

20 April 1970

THE LAW OF THREE FORCES

A MORE COMPREHENSIVE STUDY

PART 1. THE NECESSITY FOR THREE FORCES AND THEIR INTRINSIC NATURE

It's a strange thing to find that in one respect we have gone full circle from Mr. Ouspensky's final thoughts at the end of World War II to the situation where the Shankaracharya has brought us during the last decade. This 'one respect' is summarised in our realisation of the universal importance of the 'Law of Three'.

When, during the 1930's, we first heard Mr. Ouspensky enunciate this law as he had received it, he used these words:

No event can take place without three forces meeting at a certain place. When we begin to observe things we see two forces. Sometimes we see the presence of the third either a result, or as something accidental or as something unexplainable. Example: certain processes in chemistry cannot take place without the presence of a third substance which is not used up in the process but without which nothing happens. In our state of Being we are 'third force blind'. We have to study something we cannot see.

(A Record of Meetings, January 1935)

Since the Law of Three Forces applies to everything in the Universe except the Creator Himself, any single description less general than this one, must introduce some limitation. It seems therefore a good thing to review several different approaches from which we could learn more, provided we firmly pursue one or other separately for some time without trying to force them together.

It was at our first private meeting with the Shankaracharya in October 1962 that I heard him mention the three Gunas (in answer to beginners' questions about the meditation): 'Words have different Gunas and people also have different Gunas predominant.' A week later we gave him a synopsis of our System teaching about the two Cosmic Laws. He replied that the description in his System of the two sets of Laws – the Laws of Three and Seven is exactly as our System says. Since then during all our visits he has gradually revealed these Laws – always and only, of course, in answer to our questions and in relation to Self-realization – until at our recent visit there was scarcely a subject of discussion which was not related by him to the Law of Three. From mere philosophy it has become really practical.

At my last conversation on 1st February, 1970, I quoted the sentence from the *Gita*, 'He who knows that it is only the Gunas that act, and remains calm...' and asked for a 'last word' on the subject. In his answer you will notice this distinction that, whereas our System relates the necessity for the three 'Forces' to the entire Universe, the Shankaracharya speaks of three 'Gunas' in the special instance of Self-realization. Since we have the meditation as a direct method for experiencing the mysterious 'third force', in this special instance, there is no excuse for remaining 'third force blind' in this relation; though we may continue to be blind to the nature of the three Forces in events not directly connected with our own experience.

This was his description on that occasion:

S. He quoted one of the verses from the 14th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* which speaks of the three Gunas and their intrinsic qualities. (The whole chapter is about the Gunas,

and it might be summed up: 'from Prakriti (Nature) the plan of the Gunas comes forth, Sattva, Rajas, Tamas; these are the bonds that bind the undying dweller imprisoned in the body').

The Sattva is said to be the *Light*. It spreads light. It creates light out of which the existence of everything possible is known and experienced.

The Rajas is the quality of *expansion and activity*; it is only through the activity that the expansion takes place when things move. Because of this activity, the expansion is created out of the movement.

The third Guna, Tamas: Whatever is related to *sleep and resting* is directed to regulating all the forms, and recharging once again into Sattva

So all three Gunas participate in all forms, and keep them going, and are concerned with the regulation of the Universe. The Atman is the Witness to all these streams of Gunas having the dominance either in Sattva, Rajas, or Tamas. This is all witnessed by the Atman who is never attached to any of them.

On the basis of this stream of Gunas and their predominance, there are three types of people. There are good people, because there is abundance of Sattva in them. Most of the activities which emanate from them are basically Sattvic and they are good.

Then there are people who are predominantly Rajas: with them is associated all this activity and movement; they are not necessarily good men. The third type of men are regulated by Tamas and nothing seems to come out of their activities except lethargy and sloth.

The best man is one who is neither attached to Sattva, nor Rajas, nor Tamas. He simply witnesses everything. He has neither liking nor disliking for any of them. So one who can, in this creation, be simply a witness of everything, whatever happens, and yet recognises the role of all three Gunas without any attachment, is the only man who has understood Truth; and he is the wisest of all.

PART 2. THE SIX POSSIBLE COMBINATIONS OR TRIADS

Though handicapped by the loss of this method of Meditation which properly belonged to our System, Mr. Ouspensky managed to find a really practical application of the Law to the activities of mankind. His special contribution lay in working out the idea of six triads – the six possible combinations of the three Forces. This is how some of us first heard him speak about it at Warwick Gardens. Now it seems strangely prophetic:

Mr. O. In two questions triads were mentioned. What do you really remember about them? ... First, do you remember how the idea of triads starts? It is said that every action, every manifestation is the result of the conjunction of three forces; positive, negative and neutralising. This is the first idea that was explained in the System, and at the time when we first spoke of it in St. Petersburg I realised that this idea is the same as the idea of triads in Indian philosophy... In Sankhya philosophy it is put like this: three Gunas have seven combinations, one combination incomprehensible for our mind and six combinations comprehensible for our mind. This is the principle, this is the idea. And if we connect this possibility of seven combinations with the Ray of Creation we will get something out of it; but of this we will speak later...

