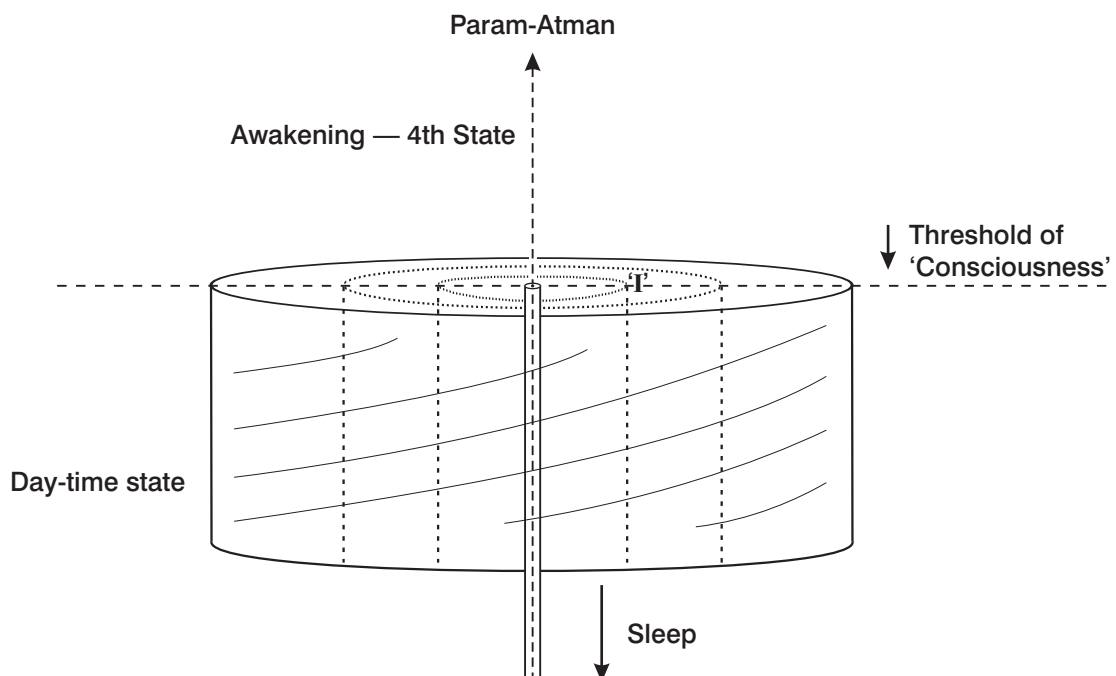


7 June 1971

## READING 5

On resuming after Whitsun we should once more go back to the beginning and ask ourselves what all our activity is about. The diagram you were given (Reading 3) is a symbol in which 'very much is contained in very little'. While for a few specialists it is of value in bringing work on Consciousness into line with current scientific discoveries in many fields, for the great majority of us it has one point, and one only – the central axis of pure Consciousness about which all our mental operations are for ever spinning. For change of Being, it is only necessary to use that part of it in which the causes of everything exist, and to distinguish between what Newton called the centripetal and the centrifugal forces of attraction and repulsion (Figure) – towards the Self or spinning away from it.



By great good fortune we have just received translated summaries of two talks given by the Shankaracharya to his people before he went up to the Himalayas on 8th May. We can begin by being humble, for these talks were not for us at all but for the poor people round him whom we, in our ignorance, consider to be primitive and 'under-privileged'. With us his approach is more elementary, but there is a chance that perhaps a few here can follow him enough to put something into practice as he continues to try to strip the veils of illusion from our eyes.

In one of these talks he begins by quoting from Vyasa, whose name we hear in the initiation ceremony as the third in line of the great leaders of the Holy Tradition of the Meditation. This Vyasa was not only the first to record in writing the basic teachings of the *Upanishads* and the *Vedanta*, but also wrote the marvellous poetry of the *Bhagavad Gita* as the summary of them all in Arjuna's vision of the Param-Atman.

The talk begins: 'Vyasa says, "I have made a critical study of the Vedas and the Shastras

several times. The gist of all that, as I found, is that we ought to hold the Param-Atman in mind all the time.”

His Holiness goes on:

As soon as any other thought enters the mind, we are in the grip of Maya or ignorance, which catches hold of us, and takes us very, very far away. The ‘Jiva’, the person who is ‘ourself’, is a part of the Param-Atman and it has come into the world for the purpose of discovering the source of Happiness (and Goodwill). But instead of that, *it has fallen into the trap of ignorance, which is forgetting Reality*. Therefore the biggest of all troubles is to forget the Reality; and, ‘by forgetting the Reality’, we mean forgetting that only Param-Atman is real and the world (the artefact of mind and senses) is unreal.

