

25 February 1980

READING 4

'TRANSFORMATION OF MAN'

PART 1

We've been lucky to turn up an early draft of the first of the 'Psychological Lectures' that Mr. Ouspensky gave in London in the 1930's, to which we were encouraged to bring all the friends we could find. When seen in the light of what we know now (over forty years later) they seem to foresee the totally altered outlook of today. That lecture began with the surprising statement that:

Psychology is not a new science, but perhaps the oldest science and, unfortunately, a forgotten science, which until modern times has never existed under its own name. For people have always been suspicious of psychology which has had to use different disguises ... All systems of psychology, both those which are carried on openly, and those which are hidden, can be divided into two chief classes: First those which study man as they find him or as they suppose him to be; and second those which study man not from the point of view of what he is, but of what he may become. The fundamental idea in teachings of the second kind is that Nature develops man only to a certain degree and then leaves him to develop further by his own efforts or to live and die (an incomplete being) as he is. This is the idea of the 'Transformation of Man' and the present state of mankind is regarded as a phase in this transformation. It is really and literally true that *man is a grain or seed*; this was the great secret of many ancient mysteries.[†]

Psychology is a science studying *transformation of man*. Many questions naturally arise from these statements. 'What does it mean that man can become a *different being*? Why can only a few men become different beings? Why all this injustice?' I will try to answer these questions and I will begin with the last. The answer is very simple: *Because they do not want it*. The fact is that, in order to become a different being, man must want it very much. The transformation of man can only be voluntary... so there is no injustice. If people were forced to become different beings then *this* would be injustice.

(Pause for Meditation and perhaps silent contemplation of this idea)

We can see how much the climate of public opinion in this country has changed and is changing today. At the time he gave those lectures, science and education were perfectly content with the Darwinian theory of evolution (which is still the best description on the big scale of the Biosphere). But it needed another World War, and all the chaos of society and economics of today's materialistic world, to show the inadequacy of that explanation when applied to the lives of individual people. It contained a serious contradiction. One of its main corner-stones was that acquired characteristics are not inherited so any change in man's being (or in other species) had to come about through chance mutation and the slow process of 'natural selection and the survival of the fittest'.

[†]**Note.** In particular those at Eleusis which dated from the pre-Greek (Mycenaean) civilization about 1500 BC and continued for about 2000 years until they disappeared in Byzantine times. 'The culmination of the mystic initiation, we are told, was the display of the *ear of corn harvested in silence*, a special act for those who were to be admitted to the fullest degree of the mysteries in the year following their first initiation.' (From the guide to the excavations, by their Director, 1930)

It is no surprise therefore that it is the biologists who are spearheading the present nation-wide enquiry on the media into the evidence for some other explanation; and special units have been set up at two universities (Oxford and Nottingham) to deal with the mass of evidence in response to questions about those individual experiences which cannot be explained in the ordinary way.

PART 2

And now we come to a further prophetic note sounded in that first lecture of Mr. Ouspensky's. There have never, before this time, been quite so many independent teachers who claim to have supernatural knowledge or powers and who try to collect adherents and money by such impossible promises as have brought the whole idea of special knowledge and methods into disrepute among ordinary thinking people.

By the way of inner growth (continues Mr. Ouspensky) man acquires many powers, faculties and properties which he *does not possess but which he ascribes to himself, i.e. he thinks he possesses them.* This is the most important point. By the way of transformation man can acquire qualities which he thinks he already possesses, and he must acquire those before he can acquire any new and unusual powers. *Man does not know himself.* He does not realize his own possibilities and his present limitations. He does not even realize to how great an extent he does not know himself.

Mention is then made of the illusion that we already possess unity, consciousness, and *will* which would include the power of independent movement. With us 'everything happens; like puppets, someone else is pulling the strings'.

The Advaita (non-dualistic tradition based on Meditation that we are being taught) says that 'all creation is *one* and that the individual is not separate from the creator' and it teaches us how to achieve this realization, while living an ordinary happy and productive life in the world. Man can become a different being by giving up all such illusions, as in the following personal instruction received (January 1974).

Giving up can be done emotionally and intellectually at all times and in all conditions. Practise 'giving up' all the time, by considering the body, the mind and the heart as belonging to the Param-Atman (universal 'Self') and so offering all these back to him. The same thing is said in the first verse of the earliest Upanishad (the Isha Vasya):

Whatever lives is full of the Lord. Claim nothing. Enjoy, do not covet His property, and in the words of Krishna in the Gita: 'Whoever sees the world in Me, and sees Me in the world, he alone knows Me, and he alone will transcend and be relieved of the turmoil of this physical creation. He will enjoy bliss and he will have everlasting life.'

Need there be any conflict between such an aim and living an ordinary life? A practical illustration was given recently! All people naturally inherit the power to walk on the land. It is not necessary to be able to swim in the water; but by effort and practice anyone can learn to swim as well. Leading an ordinary life is like walking and preparing for the next life is like learning to swim.

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POSTSCRIPT. The name given to our Society at Colet – ‘The Society for the Study of “Normal” Psychology’ was chosen because ‘a “normal” seed is one which is capable of developing into a plant and producing flowers and fruit.’ It would seem that the more extended purpose for which Mr. Ouspensky founded a School at this house just before World War II, is still before us. We are to be ready for the people who may be approaching us as a result of all this enquiry; and we must remember not to make grandiose claims for ourselves, but only to encourage the enquiring minds we meet and try to lead them toward what they are searching for. ‘One cannot teach anybody to swim until one can swim oneself’, is Rule No. 1 for would-be swimming instructors!

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