

29 June 1981

READING 5

People have asked to hear again something from last Monday's Large Meeting, so here goes:

Dr. R. I think it is true that, under the painful conditions of today's life, people are turning more and more towards the idea that somehow something is missing in human life which ought to be there; and the Shankaracharya says that until more and more people really get this idea and put it into practice, things will continue to get worse. And we may have a distance to go yet, which is what Professor Schaefer said.

I wanted Lady Allan to read a passage containing one of the first stories I ever heard the Shankaracharya tell in public at an Ashram to which he was invited by the Maharishi, and which was retold (in 1972) with a rather illuminating lead-up.

Lady A. The Shankaracharya said:

If one could keep to this state of a silent, impartial observer, staying in the present, and acting as the occasion demands, things pass. Wise men once discussed this question of deriving Ananda or Joy out of all the multifarious aspects of the world. And the discussion led to the conclusion that one shouldn't entangle oneself with either side, physical or subtle, but should simply observe; because the Absolute is in everything and this creation is a most efficient mechanical organism which is functioning by the wish of the Absolute, so that one should always see the Absolute behind all those passing phases. Now one of the listeners at this discussion went away and on the road he saw an elephant coming along. He remembered that the Absolute was in everything so he thought, 'The Absolute is in the elephant so surely it won't harm me.' The man on the elephant's back kept shouting at him to get out of the way. But the man on the road took no notice and the elephant took him up and threw him on one side. He went back to the wise men to say he had been misinformed. He thought the elephant was the Absolute and he himself was the Absolute, and the Absolute would not harm the Absolute in any way; but He did! Then he was told, 'You didn't realise that the driver was also the Absolute, and because you didn't obey the Absolute when he shouted to you, you were punished. You in fact selected one of the two. Do not select. Do not show prejudice. Do not make impertinent preferences. Then everything will be clear and one will easily find one's way without hindrance.'

(Record, 3 October 1972)

Dr. R. The point of this story passed me by until just the other day. It is that the man who came away from this conference with the three words which contain everything – 'God is everywhere' – disobeyed the mahout on the elephant's back who told him to *get out of the way*, and this is our trouble because we don't get ourselves, our personal point of view, 'out of the way'. Before quoting God or speaking for God, one must entirely get one's own personal slant out of it. So what we have to say to ourselves here is 'Get out of the way!' and that's why the rules of this Society are made to help each person get themselves out of the way. And then this can be a united body of people, as you (Guyatt) said last Monday,

because it is only the individual personality that could make a Society fall apart. Now, is all that clear? Let's follow that up, because it's fairly easy to recognise in somebody else, to see somebody else's personality getting in the way, and you quarrel with them at once, of course! (laughter) But can one see one's own personality getting in the way? (pause) All right, we'll have an amnesty and you can speak freely. (laughter)

Mrs. Gould. Is this what's meant by giving up?

Dr. R. Yes, this is really the crux of what we have to give up. We don't have to give up sugar in Lent or anything like that. We have to give up our personal view of things and put in its place something objective and real which can be the silent impartial observer of what goes on within you and of what goes on in the world outside, thereby uniting the two halves of the mind; the silent impartial observer being, what's called in that other story, the Overseer.

S. Harbord. Really connecting with what you were saying before this, Dr. Roles, but also connected with giving up, I heard a Methodist minister on the Overseas Service on Sunday quoting Brother Lawrence's little book, which I'm sure you know and which is all about giving up, and I thought it was rather interesting to hear that from a Methodist.

Dr. R. Very good, if Simon Harbord from the moment of hearing that would emulate Brother Lawrence and begin seriously to give up Simon Harbord, then it would be really useful and worth mentioning. (laughter)

Tony Anholt, it is really what the actor has to do, hasn't he, to be true to the part he is enacting? (Very much so, yes) One has to realise that this whole life is a drama and that one is learning to play one's role, and the whole idea of the Absolute as a Being above description or definition who made the laws which govern nature; and nature as the manifestation of those laws, and we all play a part in the drama of nature one way or another. If only we can play it in this way, getting rid of one's own personal preference! Is there anything you want to say about that?

T.A. Following your analogy of the actor, since we are all different, one presumes that the Absolute would be manifested slightly differently through each of us.

Dr. R. Yes, certainly! In fact, it seems clear that the Absolute plans for great variety of manifestation. Nature is lavish – rhododendron blossoms, roses, every possible variation; and in human beings this is so also, and one doesn't make impertinent preferences. One accepts the whole thing as part of the big drama, then just enjoys whatever one can.

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