

15 July 1974

‘ETERNAL RECURRENCE’

(For those who knew Mr. Ouspensky enough to have his idea
of Eternal Recurrence firmly rooted in their minds.)

PART I

I am asking you to help me to reformulate this idea in the light of the Shankaracharya's present teaching. It is very important to realise that published descriptions of this idea in *A New Model of the Universe* and in his drama *Ivan Osokin* were written without the Knowledge which we now have, some of which Mr. Ouspensky discovered for himself during the super-efforts he made in the last month of his life, but could not at that time communicate to us.

In pre-World War days, in the summer before Munich, he was engaged on writing what is now Chapter 27 of *Osokin* called ‘On the Threshold’. We can safely take it that by ‘the Magician’ he meant what we now call Param-Atman, Osokin representing the person or individual (Jiva). For what His Holiness calls ‘giving up’ or ‘relinquishing’, Ouspensky used the harsher word ‘sacrifice’:

‘A man can be given only what he can use; and he can use only that for which he has sacrificed something. This is the law of human nature. So if a man wants to get help to acquire important knowledge or new powers, he must sacrifice other things important to him at the moment...’

‘Are there no other ways?’ asks Osokin.

‘You mean ways in which no sacrifices are necessary? No, there are no such ways, and you do not understand what you are asking. You cannot have results without causes. By your sacrifice you create causes. There are different ways, but they differ only in the form, magnitude and finality of the sacrifice. In most cases, one has to give up everything at once...’

‘There is a Dervish song which goes like this:

Through four renunciations
Ascend to perfection.
Leave life without regret.
Expect no reward in heaven.

‘Do you understand what that means? Most people can go only by this way or by one of the similar ways. But here, now, you are in a different position. You can talk with me. You may know what you have to give up and what you may get for it...’

‘For some very complicated reasons which are all in yourself, you happen to have guessed a very great secret that people generally do not know. By itself, your guess is useless because you cannot apply it to anything. But the fact that you know this secret opens certain doors for you. You know that everything repeats again and again. There have been other people who made the same discovery but they could make nothing more of it.[†] If you

[†]Note. For example, the later followers of Pythagoras. The usual translation of a favourite word of the Pythagoreans – *arithmos* – makes nonsense of the passage from Simplicius quoted on p.468 of 2nd Edition of *New Model*. No word ‘*rithmos*’ or ‘*arithmos*’ appears in any dictionary or lexicon that I possess. But there is a word ‘*rūthmos*’ from which our word ‘rhythm’ is derived which (according to Liddell & Scott) meant: 1) ‘measured motion, time, rhythm’; 2) ‘proportion or symmetry of parts’; hence, ‘form’ ‘shape’; 3) generally, ‘proportion, arrangement, order, method’. The prefix ‘a’ – usually means the negative – like a-symmetrical. So it is possible that while ‘*rithmos*’ referred to the ‘natural order’ (Karma), like repetition of cycles, i.e., movement round the circle of time, ‘*arithmos*’ meant escape or ‘Liberation’ from that repetition.

could change something in yourself, you would be able to use this knowledge for your own (and other people's) advantage. So, you see, you *do* know what you want and what you may get.

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'Now the question of what to sacrifice and how to sacrifice. You say you have nothing. Not quite. You have your life. So you can sacrifice your life. It is a very small price to pay since you meant to throw it away in any case. Instead of that give me your life and I will see what can be made of you.'

But from that point the dialogue takes a turning which we now know to be mistaken and unnecessary. We now know that 'giving up one's life' means to change one's attitude to it, to watch the cinema film on the screen without any sense of ownership. To 'give up' one's life to the Param-Atman means to relinquish the feeling of 'I', and since one's thoughts and feelings and actions come ultimately from the Param-Atman, to return them or dedicate them to Him. This must be begun now and established before we die, because if there is a next life it will be determined by the deepest desire the person has at the time of death. If that last desire of his is for the Param-Atman the Param-Atman will arrange everything for him.

In particular, the Shankaracharya has repeatedly said that it is quite wrong to go over our past life with the idea that things may have gone wrong at certain points, and that by remembering such 'cross-roads' we shall live a different life. On the contrary, he says, you only bind yourself the more by so doing. If any of us fail to get full Realization by the time we die, so that it would be necessary to live again, the Param-Atman will arrange everything so as to make Realization easier and quicker.

PART 2

During his last meetings at Colet before the War and also at meetings in New York, Mr. Ouspensky began to express the idea of recurrence a little differently:

Q. Does the idea of parallel time mean that all moments continually exist?

O. Yes, but it is very difficult to think about it. Certainly it means eternity of the moment, but our minds cannot think in that way. Our mind is a very limited machine. We must think in the easiest way and make allowances for it. It is easier to think of repetition than of the eternal existence of the moment...

