

29 November 1976

READING 9

THE LADDER OF SEVEN STEPS (CONTD.)

People have asked to hear further about some of the main points in our discussion at last Monday's full meeting. Since 1962 when we first heard the description of this Ladder (given in Reading 8) our own views about it have undergone a radical change, partly as the result of increasing experience and partly because of the advances made in our knowledge of the human brain and nervous system. Gone are the days of 'cerebral localisation' where a special place had to be found in the brain for each separate faculty. The patterns of nervous activity have proved to be so complicated and so interconnected that the whole brain is (directly or indirectly) involved in every major function.

Our discussion started as follows:

R. Those seven steps are, we have said, already in existence as part of human nature; the whole mechanism is there within us.

Q. Is there an organ in each individual for each step?

R. Each step requires a change in the function of the whole of one's nervous system. It is the whole person who is going up the Ladder, and not little bits of him.

Q. Each step is a separate development for each individual and also of the whole nervous system?

R. Yes; though the general pattern and order of development has to be the same for all, the details vary with each individual.

The seven steps were then outlined in a way designed to show that each step involves a change in the whole person. Two steps bring him out of the ignorance of supposing that the physical world of the body and its sense organs is the only world. Having started to practise (under careful direction) some valid discipline, a new world – the world of personal psychology – opens before him. But this is a dream world – a maze – and two further steps are needed to take him through the maze and introduce him to the third or Causal world. He suddenly 'wakes up'.

A good example of a glimpse of that fifth step was given by Dr. Dale Beckett at a small meeting last week:

'I could never,' he is quoted as saying, 'know what to do (in an emotional situation). If I had remembered I do think I would have done it; because the one thing I do remember very strongly happened, I think last February. I was walking along the corridor in the hospital, and suddenly realised that *I knew who I was*. I am so confident now that I know myself – I am Me – that nothing matters now very much beside this certainty. I am sure that was a straightforward outcome of the Meditation.'

This was a very valuable example for several reasons, the chief of which is that a glimpse of the fifth step feels like a 'moment of consciousness' which, as Mr. Ouspensky used to say 'brings with it very vivid memory' – in his case a confirmation that he had lived before.

Why do I say with certainty that the steps of the Ladder are already in existence within us? Partly because a large number of people have experienced this awakening during initiation – in the

first minutes of Meditation without any previous knowledge or discipline. We have been told that the initiation ceremony was designed to reach the Causal level in any individual who comes to it with an open mind. Of course they may not get it again for some time, and may only get it later after varying intervals of time; but once it has happened it will never be completely lost, for it gives rise to something like Ben Jonson's:

The Thirst that from the Soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine.

The Causal level consists of our latent possibilities integrated into a single unity, and again it involves the brain as a whole, and is experienced by the whole person. Two steps, the fifth and the sixth, take one to this point where one would be ready for the final realization which again requires a conscious impulse or shock from another person. The fifth step – called 'Insight' – gives us those 'intimations of immortality' where one sees oneself, sees the people one knows and one's immediate environment as they really are. These experiences express themselves as 'self-evident truths' the existence of which we previously suspected but never proved.

Monday's discussion continued rather like this:

R. Each pair of steps relates to our dual nature: The first, third and fifth come through changes in the quiet hemisphere within, whereas by the second, fourth and sixth the outgoing or dominant one is brought into line and manifests it in our lives. Someone at a meeting lately said 'we are like a twin-engined jet and the engines have to be synchronised.' Of course we have to traverse the steps again and again, always beginning with the first one – the good impulse.

Q. When you say it is all there already, I would very much like to know what you mean?

R. Yes that's the hardest thing to understand and to express to someone else. The Shankaracharya has tried for fourteen years to get us to see it! A good way is to see it all as a drama – say *Hamlet*; the play is already in existence with all the characters written in. The actors that the management engages for a particular production have to learn their parts and be rehearsed again and again. Perhaps each of us has a role to play in our tiny section of historical time; we also need plenty of rehearsals.

Q. Did you also mean that the line (of 'Now') is always there, but that our bodies make limitations on that line?

R. The chief limitations are made by the *mind* of the Jiva (or person) which is always drifting off onto some circle instead of paying attention to direct impulses being received *Now*. If the mind is trained not to do that the body can be brought into line.

Q. Now when problems arise in ordinary life I find I approach them in a different way and I think this must be connected with practising the teaching about the first two steps. One astonishes oneself.

R. Yes – very surprising. When we used to complain to Mr. Ouspensky that we were showing little change, he would say: 'Just think how different your life would have been if you'd never met the Teaching.'

- Q. Does this line show the impossibility of changing the drama of one's life which has already been written?
- R. True, but we are engaged in making new films on location here, so we have choice. It is when we revert suddenly to that old film that we surprise ourselves and our friends!
- Q. Hasn't it been said that guidance is always available (without physical proximity) on higher levels?
- R. Quite true, but we have to ask for it. We are told that the telephone exchange is always here, but to get the connection you have to dial the number.
- Q. From what you say this Ladder must have been in existence since the beginning of the world whatever names may have been given to it from time to time?
- R. Well, say from the beginning of human existence. Man, by definition a self-creative being unlike all sub-human species, must have been created with this Ladder potentially within him.
- Q. You say that a shock has to be given between steps six and seven. How does that affect the Real 'I'?
- R. Of course Stebbing, I know no more than you about that at first hand, but we are told by the man who *does* know, that then there is general rejoicing all round!

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Here are some words of his to keep in mind in relation to this subject:

Although individuals feel a separate identity, in reality there is only one unity, one identity, and that is the Param-Atman. In our Antahkarana (the Causal body) and in the Subtle body we have this sense of separate being and, due to ignorance and other influences, the Jiva (the 'person') seems to feel *different* from the Param-Atman and so longs for union.

The individual, if he does anything at all, only needs to remove the impediments that block his vision – which depend on preoccupation with his name, his form and his sense of separateness or difference. In fact the motivation comes only from the Param-Atman's side; it is the Param-Atman Himself who reaches out to the individual.

(Record, 3 October 1972)

(He then told the story of the lion cub who strayed into a flock of sheep and behaved like them until shown that it was really a lion.)

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