

23 January 1978

READING 2

THE THIRD STATE OF CONSCIOUSNESS ESTABLISHED THROUGH ATTENTION

PART 1. Descriptions of the Third State

In Reading 1 we mentioned the perpetual repetition of the cycle of two states of consciousness – sleep at night, ‘relative sleep’ by day – sometimes relieved by glimpses of a third state, when we feel we have suddenly awakened from the monotonous ‘sleep’ in which we have been living since we last ‘woke up’.

There are a number of authentic descriptions of this third state apart from those belonging to the Tradition of our Meditation back into pre-history, and to our fragmentary Western System which was studied by P. D. Ouspensky at the beginning of 1915. We would like to give you two of these (the writings of Mevlana, founder of the Mevlevi order, would form a third) in order to increase our desire to awake.

The first comes from a Pali text called the *Dhammapada* attributed to the Buddha Gautama who is considered to have lived from 563–483 BC:

(2nd) Canto of Wakefulness

21. Wakefulness is the way to immortality; heedlessness is the way to death; those who are wakeful die not, the heedless are already dead.

24. Continually increasing is the glory of him who is wakeful, who has aroused himself to vigilance, who performs blameless deeds, and acts with becoming consideration by means of self-restraint.

25. Let such a one, moving towards wakefulness through self-conquest, make for himself an island which no flood can engulf.

The second is to be found (a whole millennium later) in a collection of early Christian writings called the *Philokalia* which seems to have been put together during the 6th Century AD and this quotation is contained in an address given by St. Hesychius. His subject was called by a Greek word (‘Neepsis’) which can be translated as ‘wariness’ or ‘wakefulness’ or ‘attentiveness’:

Wakefulness is a spiritual method which, with the help of God, releases man completely from passionate thoughts and words and from evil deeds. It becomes continuous if practised diligently... Attention is a heart-felt rest from all thoughts... It is the steadfast fixing and stationing of thought in the door of the heart. It subtly sees and hears the thoughts that come to destroy the mind by fantasy. All these ways (he has described) keep off destructive thoughts as a doorkeeper keeps intruders away.

Our friend the Shankaracharya speaking for his ‘non-dualistic’ Tradition, says: ‘This body (physical, mental and Causal) is the vehicle and the Self is the driver; treat the vehicle as different from the driver’ and, ‘the states of consciousness which we experience arise from the influx of three aspects of energy derived from people, places and events. These all come and go, but the Observer who sees it all as a passing show, remains always the same.’

(Pause and perhaps a few minutes of Meditation)

COMMENT

All these statements from such varied times and places, can serve as directional guides to us in our researches; and all are connected together by a Universal Symbol which has been known to a few people from time immemorial. It can be described as a blueprint or 'master-plan' of the Laws of Nature as seen in any human individual, and in the great world around.

Some of you will be content with the practice of Meditation accompanied by readings from inspired sources (including the *Mathnawi* and other writings of the founder of the Mevlevi Order) and practical work in a group. Others will demand more precise knowledge; but I must warn them that all theories invented before the 1960's are now out of date. The new science of neurophysiology which has arisen during the last two decades studies human beings and no longer depends upon experiments on animals for which neither the higher states of consciousness nor the practice of attention can exist; though this branch of science is still only in its infancy.

So if we want to use Ouspensky's System with its greater precision, we must take an entirely new look at it.

PART 2

The older Western psychologies based on 'phrenology' or bumps on the head, or on cerebral localisation and the definition of brain centres for each faculty, have given place to new facts elicited by electronic techniques. In particular, the modern electronic computer includes a store in which both the data and the programme of instructions are held; together with facilities for input, output and information retrieval ('memory') so that it is self-governing and can, for example, perform a million additions of ten-digit numbers in one second. But of course, being a mere machine, it cannot 'think' for itself and is entirely dependent on the data fed into it by its designer and programmers according to the particular field of enquiry.

As was said in Reading 1 'in almost any discovery that man makes he finds that Nature has already done better' and the human nervous system contains an infinitely more complex and efficient set of computers than any invented by man. It is so complete, in fact, that we have to study it by taking our chief functional units like thinking, feeling, speech, body regulation, movement or reproduction *one at a time*. If we do that we find that they all work according to a general plan. Re-stating Ouspensky's description, each circuit consists of three parts determined by its relation to attention – a mechanical part; a voluntary part; and a higher part that works only in higher states of consciousness with attention aroused and directed upon its object to the exclusion of everything irrelevant.

Those who wish to pursue this subject can tell their group-takers and we can give them a plan on which to base our future researches.

But, meanwhile, everyone should practise attention to what they are doing at any given moment and discard all dreaming about the past or the future. When not required to do anything else, e.g. in Meditation, we should cultivate one-pointed attention by rejecting any activity of those mechanical parts – such as turning thoughts, conflicting desires and involuntary movements. This will provide the much needed energy and leave the field clear for Designer and programmer to proceed to more creative work.

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