A schoolboy was given a new penknife by his parents for his birthday, and he took it to school with him. Usually he carried his penknife in his satchel, but that day he wore the new one in his belt. But when he wanted it, he forgot that it was in his belt and searched for it again and again in the satchel. Not finding it, he thought his classmates had stolen it, and reported the theft to the class-teacher. The whole class was punished. This is how a most ordinary instance of forgetting causes big trouble.

(Record, 7 May 1971)

We’ll come later to the rest of the talk which is about ways of remembering. But for now let’s again ask, ‘What causes this forgetting?’ Directly the mind departs from the Param-Atman it gets into that outgoing spin which Dunne called ‘the infinite regress’. When we say, ‘this child has a father’ that’s enough; but when we go on, ‘this child has a father who had a father who had... etc.’, we enter the regress which is how our minds work when we are not attentive, and is the chief cause of our loss of memory.

The clearest description of the truth of His Holiness’s remark that ‘As soon as any other thought enters the mind, we are in the grip of Maya or ignorance, which catches hold of us and takes us very, very far away’, comes from Mr. Ouspensky when he first heard of Self-remembering before the Russian Revolution, and we can’t hear it too often:

My very first attempts showed me that I was up against a problem entirely new to science and Western philosophy...

In the first place I saw that self-remembering had nothing in common with ‘self-feeling’ or ‘self-analysis’. It was a very new and very interesting state with a strangely familiar flavour.

And secondly I realised that moments of self-remembering do occur in life although rarely. Only the deliberate production of these moments created the sensation of novelty...

I had always been astonished at the weakness and the insufficiency of our memory. So many things disappear. The chief absurdity of life for me consisted in this. Why experience so much in order to forget it afterwards? ... It now became clear to me why this was so, and why it could not be otherwise. If our memory really keeps alive only moments of self-remembering, it is clear why our memory is so poor...

Sometimes self-remembering was not successful; at other times it was accompanied by curious observations.

I was once walking along the Liteiny towards the Nevsky, and in spite of all my efforts I was unable to keep my attention on self-remembering. The noise, movement, every-

thing distracted me. Every minute I lost the thread of attention, found it again, and then lost it again. At last I felt a kind of ridiculous irritation with myself and I turned into the street on the left having firmly decided to keep my attention on the fact that *I would remember myself* at least for some time, at any rate until I reached the following street. I reached the Nadejdinskaya without losing the thread of attention except, perhaps, for short moments. Then I again turned towards the Nevsky realising that, in quiet streets, it was easier for me not to lose the line of thought and wishing therefore to test myself in more noisy streets. I reached the Nevsky still remembering myself, and was already beginning to experience the strange emotional state of inner peace and confidence which comes after great efforts of this kind. Just round the corner on the Nevsky was a tobacconist's shop where they made my cigarettes. Still remembering myself I thought I would call there and order some cigarettes.

Two hours later I *woke up* in the Tavrisheskaya, that is, far away. I was going by cab to the printers. The sensation of awakening was extraordinarily vivid. I can almost say that I *came to*. I remembered everything at once. How I had been walking along the Nadejdinskaya, how I had been remembering myself, how I had thought about cigarettes, and how *at this thought* I seemed all at once to fall and disappear into a deep sleep.

At the same time, while immersed in this sleep, I had continued to perform consistent and expedient actions. I left the tobacconist, called at my flat in the Liteiny, telephoned to the printers. I wrote two letters. Then again I went out of the house. I walked on the left side of the Nevsky up to the Gostinoy Dvor intending to go to the Offitzerskaya. Then I had changed my mind as it was getting late. I had taken a cab and was driving to the Kavalergardskaya to my printers. And on the way while driving along the Tavrisheskaya I began to feel a strange uneasiness, as though I had forgotten something. – *And suddenly I remembered that I had forgotten to remember myself.*

(*Memory*, pp. 20–21)

[Pause]

Listening to this again one asks oneself, 'Wouldn't you think you'd been wide awake if you remembered so precisely what you had done over two hours, and on which side of the street you had walked?' Yet for him it was deep spiritual sleep!

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And so from prehistoric to modern times the problem for the individual and for humanity remains the same. For human 'progress' consists only in circles of 'discovery' at the cost of forgetting what was known before; and the scientists are getting only further and further away from the rediscovery of Self-remembering.

And what about ourselves today? When Mr. Ouspensky made those first attempts over 50 years ago, he had nothing of what we now possess – all the modern knowledge of the mechanism of our brain; methods like the Movements, the Turning, the Meditation; and, above all, the constant guidance of a man who lives continuously in the state of Self-remembering. Are we going to listen and practise? Are our meetings going to lead to Self-remembering or to the forgetfulness of 'second sleep' or spiritual death?

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