Q. Will you explain how it is possible for a man to live coexistent lives simultaneously?

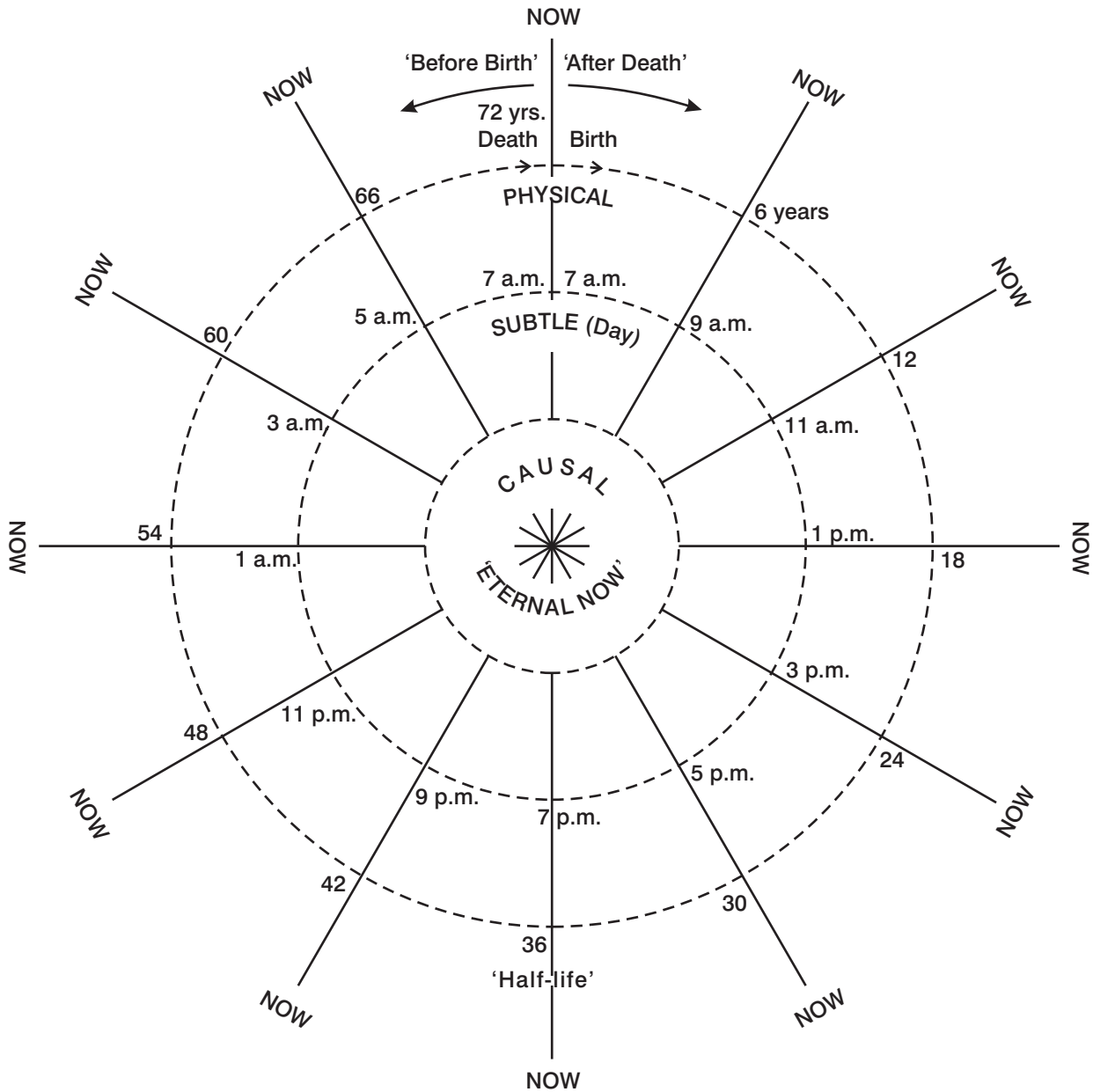
O. There are many things that look impossible, but that is because our thinking apparatus is not good enough. These problems need mathematical thinking. For instance, we cannot think about time as a curve, but only as a straight line. If we could think of time as a curve, and understand all that that implies, this question of yours would not arise... Really there is no problem of this kind. The problem is that due to the structure of our own mind, the aim of all our work is to reach higher states of Consciousness, which means to think through Higher Centres. If we could do this, then problems of the future life, absurdities like this time question and so on, would not arise...

Q. I do not understand what you mean when you say the fourth dimension is the realisation of one possibility?

O. Life is the fourth dimension, a circle, the realization of one possibility. When this comes to an end, it means its own beginning. The moment of death corresponds to the moment of birth and then life begins again, maybe with slight deviations, but they do not mean anything...

We cannot think of simultaneous moments. We have to think of one moment *following* another, though actually they are simultaneous on another scale. For instance, scientific descriptions of small particles such as electrons, lead to the conclusion that their *eternity* is in our *time*. So why can our *repetition* not be in earth's *time*?

Brief study of the accompanying diagram shows how simple are the answers to the above questions if we use the same model for 'time as a curve', but varying the units of time according to the different scales within the universe. For example, the latest data ('The Age of the Elements' by David N. Shramm, *Scientific American*, January 1974, p.69) indicate that for a decade of human life we should use a thousand million years as the time-unit of our solar system.



