one is not identified one must remember oneself to a certain extent, perhaps even without knowing it. There are many different degrees.

(*A Further Record*, August 1939)

From this we get the clear impression that Mr. Ouspensky used the word 'identification' wholly for what is harmful, what impedes our progress towards Self-realisation. Since this word can nowadays also be used with an opposite meaning, as in the story of the arrow-maker which expresses 'Conscious attention wholly directed to the work in hand', we surely should avoid the word, using other words like 'captivated' or 'personally involved' for the harmful thing we have to get rid of. Also we should always illustrate by examples what we mean – such as this from the *Avadhuta had twenty-four Teachers*:

Attachment, (continued the Avadhuta), leads to misery.

Freedom from attachment brings endless joy. This is the lesson I have learned from an *Osprey*, who was attacked and followed by other and stronger birds as long as he carried a piece of flesh in his mouth. As soon as he gave up the piece of flesh he became free and was happy.

Praise and blame are alike to me. I have no care, no anxiety, as those have who are attached to family and possessions. I find my playmate in the Lord, I take delight in the contemplation of the Self, and like a *Child*, unrestrained and happy, I wander about freely.

The wise man, having passed beyond the Gunas, is happy and free from care, like a little child – yet how unlike! For the child is happy through ignorance, the wise man through Knowledge.' (*S.B.*, 11.9.1–4)

As a man thinketh intently, whether through love, or hate, or fear, so doth he become. The cockroach, being attacked by its mortal enemy, an insect, becomes that insect: it thinks only of its foe, and as a result is transformed – without losing its original consciousness – into the object of its fear.

All this have I learned from these many teachers. Now hear what my own *Body* has taught me.

Reflecting on the nature of the body as subject to birth and death, and as the cause of suffering and misery, I have awakened within myself dispassion and discrimination. Knowing myself separate from the body, I have learned with its help, to meditate on the eternal Truth.' (p. 222)

(*Srimad Bhagavatam*, 11.9.23–25)

**NOTE:** The key to understanding identification lies in trying to arise out of it to something better, as in Mr. Ouspensky's sentence: 'You must be able to see this state apart from yourself, separate it from yourself, and that can only be done by trying to remember yourSelf.'

His Holiness similarly describes what he calls 'attachment' as wholly wrong and the cause of all troubles. There is nothing wrong, he says, about the body or any of our functions; but it is only 'attachment' that makes them wrong. From suffering, for instance, we can learn that when we are attached to suffering we cease to learn and suffer only more and more.

Most of his stories illustrate one or another aspect of 'attachment', particularly the one about the country-cousin at the cinema, which you should recall as showing exactly how the trouble arises. Confusion only comes when our translator has used the word 'identification' (as in the story of the arrow-maker) for the fully controlled 'attention' which would be the opposite of 'attachment'.

Let us agree, then, to use other words appropriate to any given situation, keeping the words 'identification' and 'attachment' for theoretical conversations describing a state which is always bad.

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