

8 October 1973

## READING 2

## A SCHOOL OF THE FOURTH WAY

## PART 1

Last week one of our newer groups had a very lively discussion sparked off by a question put to it by Dr. Arthur Connell: 'What do we want, and why have we come here?'

However learned some of us think we are, I propose this week we *all* start off with the attitude put so sincerely by young Philippa Bill (at this her first meeting) in answer to that question:

It's partly because I don't know what life is about *at all*, and I don't know what I want out of life either, or what my life is for. I'm more likely to find the answer with other people who are searching too.

Let's, then, start this week with just one idea, namely that we are all on the same voyage of exploration – Self-discovery. 'What do we have to discover?' Although each of us might put it differently, I guess that we are really 'searching for something in ourselves that we could always trust – something to rely on'. That implies permanence, and there is no permanence anywhere else. The cells of our bodies are changing every month and every year during their short lives; our environment changes all the time; our thoughts, feelings and intentions are changing even more rapidly – every hour, every day. But there's a part of human nature, very big and important, which scarcely changes at all. This 'inner organ' or 'Soul' – mostly containing possibilities not yet realised – is *silent* (only surfacing in a crisis). But it knows at least one Big Secret, namely that there exists *in everyone* a spark of the Divine, of Pure Consciousness, which alone can be called one's True Self. So Philippa's question about what her life is for, depends on whether she uses the word 'my' for her perishable body or for her True Self. This 'inner organ', with its immediate access to the Self, is where our meditation is designed to take us.

Again, this was expressed very well by David Gow, another newcomer to that meeting (though he has already made a beginning with a small group of ours in western Canada):

I think that the thing that has brought us here is the experience of the Self (Atman) that we have had, perhaps in the past in many different ways. In reality the Self is always with us, otherwise we couldn't begin this 'Ladder of seven steps'. So if we concentrate on the first two steps, then everything else occurs.

Also Mrs. Ashbrook:

It's like the potter's wheel, with the finger in the centre; when you are centralised it gives you a certain kind of freedom, freedom from your (small, changeable) self.

[Pause: Do you agree in the main with this guess? Then, perhaps after a little talk, restate those seven steps quite shortly.]

\*

## PART 2

Now, what is the first thing that should be known by Self-realizing people – people who have discovered part of the Big Secret and want more of it? We believe that, in order to acquire permanently this ‘freedom’ which we sometimes feel when we happen to be ‘centralised’, we have to submit to a little gentle discipline. We have to learn to *listen*, and then keep to the line being developed at the meeting, because important questions can only be answered in a certain order. Otherwise the meeting just becomes chaotic – too like ordinary life!

You may have realised that your small group is part of a ‘School’ (of Self-realization) intimately linked with a great and permanent Tradition; a tradition that has centred on the Meditation for hundreds of years and which is widely known as the ‘Way of Liberation’. Though it started back in the mists of pre-history, its present form is due to a young man called Shri Shankara who, in his short life of thirty-two years, transformed the face of India twenty-five centuries ago; and whose influence spread westwards along the trade routes, across the high mountains of the Hindu Kush to Persia, Asia Minor, and via the Greeks (such as Plato) and the early Christians, to the rest of Europe, and back to the Indus valley with the armies of Alexander the Great. Of course, it spread eastwards as well.

Shri Shankara was a poet and a singer – his teachings were clothed like his *Crest Jewel of Wisdom* in (often extemporary) poetry; and, through the long line of his successors right up to our present guide in Meditation, music and poetry have been used to keep it alive and inspired. Whenever we visit the Shankaracharya, there is always music, and often his words are poetic like these about the Atman:

He makes our Nature dance,  
But none can make Him dance!  
He is the Reality,  
He is the Truth, and there  
Is no place where He is lacking.

\*

So we try at our meetings to allow our consciousness to be lifted in such ways off the ordinary street level of ‘analytical thought’, which makes life:

Cold till doom!  
All the world obeys its rule,  
Every track becomes a stream,  
Every ford a pool.

A Sufi defined Iblis (their Satan) as the ‘inventor of analytical reason’, and surely that’s the main curse of today’s world; yet even Iblis said to a true Believer: ‘Never say ‘I’, or you will become like me’.

\*

So, if you start right now to practise both the meditation and the first two or three steps of that Ladder every day, you will find that Liberation will follow as day follows night,

And, Oh God!  
 Once again for ill or good  
 Spring will come, and I shall see  
 Everything but 'me' renewed.

[Discussion, chiefly about 'How we can become part of a School of the Way of Liberation.']

At end of meeting:

One last thought to take away with you. On the three traditional Ways – the Way of Action, the Way of Devotion and the Way of Knowledge, people nearly always look for some kind of personal reward, so that in their temples there is a hierarchy of prestige (and usually of a pecking order!); whereas on the Way of Liberation we start from the beginning to free ourselves from that final obstacle. We try to brighten our own lives and those of our neighbours for the sheer joy of it, without looking for any personal profit. To the Self-realizing person, what does it matter if:

He weaves, and is clothed with derision,  
 Sows, and he shall not reap;  
 His life is a watch or a vision  
 Between a sleep and a sleep.

(Swinburne, from 'Before the Beginning of Time')

Consequently, he keeps quiet about himself and his doings. On this Way, the 'rule of Silence' is a wise one. It means that one says only what one's hearer can understand and profit by, and without taking the name of the School in vain. So one begins by asking permission from some more experienced person before one mentions these meetings to anyone outside one's own family circle.

\* \* \*