PART 3. A NEW ATTITUDE TO LIFE AND DEATH

So now I am asking all those who knew Mr. Ouspensky, firmly to give up any idea of going over the events of this present life in one's mind in order to prepare for some other life to come, and to join me in dwelling instead on all that the Shankaracharya has said about Liberation in this present life, however short or however long a time we may have to live.

It was a mighty task to try and make some selections from the nine volumes of verbatim conversations with him. All these can be summed up in the following terms: However many lives we have previously lived, once we are welded together into a School or group which has become part of the Holy Tradition of the Meditation under the guidance of a fully Realized man, all the ordinary laws of recurrence disappear. Instead, the thought of the All-powerful Param-Atman with the Shankaracharya as His living representative, should occupy our thoughts and emotional life. It can all be summed up in this sentence: 'Even though we have only one single moment to live, we should forsake all worry about the past and the future and make a good use of the present with dignity, and good thoughts (as the thought that we belong to the Param-Atman and the Param-Atman belongs to us). Our minds should never be allowed to accommodate a doubt about this fact.'

For a start, four passages may be quoted:

1. An answer to Irene Nicholson's question to him before she died of cancer:

What is the most important thing to do before death in order to ensure continued connection with His Holiness and our own School, and to be of best use to this Work as a whole?

His Holiness (smiling): There was a young disciple with a Realized man. The Realized man was very old and was just about to leave this world. This young disciple was worried and asked his Teacher: 'Since you are leaving this world for Liberation, what shall I do to be liberated?' The teacher replied, 'You don't have to worry about that. Once a relation has been established between the Teacher and the disciple, both will be liberated together.'

Bodies may seem to leave each other, but in reality the Teacher comes again and again to prepare people; then all are liberated simultaneously.

(Record, 2 November 1967)

2. S. The method of Meditation is somehow related to all three times, past, present and future. It doesn't only correct the harmful tendencies of this present life derived from the past, but the Meditation and the Sattva it produces take care of the third aspect of time, the future – and clean everything up. This means that Sattva produced by Meditation wins the battle over the harmful tendencies and allows all possibilities to be realized in this life, thereby removing harmful tendencies for the future.

One of the examples which could be seen is when harmful tendencies of past lives have caused a disease in this life. Again, a disease is in three phases. The first is when it begins to attack the patient, the second when it has gained a hold on the patient, and the third when the disease is passing away from the patient due to time or other factors.

In ordinary life these three phases of the disease have a varying effect on the patient so he goes up and down.

But a person who has mature Meditation established in him will be affected only on one level. Though the body may be suffering, the Manas and the Buddhi will be unaffected by what is going on in the body. Unexpected healing may take place, and he may be able to perform his activities without pain or deterioration. Even if he has pain, he will be able to withstand it well compared with those who don't meditate.

(Record, 27 January 1970)

3. When asked on another occasion 'why two such renowned saints and teachers as Ramakrishna and Ramana Maharshi should both have died of cancer?', he replied that 'the physical disease was the result of previous lives. But,' he added, 'it made no difference to their full Realization on the subtle and causal levels. It is the brave smile on the face that wins the ultimate victory over the bodily ailments.'

(Record, 4 September 1964)

As we have said, with His Holiness's present teaching all those old conceptions – all the search in one's past life for crossroads which have to be 'changed' next time – can be happily given up.

4. S. The System is always the same – that one must dive deep into the Self – into this great ocean of Bliss. When one reaches that level and comes out having soaked or bathed in it, then one finds that this Antahkarana (see diagram – 'Causal level') which is the medium of expression for the individual, by itself *regenerates everything as new*; new for meeting each situation as it arises. So this gives you a creative faculty to meet the situations and provide *new* solutions every time there is a problem...

If one has learnt to dive deep without any load and to go to the base – the bottom of this ocean – then there is nothing else that a man really needs; everything will be provided, everything will be ready-made for him, and he will make it ready for others.

R.A. (5) When I came in (to the audience chamber) this morning, I felt complete reassurance... that there is no need for any anxiety, and that all things are cared for. How can one hold that?

S. There are two ways of holding this experience: one is by the mind – Buddhi. If it is held by the mind constantly and one reminds oneself about the experience and its taste, then in the course of time it becomes one's own.

The second way of holding is to hold by faith – Shradda – and that is held in the emotional body of the individual. Here it is held very tightly; this is where it is held totally. Having held this experience from these two standpoints – from faith and from Reason – then it becomes one's own; and then whenever or under whatever circumstances, or under whatever influences one may move about, one will never lose this experience...

(Record, 16 January 1974)

COMMENT

Since the part of the nervous system underlying our emotional life (sympathetic nervous system) is the last to die, it is the last *desire* that determines if and how we are to live again. The emotion itself does not die; being part of the Atman it is immortal.

Therefore nothing remains for you and for me to do before death, but to cultivate the memory of the unlimited benevolence of Param-Atman in all its manifestations which leads to Faith, namely, 'that we belong to Param-Atman, and Param-Atman belongs to us.' We should

order our actions accordingly, but disciplines other than the Meditation and (other lines of thought) are superfluous.

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