

16 June 1969

READING 6

PART 1. THE PRISON OF IGNORANCE

Reports of your discussions show that some don't admit to ever feeling that they are in prison; while others claim to have felt it acutely and quite often all through their lives, but ascribe their frustrations (as always) to external pressures. Perhaps what matters is that if we *do* get longings for freedom, those must be made a driving-force to free our consciousness from the mind-body machine, and keep it free. This art we can only learn by practice.

Whether we feel it or not, we all *do* live in prison most of our time; a prison of ignorance based on wrong points of view which are built-in and take a lot of shifting. A most fundamental error, on which many others hang, is that there is only one 'Time' which passes straight from past to future. Consider the 'Ladder of Seven Steps' – we usually view these steps as laid out along a straight line. 'Ten years ago,' one says, 'I got on to the 1st step and after two or three years in this organisation I got on to the 2nd, and through persistent efforts on to the 3rd. Now I'm on the 4th, and in another ten years or so I'll probably get on to the 5th and have a grand time. But perhaps I'd better put the higher steps off till some future life after I'm dead!'

A first step to freedom from ignorance is the insight that 'passing time' is really a circle, and it is the nature of a circle that the end is the same as the beginning. So when we are thinking about a 'past' or a 'future which will be different,' we are in a state of illusion, 'Hurry! hurry!' we cry. But where are we hurrying *to*?

The stars are setting and the caravan
Starts for the dawn of Nothing – Oh make haste!

All this 'hurry' is produced by the reverberating circuits of the machine, which the practical surface-mind represents to us as one straight line, like an ant following the equivalent of its nose.

The next step to freedom comes from realising that a circle has an infinite number of radii rays connecting the circumference with the centre, each of which can be labelled 'Now'; and that 'Time' is different according to the distance of the observer from the Centre. The Ladder of Self-realization would consist, then, of six points marked out along any radius (any 'moment'), the 7th point being the timeless centre of the circle itself. Thus when the hands of my watch (which also, conveniently, revolve in a circle) point, say, to 6.00 p.m., and I sit down to meditate, there's nothing except my own psychology to prevent me going straight to the centre; and a half-hour gives ample time for that. One passes, I repeat, from movement to stillness and timelessness. With the steady application of this very mild discipline, the observer gradually acquires a wholly new relation to his non-existent prison wall of 'Passing Time'.

He gets (amongst other delights) an increasing insight into the meaning of many stories of the Shankaracharya, and many writings such as the Pythagorean recognition of 'two kinds of Repetition' quoted by Mr. Ouspensky in the 'Eternal Recurrence' chapter of *A New Model* (2nd Edition, p.468).

There is no other prison but our own ignorance and the bad habits arising therefrom. As we built our prison ourselves, its demolition lies within our power.

PART 2. OUR THREE-FOLD NERVOUS SYSTEM (contd. from Part 3, 1969/20)

I must say I was surprised at the interest shown in this at several groups. And now we can come to something clear and practical.

For the next big step forward in the study of what we now call the 'autonomic or involuntary division', science had to wait for more than eighty years. It was Gaskell at Cambridge who (in his first paper of 1885) described certain fine nerve fibres (unlike any others) in the white nerves ('white rami') which he thought were the only connecting link between the two nervous systems outlined by Bichat. These fine fibres with their rapid rate of conduction are peculiar to what came to be called the 'sympathetic outflow' (in the Middle Storey) which is everywhere in opposition to two other 'outflows' (one from the brain and one from the lower end of the spinal cord). These two taken together were given the collective name of 'parasympathetic' by Gaskell's pupil, Langley, in 1905. Gaskell had written in 1886:

The evidence is daily becoming stronger that every tissue is innervated by two sets of (Autonomic) nerve fibres of opposite characters, so that I look forward hopefully to the time when the whole (inner) nervous system shall be mapped out into two great districts of which the function of the one is katabolic ('breaking down') and of the other anabolic ('building up') to the tissues; two great divisions (of the inner world) which are occupied with chemical changes of a synthetical and analytical character respectively...

This prophecy began to be fulfilled by the discovery of epinephrine (trade name 'adrenaline') in 1893; and later by that of the opposing group of powerful chemicals (the 'choline derivatives'), so that the whole autonomic is indeed divided today into two sets of nerves called 'adrenergic' and 'cholinergic' respectively. This dualism has not been, and is not likely to be, resolved by laboratory experiment (*pace* Cannon's 'sympathin'). For the missing third group of chemicals (neither exciting nor depressing) which could bring the Sympathetic to its full potential, is evanescent and never to be found in sufficient concentration either in animals, or in human beings who do not know how to produce and store it.

But here we have the factual basis for the Three Gunas – pure Sattva (the 'Energy of Being' which exists chiefly *in potentia*) is needed for Self-realization but has to be 'liberated' both from excitement (Rajas) and depression (Tamas). My old chief at Barts (Sir Walter Langdon Brown, himself a pupil of Gaskell), used to delight in describing how the adrenaline group 'clears the decks for action' (whether in 'fight or flight') while its choline antagonists conserve energy by damping down.

But what he couldn't know (though we must!) is that 'man is not only flesh and bones'. While the physical body requires for its self-preservation an efficient feedback and cooling system to protect it from wear-and-tear and keep it chemically constant in the teeth of a changing environment; the 'psyche' (or 'subtle body') requires to be *free*. To work at the proper emotional potential which could bring it to the Causal level of pure Consciousness, this subtle body – our psychology – needs a 'quantity of high energy fuel'. Our System describes in terms of 'Hydrogens' what the Shankaracharya speaks of as 'increased concentration of pure Sattva'.

Mr. Ouspensky (who knew quite a bit about the physiology of his time), saw in the three-fold division of our inner life – cranial, sacral and sympathetic, the way in which negative emotions are generated in the machine. They come, he used to say, either from the lower storey

(excitement or exaggeration produced by misuse of sex energy) or from the upper storey (negative imagination). We have no power over their genesis, he said, but we can, through right attitude, not justifying and not expressing them, gradually obtain control.

During the last decade or so scientific research has been exploring the 'representation' of the Autonomic system in the forebrain. If you are still interested in pursuing this enquiry, we can try to apply this recent knowledge to ourselves and perhaps speed up our power to escape from our prison of unhappiness, or in other words 'negative emotion based on imagination and wrong work of the machine'.

This whole dualistic picture of opposing chemicals can best be summed up by a new application of one of Niels Bohr's favourite illustrations:

A little boy goes into a sweet shop and asks for a 'pennyworth of mixed sweets'. The shopkeeper takes the penny and says: 'Here are two different sweets; you'll have to do the mixing yourself!'

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