

5 June 1972

READING 11

PART 1

I'd like now to try a new approach to the subject we were discussing before the Bank Holiday, which is suggested by the Shankaracharya in a talk to his people on 2nd February this year, and which I don't think you have heard yet. It begins:

This body is like a big town, the habitation of many. It contains within it a whole world of living creatures, all possessing life and the desire to live. Some appear harmful and some useful. They are being kept constantly in a state of dynamic equilibrium, and this equilibrium keeps the body fit. Any disturbance of equilibrium can lead to illness, so compensating forces within our nature arise which tend to set it right. Similarly, when the balance of the Big Creation is upset, then the forces of Param-Atman come into play to restore it.

These few simple sentences are worth considering more deeply for a number of reasons:

1. They describe in strangely similar terms the concept of the chief function of that inner (autonomic) nervous system which modern science owes largely to the great French physiologist Claude Bernard (1813–78). In describing what has come to be called the 'vasomotor system' (by which every cell and every organ and system gets its measured ration of food and oxygen), Bernard stressed the *constancy of the 'milieu interne'* in the midst of a changing environment. The body is kept in a state of very precise chemical balance by means of compensating mechanisms involving breathing, circulation, digestion, excretion, and so forth; and though these adjustments often produce disturbing ('functional') symptoms, it is only when the compensation breaks down that the doctors diagnose organic disease. There is usually plenty of warning, to which some people are strangely impervious, while others get unnecessarily alarmed and make things worse. We should know our machines better!
2. The use of the term 'living creatures' recalls Mr. Ouspensky's description of the power of *self-suggestion* (*A New Model*, pp. 303–307), especially the paragraphs beginning, 'A man consists of a countless number of lives' and 'The inner consciousnesses are a provincial crowd listening to the opinions of inhabitants of the capital, following their tastes, imitating their manners'.
3. The real meaning of the Law of Three Forces or three Gunas, for every excess (Rajas) in one system or one area of the body, inevitably gives rise to a defect (Tamas) somewhere else; whereas to Sattva belong the compensatory forces tending to restore health and equilibrium.

Many attempts have, of course, been made to try to bring this autonomic nervous system under control. Claude Bernard's own approach was biochemical, and today we are in the hands of the purveyors of all manner of *tranquillising* drugs, while the younger generation are trying to *arouse* these inner sources of power by means of dexedrine, hashish, and even LSD.

But the realisation that everybody will have to come to in the end, is that control can only be brought about *from above* through the process of Self-realization – one example of the importance of the Shankaracharya's insistence on acquiring the habit of *remembering Param-Atman all the time*.

PART 2

As confirmation (from an independent source) for the great possibility of acquiring control from above both of the outer and the inner divisions of our nervous system, we can quote the following passage once more:

The work on the circulation of the Light depends entirely on the backward flowing movement, so that the thoughts are gathered together in the place of Heavenly Consciousness, the Heavenly Heart. The Heavenly Heart lies between the two eyes...

The Heavenly Heart is like the dwelling place, the Light is the Master. Therefore when the Light circulates, the powers of the whole body arrange themselves before its throne, just as when a holy king has taken possession of the capital and has laid down the fundamental rules of order, all the states approach with tribute; or, just as when the master is quiet and calm, menservants and maids obey his orders of their own accord, and each does his work.

Therefore you only have to make the Light circulate; that is the deepest and most wonderful secret. The Light is easy to move but difficult to fix. If it is allowed to go long enough in a circle, then it crystallises itself... It is the condition of which it is said in the Book of the Seal of the Heart: 'Silently in the morning thou fliest upwards'. Another Sutra says, 'By collecting the thoughts one can fly and will be born in Heaven. Heaven is not the wide blue sky, but the place where the body is made in the house of the creative'.

Translator's Note

This comes from a book (*The Secret of the Golden Flower*) translated by the German scholar Richard Wilhelm, who died in 1930, and he says of it, 'The book comes from an esoteric circle in China. For a long time it was transmitted orally, and then in writing; the first printing dates from the 18th century. Finally, a thousand copies of it were reprinted in Peking in 1920 and were divided among a small group of people who, in the opinion of the editor, understood the questions discussed. In this way I was able to obtain a copy'.

PART 3

That will remind us of the now established fact that the causes of our physical and psychological disturbances lie on a higher level (the Causal) in that Real space which is independent of time and change.

All this adds point to the continuation of His Holiness's talk with which we began this paper:

Nature is constantly striving for perfection, never attaining it. Man, also, as part of Nature. One who is ill tries to get well; one who is weak, tries to get strong; one who is poor tries to get rich; and so on. Thus, in every situation there is dissatisfaction, and there are corresponding efforts to overcome it and to improve things ...

Our efforts, however, are more towards *looking* good externally, and less towards *being* so internally. Trying to look good outside, but staying bad inside, does not however cure the condition or restore the equilibrium. In fact, such attempts can only result in harm, since they are based on deception:

Once a well-dressed young man came to me posing as the son of the Prince of Avagarh. He said that he was stranded at the railway station having lost all his

luggage, and he wanted to borrow money, promising to return it by telegraphic money order as soon as he got home. I told him to make himself comfortable at the Ashram first and have a meal, and then we would consider later what we could do about it. By chance, an employee of Avagarh State also happened to be in the Ashram just then. I asked him if he knew the man, but he denied all knowledge of him. The imposter then disappeared on some pretext and never returned.

The world, on the whole, is like this. People put on good appearances outside but keep ulterior motives within.

This affords us a valuable distinction between Personality and Essence; while essence is concerned with *being good*, personality is usually concerned merely with *looking good*. In fact, one's personality is always playing 'confidence tricks' like that, both on oneself and on other people. More often than not we don't know it is playing these tricks, for they have become part of our 'second nature', which we don't trouble to dig out. Remember the quotation in *A New Model*: 'A man winnows his neighbour's faults like chaff, but his own fault he hides, as a cheat hides the bad die from the gambler'?

This is one of the chief reasons why a School is so necessary; and the head of a School (until he attains full Self-realization) also looks to his companions to help him detect in himself some of the repertoire of his own personality, so welcomes plain speaking as in this Zen story:

Our schoolmaster used to take a nap every afternoon. We children asked him why he did it, and he told us: 'I go to dreamland to meet the old sages, just as Confucius did.'

...

One day it was very hot, so some of us children took a nap. When our schoolmaster scolded us, we explained that 'we went to dreamland to meet the ancient sages, same as Confucius did.'

'And what did those sages say?' the master demanded.

One of us replied, 'We went to dreamland and met the sages and asked them if our schoolmaster came there every afternoon, but they said they had never seen any such fellow.'

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