

9 June 1969

READING 5

FREEDOM

PART 1

There is one characteristic of those 'Glimpses of the Truth' which runs through all our observations and discussions, and that is the sudden feeling of *freedom*. People constantly say they feel 'liberated' from some prison or other in which they are ordinarily confined. If one pursues the questions: 'What is this freedom brought by the breakthrough into a higher state of consciousness?' and 'From what, exactly, are we then freed?', one gets a new and thrilling illumination of our problems in the world of today.

Take current social life as we read about it in the papers and see it on television. What are the motivations that lie behind all the unrest and the spirit of revolt which is so worldwide? In a state of detachment one sees this spirit of revolt as aroused by three restrictions which are seen as directed against the freedom of the individual to live his own life and think for himself. The first is a material limitation imposed by establishments, chiefly economic, educational, political; the second is the desire for instinctive and sexual freedom from what are regarded as artificial conventions belonging to the past; and the third is the throwing off of time-worn religious codes which used to restrict the emotional life and the individual conscience. Naturally these three are closely interconnected, and all combinations and permutations are to be seen. But in their origin these three arise from the threefold division of the nervous system and are intrinsic in animal and human evolution. The real freedom (which is not appreciated) would be peculiar to man when he has developed his full potential as a Self-conscious being.

This is brought out in a simple little story, told by His Holiness, but based on one of the oldest Indian classifications of human nature and conduct – that of the 'Four aims or areas of human life'.

The story is this: Once when the original Shankara was travelling in Kashmir he came upon a temple dedicated to Sharada, the Goddess of Wisdom. This temple had three gates which were always open, and a fourth which was kept closed. The three open gates were labelled as follows:

The first was '*Artha*' meaning literally 'that which can be perceived by the senses as a material object'; the name given to the aim for material possessions involving the study of economics and politics, and the teachings of surviving in the struggle for existence against rivalry and competition, the tyranny of despots and the violence of reckless neighbours. The cure lay in the narrow code of the householder and the virtuous fulfilment of life's obligations.

The second aim is called '*Kama*' (nothing to do with 'Karma', spelt with an 'r') which was the counterpart in Indian mythology of Cupid, who with his flower-bow and arrows pierces our hearts with desires. The *Kama Sutra* was a serious manual designed to kindle normal love among all those young couples who were in difficulties because their marriages had been arranged for them in childhood.

The third, called '*Dharma*', comprised the whole structure of religions and moral duties governing the three upper castes and derived from the *Vedas* and from the laws given by Manu.

These three were grouped together as the threefold outward motivation of people in the world, which always end in the slavery from which many are trying to free themselves today.

The Fourth Gate (the closed one) had written over it '*Moksha*' (Liberation) with its root meaning, to release, set free, let go, escape; the *Inner* or Spiritual motivation. Shankara on arrival walked straight through this closed gate, and while the members of the three establishments inside were wondering how he could do this, the Goddess Sharada was heard to murmur, 'You see, he is the fully liberated One'. The Tradition of the Meditation which we use was often called the 'Way of Liberation'; and we would do well to remember this; for today when the universal longing for freedom is overthrowing all those three old-time limitations, it is the inner Spiritual freedom which people are seeking whether they know it or not. The meditation could open the Fourth Gate for anyone who wants enough the only real and permanent freedom.

PART 2

To turn from that remote past to modern European history which has led up to our present situation, Sir Kenneth Clark has recently reminded us how many revolutions occurred during the 19th century in different countries, all showing a characteristic pattern beginning with the violent throwing off of a tyranny but ending in a tyranny as bad as before. The pattern of the 19th century was set by the French Revolution which eventually gave rise to the despotism of Napoleon and his political prison at Vincennes, which was more formidable than the Bastille. The equivalent in the 20th century has been the Russian Revolution and the subsequent tyranny so clearly shown not only in Russia but in Hungary and Czechoslovakia now. Though Sir Kenneth referred to five great 19th century exponents of freedom – Beethoven, Goethe, Byron,[†] Leo Tolstoy and Gandhi – he did not mention the most important thing about them. For the writings of all of them show that they knew perfectly well that there is an inner freedom which is independent of external tyrannies and prisons. If you are interested we could illustrate this statement for you. It is, however, more difficult to find men (in the materialistic climate of today) as great and influential as those who have so well expressed the Inner freedom which is always the real answer.

