

4 May 1978

FOR NEW GROUPS

ASCENSION DAY

In response to Reading 1 there were some really good questions which were all connected directly or indirectly with the subject of ATTENTION. For these to get adequate answers, we need to know more of the different possibilities of Attention on the physical, subtle and Causal levels.

Our physical lives are lived in clock and calendar time which, though convenient, is arbitrary and bears no relation (as Martin Redfern and Joe Skeaping pointed out) to the psychological time of the Subtle level, sometimes called 'Subjective Time'. In sleep there is no attention and in the daytime it is limited and changeable with us. This kind of Attention is usually called 'Voluntary Attention' and we may keep the name if we remember how little of the vast possibilities of the human nervous system can be controlled by such 'will' as we naturally possess – just a small part of the outward-looking hemisphere. Every schoolboy knows that to learn and retain in memory any knowledge or skill, a certain capacity to control attention must be acquired. Every L-driver who passes the driving test also knows the relief experienced when a new kind of control and a new kind of attention take over. It is this kind of attention, I think, to which Belinda Shattock referred when she asked: 'Does this explain the great allure of crafts and trades which demand attention?'

But scientific work and *Creative Art* bring in a new dimension of Attention involving some innate control of what is known as the 'Autonomic System' as well. This system which is responsible for the maintenance of stability within the organism in spite of a changing environment, is not under our direct or 'voluntary control'. Though it ordinarily works far below its full speed, it is too fast and can only be controlled from within at the Causal level. When working nearer its full speed under the influence of strong emotion, it can, in the trained artist, be all that we call 'genius'.

To take just one example – the writing of poetry – the late Sir Maurice Bowra wrote (in *Inspiration and Poetry*, MacMillan 1955, p.12): 'In these rapturous moments inspiration and the critical faculty may seem an oddly assorted pair, but it is a remarkable fact that the greatest poets have been able to combine the two' (that is, make the two sides of the brain keep pace and work in harmony). Some poets like Pushkin (or W. B. Yeats) had to do all this correcting on paper, but on Ben Jonson's testimony: 'Shakespeare never blotted out a line'. Apparently his mind, 'working in an inspired rush of energy, could maintain an astonishing level of performance, doing "naturally and easily" what most poets do by hard and halting effort'. You can find plenty of examples too among great painters and sculptors and musical composers whether (like Mozart and Cezanne) or not they have left accounts of their methods.

But there is another level of attention beyond the subtle level to which we might give the name '*Spiritual Attention*' about which we can only learn from the examples and descriptions of fully Realized men. This is what our friend the Shankaracharya said about it at an audience in 1974 when he was describing the relation of Attention to *Stillness*:

Since the Causal level cannot be described, one learns about it from its effects, and one can see it in the activities and dispositions of such men who provide themselves with Spiritual Stillness. There are three prominent features:

Firstly all their actions will be initiated with love and then held and nourished with love until they come to fulfilment. All relationships with individuals, direct or indirect, will be lighted and guided only by loving affection.

Secondly, their ideas, intentions and motives will be pure and simple. [That is, performed by the unchanging 'Essence' instead of the changeable 'personality'.] Purity and simplicity widen the horizon, and they think and work for the whole of humanity and only through the Natural Laws of the Absolute. Divisions into groups, nations, races or colour disappear as well as many man-made fashions and divisions. Their thoughts naturally encompass the whole of the human family, and its intrinsic goodness.

Thirdly, the physical movements of such people are geared only to the natural rhythms, and the result is simplicity and economy of movement. They never rush into any situation; are never agitated; and perform all actions in an efficient, sublime and graceful way. Whatever they do will emerge from stillness, be held in stillness, and again submerge in the same stillness which they experience in this great total immobility.

This should establish an ideal or a standard for the common man to aspire to, if he somehow awakes to the need to improve his lot.

(Record, 9 November 1973)

ATTENTION IN MEDITATION

Our Meditation was designed to take anyone from the physical through the subtle to the Casual level where the peace and stillness reign supreme. It is chiefly at the beginning of a half hour that 'voluntary attention' is required, for as one goes deeper, the Self or Atman takes over.

The 15th century neo-Platonist author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, in describing his own method of meditation, points out the importance of Stillness, remarking that ordinary people 'can neither sit still, stand still nor lie still, unless they be either wagging with their feet or doing somewhat with their hands'. We've no idea all this is going on throughout our daytime state of fluctuating and very partial attention, until we try to sit still with our eyes shut and nothing to wag!

But that author offers the following consolation which has a bearing on the questions you are now asking:

This work asketh no long time... for it is the shortest work of all that man may imagine. It is never longer nor shorter than is an atom: the which atom, by the definition of true philosophers in the Sciences, is the least part of *Time*, so little that it is indivisible and nearly incomprehensible. This is that 'time' of which it is written: 'All that time that is given to thee, it shall be asked of thee how thou hast spent it (see *Life After Life*); for it is neither longer nor shorter than one single stirring that is within the principal working might of Thy Soul, which is thy will. For even so many willings or desirings are in one hour as there are atoms in one hour... And if thou wert reformed by Grace... then thou shouldest evermore by help of that Grace be lord of those stirrings.'

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GUYATTS ONLY – perhaps after a little meditation

The Guyatts might care to read the questions last Thursday on ‘Time and Consciousness’ and on ‘Attention’ to show them how ‘on target’ they were!

My only comment would be in reply to Victor Melleney (at his very first Meeting): ‘Is attention allied to Consciousness?’ Consciousness is the goal and attention is the way to reach it.

And ‘Is Self-remembering to do with personality?’ Self-remembering can be achieved whenever the personality (dominant hemisphere) is quiet and off-stage.

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