

27th April 1970

## READING 1

### THE LAW OF THREE

#### PART 1

We have chosen this term to study one of the two fundamental 'Laws of Nature', partly because this is of great practical value in certain situations, and partly because it can be made a potent way of escape from that unholy combination of false ego with limited thinking, which is perhaps the chief obstacle to our progress at present.

From our Western System we learn that Knowledge of the Whole would arise from knowledge of the union of two Cosmic Laws in the Oneness of the Absolute. One of these Laws – the Law of Octaves – describes how all successions of events follow a repetitive pattern proceeding in cycles through certain recognisable steps. If it were not for the second Law, the Law of Three, 'there would be nothing new under the sun'. For the birth of anything *new*, three forces of different intrinsic nature have to be present at the required point. We usually proceed to 'do' something on the assumption that one force is enough, forgetting that 'to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction'. Two such opposing forces would always extinguish each other; for 'action' to produce the result intended, a third and different kind of force must be applied. On a limited physical front necessity has sometimes enabled men to find the necessary third element (after a long period of trial and error or patient research) so as to succeed in specific objectives.

But interpenetrating the physical world are the subtle and causal worlds of 'mind' and 'consciousness' which cannot be investigated by physical means. And the 'Laws' of which the System speaks govern all these three worlds.

Since the Law of Three applies to everything in the universe on all these three levels, any label or definition introduces a limitation. Sometimes this 'threeness' can be thought of as three 'forces'; sometimes as three 'aspects' of a situation; or as three 'elements of matter' like different coloured strands twisted into a rope; or three 'factors', x, y and z. So it is quite useful to use what is for us a totally non-committal word like the Sanskrit word '*Guna*'. Whatever you call them, there can only be six different possible triads or combinations of three factors: (x y z), (x z y); (y z x), (y x z); (z y x), (z x y). This is the theoretical basis of a practical study of the Law of Three which need not trouble us further at present.

Mr. Ouspensky introduced us to this study in words like this at his meetings before we came to Colet House. For example:

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 realized 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 combination 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)

Adopting this advice I would like to take examples and stories from the Shankaracharya to illustrate these six categories, for behind everything he says lies this same idea. Don't try yet to find the particular order of action or place in the triad – try to penetrate the essence of the example so as to find similar ones in your own experience:-

Take a good piece of wood and give it to a carpenter or wood-carver; he would make a useful piece of furniture out of it and present it in a beautiful way; whereas a good piece of wood given to an ignorant fool would be spoilt or burnt or thrown here and there till it rots.

(17 October 1962)

Here is a contrast between two triads in human activity, one of which Mr. Ouspensky called 'good professional work' and the other the triad of 'destruction.' This is a purely physical illustration, but on other occasions His Holiness has given illustrations of these same two triads which show that they apply on the subtle level also. This story, for instance, was told to show us how careful one has to be to preserve something valuable (in this case knowledge) from getting misused:

A rich landowner was pleased with one of his employees, a gardener by profession. Wishing to reward him for faithful service, he gave him one of his gardens to tend and use for his own profit. This garden happened to contain some sandalwood trees, the most valuable wood in India. The gardener, being ignorant of their value, started to cut down the sandalwood trees one by one, burn them up, and sell the charcoal in the common market. By and by the merchant paid him a visit to see how he was getting on. To his horror he saw what he was doing and shouted at him: 'My good man, do you realise that if you took one small piece of one of those sandalwood trees and polished it up, it would fetch a far higher price than all the charcoal made from burning all the trees!'

So you must be particularly careful to whom you give the True knowledge.

(27 August 1964)

Now try to find examples illustrating these two triads from your own experience. Remember that the Shankaracharya divides activities into 'good or bad' on the basis of whether they are useful or not to the Atman – whether they encourage or discourage Self-realization.

[We would be very grateful if the group would spend the last few minutes of each meeting choosing two or three of the best examples to send in, so that they can add to our store and be used for other people.]

## PART 2

The '*seventh and incomprehensible triad*' is the Nature of a certain 'Entity' (which our System calls the Absolute) that exists whether worlds are created or not. This Nature is a threefold Unity of which the three aspects cannot be separated from each other. In the System of the

Shankaracharya it is symbolised by the single word Sat-chit-ananda – Unchanging *Being*, Pure *Consciousness* (the Knowledge aspect) and pure *Bliss* (the emotional aspect). The different religions naturally have great difficulty in giving some kind of description of what is unmanifest and indescribable – the Hindus and Christians, for example, have personified it as ‘Three Persons’. What is important, however, is to keep the idea inviolate; and the first Council of Nicaea under the Emperor Constantine in AD 325 met chiefly to reformulate it in order to correct what was being misunderstood: ‘The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible; and yet there are not three incomprehensibles but one incomprehensible’.

Our System both in its Eastern and its Western forms achieves this result by demonstrating that each individual human being is a small replica (microcosm) of the great Universe (macrocosm), and that the True Self, always present though often unmanifested, has exactly the same Nature as the Creator of the Universe. By knowing and loving and ultimately becoming this True Self, one comes to understand this ‘incomprehensible’ and live by it. What keeps the Truth alive is when a religious leader applies this to himself; if he is faithful to this, then any teaching (whether by precept or example) that comes out of him will be true. This is shown in the story of Saint Patrick of Ireland which is called *The Deer’s Cry*:

Patrick made this hymn one time he was going to preach the Faith at Teamhair, and his enemies lay in hiding to make an attack on him as he passed. But as he and his servant went by, they saw no enemy but only a deer and a fawn passing by. And the *Deer’s Cry* is the name of the hymn to this day:

I bind myself today to a strong strength, to a calling on the Trinity. I believe in a Threeness with confession of a Oneness in the Creator of the World...

In stability of earth, in steadfastness of rock, I bind to myself today God’s strength to pilot me;

God’s power to uphold me; God’s wisdom to guide me; God’s eye to look before me; God’s ear to hear me;

God’s word to speak for me; God’s hand to guard me, God’s path to lie before me; God’s shield to protect me; God’s host to save me...

I bind to myself today a strong strength to a calling upon the Trinity; I believe in a Threeness with confession of a Oneness in the Creator of the World!

(quoted by W.H.Auden in *The City without Walls*, 1969, p.200)

This is an expression of what our System calls ‘Self-remembering’, though it does not use the word ‘God’, for this is apt to give rise to duality which must be avoided at all costs. Some systems of meditation use for repetition certain words which contain this ‘Threeness in a Oneness’; before starting a half-hour it helps to say that first and last verse of Patrick’s hymn.

Any programme directed to Self-realization, and discussions on the Law of Three, rapidly become hollow unless based on this central idea and accompanied by some such daily work on Being. Of course the ‘Threeness in a Oneness’ is also apparent in other disciplines, notably the Mukabeleh of the Mevlevi Tradition. What would unite all our people into one body is the Self-remembering which lies within all ‘three lines of Work’.

