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THE MIRROR OF SELF-OBSERVATION

We are now at the stage when we should be able to bring what we are being taught more into relation with ordinary life. Self-observation begins and ends with the gradual purification or polishing of the reflecting mirror of Consciousness, which all of us carry in the front half of the brain that lies immediately behind the forehead. Modern neuropsychology is attaching more and more importance to the role which this part should perform in regulating our lives. But without actually experiencing this gradual purification through some such method as 'Transcendental Meditation', we jump to wrong conclusions and evolve complicated and mistaken theories which only increase the fog on the mirror.

Relative clarity of this mirror has been experienced by many: 1) after returning from the deepest meditation when complete cessation of all mental movements has been achieved. 2) Immediately on waking from several hours of deep sleep, provided some focus for the mind is ready at hand to maintain the quiet and delay the return of the usual mental turbulence, etc. 3) With some practice at quiet times in one's life, it is possible to maintain the clarity of the mirror even when waking and moving and performing routine activities which do not require the intervention of thought.

Why is this so important that it can be claimed that Self-knowledge begins and ends with the purification of this mirror? The simile of the mirror has been used by great thinkers since the first written records. For now, I will quote merely the following passage from *Tertium Organum*:

The 'infinite sphere' by which we represent the universe to ourselves is constantly and continuously changing: in every consecutive moment *it is not that* which it was before. A constant change of pictures, images, relations, is going on therein. It is for us as it were the screen of a cinematograph upon which the swiftly running images of pictures appear and disappear.

But where are the pictures themselves? Where is the light throwing the image upon the screen? Whence do the pictures come, and whither do they go?

If the 'infinite sphere' is the screen of the cinematograph so our consciousness is *the light*, penetrating through our psyche: i.e., through the stores of our impressions (pictures) it (the light) throws upon the screen the images which we call *life*.

But where do the impressions come from to us?

From *the same screen*.

And herein dwells the most incomprehensible mystery of life as we see it. We are creating it and we are receiving everything from it.

Imagine a man sitting in the ordinary moving picture theatre. Imagine that he knows nothing of the construction of the cinematograph, nothing of the existence of the lantern *behind his back*, nor of the small transparent picture on the moving film. Let us imagine that he wants to study the cinematograph, and begins to study that which proceeds on the screen, to make notes, to take pictures, to observe the order, to calculate, to construct hypotheses, and so forth.

At what will he arrive?

Evidently at nothing at all, unless he will turn his back to the screen, and will begin to study *the cause of the appearance of the pictures upon the screen*. The cause is confined in the lantern (i.e., in consciousness), and in the moving films of pictures (in the psyche)...

(Thus) it is necessary to study the cinematograph beginning with *the source of light*, i.e., with *consciousness*, then to pass on to the pictures on the moving film, and only after that to study *the projected image*.

(*Tertium Organum*, 1951 edition, pp.100–101)

This merely remained a stimulating theory until we heard a great deal from the Shankaracharya about how to do it. In a reply to a question he said that:

It is very difficult to maintain that the individuals are the doers of anything, for the creation is a manifestation of the Absolute who is the real doer. The whole show has been knit together in such a beautiful pattern that it keeps changing from one moment to another...

He gives the example of a cinema show, where the film is being shown on the screen and the people keep on looking at these moving pictures. On the screen you see mountains, buildings, seas, fights, love scenes and religious scenes. Some people watching are like puppets, and they get animated by the scenes.

One should be able to see the things which are happening in the world – but only as a silent observer. See all the pleasures or the horrors on the screen, but without getting involved and moved off course.

All the exciting things which are shown on the screen do not colour the screen itself – the screen is pure white...

So should we become like a screen where every part of the activity is allowed to take place, but we should become pure white and not be entangled with any of the colours of the world. The flow of the Gunas should be experienced dispassionately.

Each of the five states of consciousness is part of the manifested creation for the pleasure of the Self, and in fact each state is useful for one purpose or another. There is nothing to choose between one or the other; one doesn't have to choose anything, but stand at the centre and see both the inner side and the outer – just the passing life – the play of 'past' and 'future'... One has to become an impartial and silent observer of whatever happens; if that is achieved, it is beyond all those changing states of the world we live in, and then in effect everything is the Being – Consciousness – Happiness of the Absolute. Even the most ordinary work then gives this [strange] Bliss or Ananda.

(Record, 3 October 1972)

The same thing has been said by great men of the Christian tradition:

By means of silence you must thoroughly cleanse your mind and give it constant spiritual occupation. As the eye turned on sensory objects looks closely at what it sees, so a pure mind, turned towards immaterial things is uplifted by the object of its spiritual contemplation so that it cannot be torn away. And in the measure that silence strips it of passions and purifies it, so is it given knowledge (of these spiritual things). The mind becomes perfect when it enters into the sphere of essential knowledge and is united with God. Having thus attained kingly rank, the mind no longer feels poor and is not carried away by false desires, even if all the kingdoms of the world were offered it.

(Abba Philemon, *Philokalia*)

So, having at any moment shed all worry about the past or the future, turn the mind with love and gratitude towards your Divine Self. There is no need to ask for anything because He is always present and knows all your innermost thoughts and needs. But He cannot make His presence felt unless you call on Him. Immediately you approach Him in your heart with faith born of experience, He will come to your aid with an answer to your problem and a supply of energy to carry it out.

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