PART 3

Some of you will be only interested in maintaining and increasing your own peak experiences of Spiritual freedom; but some of you will also want, like myself, to apply the available knowledge of man's three-fold structure (referred to above) to Self-knowledge in the practice of 'liberation'.

It is a strange but very significant fact that though all this knowledge has accumulated in the West since the 4th century BC, when two Alexandrian anatomists distinguished brain and spinal cord and cerebrum from cerebellum, there is not a single description in print which gives the application of this knowledge to oneself! So much detail is known about the threefold division of the nervous system that we have ceased to be able to see the wood for the trees, and must go back to some earlier insights for the necessary simplicity. The man whose work foreshadows many of the subsequent discoveries about the relation between the Autonomic nervous system (that underlies 'feeling' and 'being') and the Cerebrospinal system (of 'learning' and 'doing') was a young Frenchman named Bichat, who began his career as army surgeon in the

French Revolution. Though he died at the age of 31 he had produced two outstanding works, the first in 1799, *Physiologic Researches on Life and Death*, and the second (unfinished) in 1801, the year before he died, *A System of Anatomy as applied to Physiology and Medicine*. In these writings he describes the two kinds of life which a man leads simultaneously – through what we now call the Autonomic and the Cerebrospinal systems:

He lives only in himself in this class of functions (Autonomic); through the other (Cerebrospinal) he exists outside himself, he is the inhabitant of the world and not, like a plant, of the place where he was born. He feels and perceives that which surrounds him; he reflects his sensations, voluntarily deceives himself according to their influence and usually can communicate by voice his desires and his fears, his pleasures and his sufferings (Autonomic)...

Today these simple facts are obscured by too much detail and the innumerable and erroneous labels which arise from the obscurity. We see that Bichat was describing the anatomy of those rival systems by which we perceive the two familiar worlds; the world outside us which we forsake when we shut our eyes and begin to meditate, and the world within which we have to learn to develop and to control before we can become Self-realized. That is why I feel it important to learn more of the main facts about the hidden world of the Autonomic.

Bichat, for example, also pointed out the extraordinary symmetry which exists in the external form of the parts which connect us with the outer world (eyes, ears, limbs, cranial and spinal nerves, etc.), in contrast with the irregularity and central position of those parts belonging to what he called the 'organic' (Autonomic) life (e.g. abdominal and thoracic plexuses and nerves which, as he was the first to point out, everywhere follow the arteries into all the organs). He wrote:

This constant connection between the (Autonomic) nervous system and the circulatory system is observed even in the heart, because, as has been noted, the nerves to the heart are all seen at the origin of the large arterial vessels or along the course of the coronary arteries, and do not properly belong to the muscular fibres that compose the heart.

When we remember that this Autonomic system is dominated by our emotions over which our will has no command, we may appreciate the reason why, in spite of all our scientific know-how, disorders of the heart are increasingly becoming the overriding cause of early death.

If some of you would like to follow further this kind of self-knowledge, you will see the basis for the contention that man is a prisoner, confined within his own body and its warring nervous systems.

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†Note

As soon as the articles of his marriage separation were signed, Byron shook the dust of English society off his feet and toured Europe, spending the summer of 1816 with Shelley. With the impulse of this freedom he wrote some of his finest poetry, including *Manfred* and the *Prisoner of Chillon*, one line of which is quoted out of context by despair-mongers: 'I learned to love despair'. But the following lines describing the inner liberation of the prisoner are conveniently forgotten:

But I was curious to ascend
To my barred windows, and to bend
Once more, upon the mountains high
The quiet of a loving eye.

I saw them and they were the same
They were not changed like me in frame;
I saw their thousand years of snow
On high — their wide long lake below,
And the blue Rhone in the fullest flow.

But Sir Kenneth only quoted those later lines, which mean something quite different in the above context:

At last men came to set me free;
I asked not why, and recked not where;
It was at length the same to me,
Fettered or fetterless to be
I learned to love despair.

Nor did Francois de Bonnivard (the prisoner) show indifference or despair; after his liberation he was given the freedom of the city and continued to guide the fortunes of the Republic until his death.

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