You can start to study it best from another side, from the point of view of human actions, because although we don't understand it, there is the same, or even a bigger difference between human actions as between different objects. You know that this ash-tray is different from a pineapple, you will not mix them... And this is what we must

understand in relation to our actions and we must try to find categories of actions. There are six different categories of actions – try to see them, without even knowing which represents which triad. When you understand the difference between these six categories, then we will speak further.

(*A Record of Meetings*, 17 January 1938)

Though the Shankaracharya has never used the word ‘Triad’ in our hearing, yet this further development is implicit in all he says: For example:

This is how the threefold division enters into these four (elements of mind). There are thus twelve possibilities for the parts of the mind as a single engine. With Sattva you start the engine, and then with the accelerator you apply Rajas and go up through the gears; then Tamas is like applying the brakes or even going into reverse.

(21 January 1970)

Or again:

A disease is in three phases. The first is when it attacks the patient, the second when it has gained hold on the patient, and the third when the disease is passing from the patient due to time or other factors.

(27 January 1970)

PART 3. THE ORDER OF ACTION OF THE THREE FORCES IN A GIVEN TRIAD

Mr. Ouspensky, while in America during World War II, went further and gave us a scheme by which to distinguish the order of action in the six possible combinations, though since nobody then claimed to understand it, this fortunately escaped being printed and mishandled like so much else:

A Triad	1st Place	2nd Place	3rd Place
---------	-----------	-----------	-----------

In this form he worked out a scheme for establishing the role of each of the three forces as it occupies the first, second or third place in a given triad; but here we were again handicapped by our ignorance of their intrinsic nature, and by the absence of a suitable terminology. Since we now have available all the knowledge necessary, together with a wealth of examples, similes and stories, I propose that we now combine this with the terminology of the three Gunas.

Take for instance *Tamas* – in the ‘first place’ it often takes the form of *inertia* which has to be overcome before some process like Self-realization can start; in the ‘second place’ it may be seen either as *momentum* (mechanically increasing the original action) or it can be intentionally applied as a brake or *moderator*. In the ‘third place’ it is usually seen as a *dead end* when a process merely comes to a stop. In, for example, combustion, the final stage in many organic processes is found chemically to be ‘Carbon dioxide and water’, whereas it is often visible as ‘dust and ashes’.

So we must get out of the habit of attaching fixed labels; though these three Forces have their own intrinsic nature, their manifestations may appear very different.

PART 4. RELATIVE CONCENTRATION

The Shankaracharya usually prefers the terms ‘relative concentration’ or ‘*predominance*’ of one or another Guna, rather than ‘order of action’. The two are related. For sometimes an event is

instantaneous; and sometimes the stages in a triad are long drawn out, so that an order of action can be discerned – as for instance in the example of ‘a disease’ quoted above – and even more so in the example of crime and punishment:

A criminal commits his crime today, but the proceedings may take years; only when judgment is passed would he be punished for his sin done years ago.

In other examples – the explosion of a bomb, for instance the three forces appear to be present simultaneously and then the result may be thought to depend on the relative concentration of the elements that produced the explosion. Probably there is no real difference; it is relative to the observer.

PART 5. THE THREE LEVELS

But the greatest addition to our knowledge since Mr. Ouspensky’s time probably derives from all we have been hearing of the *physical*, *subtle* and *causal* levels. We should now be able to see and compare the action of the three Gunas and the different triads at least in the physical and psychological worlds, provided we look from the stillness of the causal level with abundance of Sattva. It is then that the two approaches (Mr. Ouspensky’s and the Shankaracharya’s) come to appear magnificently complementary instead of antagonistic.

For some this could be a great incentive to intensive work on oneself; particularly because, as Mr. Ouspensky repeatedly pointed out, it is impossible to think *personally* about the subject at all. We can only achieve anything in this field by more and more renunciation of the personal ego (as during half-hours) to achieve, if we can, the expanded vision of a great dramatist or poet, painter or composer ‘who conjures up remembrance of things past’.

For me a great storehouse of examples and the best formulations are to be found in our own Shakespeare, who constantly held a mirror up to man’s nature and his own:

When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory;
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
Sets *You* most rich in youth before my sight...

Sonnet XV

This is just what *we* are being advised to do – seek for the unity of the Divine Self, firmly renouncing all the movement in Nature set up by the Gunas.

* * *

[NOTE: Please try to find time to consider the above aspects and to decide which you will start with at your groups.]