

16 February 1976

### READING 3

One of the constantly recurring obstacles on the Fourth Way (in which Knowledge is always passed on by question and answer) is our mental inertia (Tamas) as shown by our extreme reluctance to give up what we thought we understood yesterday, in order to understand better today. Neither Mr. Ouspensky nor the Shankaracharya would speak at a meeting unless he was asked a question; he could then tell from the question just how much the questioner is capable of understanding at that moment and he would try only to answer within those limits. This must be remembered whenever one reads or quotes from the written records; one must always take the answer in relation to the question and the questioner at the given stage.

Reading 2 (which you have been considering over the last fortnight) was all about 'Self-remembering' which some of us thought we understood since we first met Mr. Ouspensky forty years ago; and which again we thought we understood fourteen years ago when we first heard the Shankaracharya use the same expression. Now, after further experience we see it as a practical method – to train the roving mind to keep to the way it works in moments of consciousness.

It is often useful to listen to the questions asked by people who have newly joined us and who have just heard the idea for the first time; and as these questions aroused some interest at last Tuesday's Meditation meeting, you might like to hear them again, together with the tentative answers given.

Dr. B. (a practising psychiatrist who spends all his working hours trying to help his patients to sort out their psychological tangles) asked at one of the new groups:

Why is the word 'remembering' used in the term 'Self-remembering'? What is one to 'remember' when one is looking for the real Self? Is it something we did once experience and have forgotten?

Ans. Yes, certainly, it is something we have experienced but keep forgetting. Moreover it belongs to man's nature; it is natural for man to remember himself; yet the ordinary man keeps departing so far from what is natural for him that it strikes him as a new and incomprehensible idea which Western Science and Philosophy have never discovered. It is ultimately a case of *mistaken identity*. A simile may make it clearer:

Suppose we own a car (the physical body); contemporary science (in all its branches) studies the *car* down to the smallest details. But they forget the Conscious Being (the Self) who owns the car, and they have no way of studying that owner by the methods of laboratory science, because this Conscious Being is unpredictable from the point of view of the engineer or the mechanic.

Though we welcome all relevant scientific knowledge, we in this Society study only the *nature of that conscious owner* through direct experience; and leave the car and its driver (who is only fitfully and relatively conscious) to the universities, technical colleges and psychiatric clinics who are far better equipped for the purpose than we are! There is thus no conflict – both approaches are essential.

So the first thing we have to train ourselves to *remember* is that we are not just the car, nor just the driver, but the Conscious owner upon whom everything depends, and who *never changes*. Not only scientists but also most of the exponents of any of the religions, depart from the founder of their religion by introducing the duality of an individual ‘God out there’ who is supposed to direct the car by remote control! Take Christianity: on every page of the Gospels, our Lord reminds his hearers of their unity with their Heavenly Father and his Son; but from the dualities introduced by lesser men comes all the duality of believers and unbelievers, so called ‘Religious’ wars, persecution of heretics, the Inquisition and in fact all the crimes committed under the pseudonym of Christianity. The same with Moslems, Hindus etc., etc. So we needn’t bother about all that! Each person’s religious belief is his own private love affair with his Creator.

\*

But to return to the subject of *remembering*. Much scientific experiment over the last two decades (and here Dr. B. will agree) has established that memory consists of three parts – ‘Feed-in’, ‘Storage’ and ‘Recall’; and that every creature with a brain is endowed with a *long-term* memory mechanism, and many kinds of *short-term* memory upon which all sensory modalities depend. In the case of *Homo sapiens* there lies buried in his long-term memory such essential truths as the fact that he is Spirit and Soul as well as body and mind; and that something of him persists from the time before this body was born, through even the deepest sleep or unconsciousness, and after the death of the body. All Plato’s teaching (for example) is based on that and on the fact that all knowledge is in reality ‘recall’ (anamnesis).

Self-remembering reinforces that long-term memory by feeding in reminders of this fact and recalling it at any given moment. Everyone knows that an idea held persistently in the mind during the day and last thing at night, will be the first to appear as one wakes up next morning.

Further conversations at that new group confirm this.

Q. When one is really asleep in bed, is it true that one is in a better state than in the waking state with turning thoughts?

Ans. Yes, but being asleep one knows nothing about it because that long-term area of the brain is in complete darkness. Our meditation is designed to let the light of consciousness into that dark area.

Dr. B. again produced a good observation which highlights that very question:

I feel I sometimes wake up with tremendous insight. I could write a play or a marvellous dialogue. I feel here is a fusion of emotions and intellect, and yet I never do anything about it. What is missing?

Ans. Merely *understanding* of the problem and *persistent effort* to feed in what you will later want to recall. Such an effort is surely well worthwhile since all artistic creation, great scientific discoveries and true religious ideas – as well as guidance in our lives emerge from this process we have been describing and take origin only in moments of complete stillness of mind and body (see Koestler’s *Act of Creation*).

In conclusion two amusing stories are relevant here:

1. It is said that 'an elephant never forgets'. Once, in Africa, a man took a thorn out of an elephant's foot; but they didn't meet again for some years until the man happened to be watching a circus (in Scotland!) at which an elephant was performing. With a glint of recollection in the elephant's little eye, he came forward, picked up his benefactor and lifted him out of the two-and-fourpennies into a five shilling seat!
2. Mr. Ouspensky was fond of giving those of us who travelled with him the task of 'remembering ourselves' at the Gare du Nord in Paris; 'because,' he said 'if you can remember yourself there, you can remember yourself anywhere!' One day his secretary, Ivanov, came to the station to see him off, and having handed over his tickets, passport and baggage checks, stood dithering. 'There was *something else* you told me to remember. What *was* it?' he asked.

\* \* \*

