

1 October 1979

## READING 2

For those who prefer Western language in this approach to consciousness through daily practice, the following simple description can be used alongside Reading 1.

### PART 1

Hughlings Jackson who is still regarded by many as the 'father of modern neurology' used these words about a hundred years ago: 'There is no such entity as consciousness – in health we are from moment to moment differently conscious'. This must still define the limits of the 'scientific' approach by all those people who reject any of the well-tried methods of experiencing its more universal and durable states. They are only *thinking* about consciousness, and consciousness cannot be achieved by thinking – only by experiencing it.

This statement is supported by the fact that little progress has been made in understanding it since Jackson, in spite of all the technological discoveries of neuroanatomy and neurophysiology (particularly during the last thirty years). So people remain at the stage expressed around 1950 by a leading neuropsychologist in a broadcast talk (Slater in *Physical Basis of Mind*, Blackwell p.36):

The aspects of the mind I want to consider are consciousness and emotion. Many people think of consciousness as something that is either present or not... But consciousness is to be measured in degrees; and while we only notice the really big changes as from sleeping to waking, our attention is not caught by the minor fluctuations that are going on all the time... consciousness can only be experienced by the person, but we have very little idea of how conscious we are. When we are asleep, we do not know we sleep; and when we are only half-awake we are only dimly aware that all is not as it should be...

For technology, electrical tracings from the surface of the head of some *other* person constitute the only valid direct evidence of brain activities apart from electrodes planted in the brains of animals in the entirely artificial conditions of the laboratory. How could any of that show anything more than that there are three normal states through which every person passes every twenty-four hours – namely dreamless sleep, dreaming and daytime alertness? They can also demonstrate abnormal states as in head injury or disease, drug-induced states, and the complete 'electrical silence' which is now the most reliable evidence of physical death.

They reveal nothing of the *content* of individual experience, nothing of those smaller fluctuations, and nothing of the two higher states (Self-consciousness and objective consciousness of which there are many reliable descriptions). Some of our meditators proved this in the 1960's with the help of our neurologist (P.F.) and his technician. On one occasion I arranged with the technician to signal with my hand if any unusual experience occurred; but when I had the luck to go into Samadhi for a few minutes, nothing whatever appeared on the tracings except occasional bursts of resting (or 'Alpha') rhythm amid long spells of 'electrical silence'. So let there be no doubt among us that the study of consciousness is so far quite outside the range of laboratory science; only an individual can know, and then only about himself at some unforeseeable moment. Nothing can be planned and nothing should be inferred about other beings whether humans or animals. Yet since the dawn of history people have been searching for another kind of evidence.

## PART 2

In the 1930's, some of us attended a course of lectures in London by P. D. Ouspensky on what, at that time, he called: 'Psychology as the Study of Objective Consciousness'. In the course of those he maintained (among much else that was new to us) that Consciousness exists independently of physical or mental functions. This refuted the scientific dogma (still current) that 'consciousness is a state of awareness, and so is absolutely dependent on the information our senses provide about ourselves and about the outside world'. His view is now being confirmed by the testimony of several hundred ordinary, unprejudiced people who have been resuscitated by modern methods after being diagnosed as 'dead'. These show remarkable agreement that their habitual daytime and dream states go on when the body is reduced to inert flesh, and the brain and physical sense organs along with it. We must now, surely, accept much of this evidence; for it would be most 'unscientific' to reject it merely because we have no 'scientific' theory to account for it.

At the first of those lectures Mr. Ouspensky raised this question mentioning that glimpses of other states of consciousness sometimes appeared – the very question to which an answer was brought back in the recording of two recent audiences by our party in India:

Is it possible to acquire command over those fleeting moments of Consciousness, to evoke them more often, and to keep them longer, or even make them permanent? This is the most important point, and it must be understood at the very beginning of our study that this point has been entirely missed by all modern psychological schools (in the West!). For with the right methods and the right efforts man can acquire control of consciousness, and can become fully Conscious of himself, with all that this implies.

And he ends his lectures with this:

Very soon you will realise that all your work upon yourself is connected with Self-remembering... And Self-remembering is a *partial awakening*, or the beginning of awakening. Naturally – and this must be very clear – no work *can be done in sleep*.

\* \* \*