

## From Attention to Self-remembering

We have all, at some time in our lives, learned to pay attention. When we were at school and college we had to pay attention to the subjects being taught. When we are earning a living, we have to pay attention to the job in hand. Even after we retire from work, we find there are some things that require our attention. But whether working or retired, we will perhaps admit that for most of the day our attention is scattered all over the place. So with that in mind, we should not find it difficult to relate our experience to Mr Ouspensky's explanation of the connection between the parts of centres and attention:

This [attention] is the chief criterion in studying parts of centres. If we take them from the point of view of *attention* we shall know at once in which part of centres we are. Without attention or with attention wandering, we are in the mechanical part; with the attention attracted by the subject of observation or reflection and kept there, we are in the emotional part; with the attention controlled and held on the subject by will, we are in the intellectual part.

[*The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*, first edition; lecture 6]

All the various paths to Self-realization emphasise the importance of attention. This is the Shankaracharya's description:

The ordinary man has no attention – floating attention – one moment here, next moment there. Neither here nor there. Their attention is always diverted from one point to another, which gives them no result! Without attention, he says, nothing can be done. This is a very, very important factor in the life of any aspirant or disciple. [HH Record 15 October 1962]

The kind of attention described above, familiar to everyone, is often called 'one-pointed attention'. It is a pre-requisite for following the Fourth Way as without it the teaching would get lost in a mass of scattered thoughts and ideas, self-observation would become ineffective, and the deep, focused enquiry that is needed would be impossible. The Shankaracharya gave this advice for those who find one-pointed attention difficult:

Those who can attend to the outward world can also attend within. Those who can't manage to give attention to the physical work would not be able to give their attention to meditation. To give attention to physical work one must find a work which does interest him so that there is no opposition. So those who find it difficult to attend inwardly should first of all practise their attention in the work they do for their living or hobby. [HH Record 3 November 1967]

But this is just the starting-point. There is another kind of attention that needs to form the primary basis for our practice – variously known as passive attention, State of Attention, allocentric attention, non-specific attention, or 'the sinking back of attention into itself'. It is this type of attention that is required for Self-remembering.

Following early discussions with Gurdjieff, Mr Ouspensky described it as directing attention both inwards and outwards at the same time, and illustrated this with a diagram showing a double-headed arrow. However, he later realised that this wasn't right and that it didn't work in practice. It was left to Dr Roles to find the answer. His account of how he resolved the puzzle many years later is given in an article in Contact 61, *The Misunderstanding about Self-remembering*. An extract from this is attached as an Annex to this paper (mainly for those who have studied Mr Ouspensky's writings). Dr Roles realised that 'to direct attention on oneself without weakening the attention directed on something else is impossible'. He concluded that Self-remembering requires us first to go 'inwards' to Real I. The method he used for this was mantra meditation. In addition to two half-hours of

meditation each day, he used the same technique to reach a point of stillness in periods between activities during the rest of the day. Here is the advice he gave in answer to a question on Self-remembering:

*Q: This is a question about loss of direction: What is the right effort involved in remembering what one has forgotten?*

Dr. R. I think it is to be silent for a moment. In that silence one collects oneSelf—one comes to oneSelf. It seems to be the one effort that works, for a sense of direction comes from within. Then go into action with attention. One aspect of this is to give up all problems, all thinking, all mental activity and do what you have to do as if you were under orders—simply stepping out when you are walking, unlocking a door with attention, nothing else going on at all. That is so very refreshing; one is just a servant of the Param-Atman (Real I), or an actor playing one's own role. [FCR 1977/15]

As an alternative or in addition to mantra meditation, the method we have recently been using for 'coming to oneSelf' (using the question 'Am I aware?') is a Direct Path method based on the Indian concept of 'natural Samadhi' – the naturally-occurring gap between two thoughts or desires in which Real I is all there is. Rupert Spira describes it as 'attention sinking back into itself' – a relaxation of attention:

The question 'Am I aware?' is a thought. The answer 'Yes' is another thought. In between those two thoughts something takes place. Awareness stops directing its attention towards a thought and instead directs its attention towards itself. In other words, instead of being aware of a thought, it becomes aware of itself. And as a result of that being aware of itself, it rises in the form of the thought 'yes'. ...

The natural state of awareness is to be aware of itself. It is aware of itself simply by *being* itself, because it is *made* of itself. In order to know something other than itself, awareness must rise in the form of attention. [from yoga meditation 13/6/2014: *Sinking the mind into the heart*]

If we allow our attention to sink back into itself and then just effortlessly sink a little deeper we come into a state of meditation in which we are 'abiding knowingly as the presence of awareness', Real I. Rupert has advised us to spend as much time there as we can – Self-realization is when we are 'living there' all the time.

In a webinar earlier this year I asked Rupert how we can 'abide knowingly as the presence of awareness' and yet still do all the things that we normally do. I gave two practical examples, the first of answering the door to someone and the second of practising the piano, both of which require outward-facing attention towards an 'object':

**Rupert:** So when your attention is required by either of these two types of circumstance, just give your full attention to the object, whether it is the practical circumstance or the creative work. And then be sure that when those two requirements come to an end, your attention doesn't manufacture a kind of 'filler' object with which to keep itself busy until it is required by the world again. In other words, you let your attention be drawn out to the object for as long as the object requires your attention. As soon as your attention is no longer required, let it sink back to its source and rest there until it is called out again. To begin with there is this feeling of back and forth or in and out. The attention is stretched away from ourSelf towards the object and then it sinks back. And it goes out and back. ...

Now at a certain stage, with this back and forth going on, at a certain stage you realise 'my attention *never* leaves its source'. ... Our attention never really leaves awareness in order to come in contact with the object. Our attention is always at home. In other words, the attention we give to objects is always saturated in awareness, saturated with the peace of awareness. When our attention goes out towards an object, that peace seems to be in the background of our attention. It seems to be peace in the background of our experience. And then when our attention is not required by the object, the peace seems to be more in the foreground. But the giving of our attention to the object has less and less power to eclipse the peace of awareness. So we find that even when our attention is being given to the object, our attention is still pervaded by the peace of awareness. And this is something that just comes naturally as a result of allowing the attention to return to its source when it is no longer required by the world.

**Q:** *OK. So how does one stop it getting taken over by other things, when it's not really required by the world any longer?*

**Rupert:** Yes. When it's *not* required by the world, in other words, when our attention is manufacturing an object to busy itself with, *that* is the pure ego. Because at that moment our attention is reluctant to flow back to its source and dissolve in pure awareness, pure consciousness. And it's manufacturing an object to keep busy with, in order to perpetuate itself. So in those times, when your attention is directed towards objects, when it's not *required* to be directed towards an object and yet you still find yourself busy with objects, then that is the time to ask yourself: 'On whose behalf is my attention busy with objects? Who is it serving?' Go back to your two previous examples. In the first example it is serving a practical situation in the world. In the second example it is serving your love of music. So in those two cases it is serving two good reasons. When you find yourself attending to objects for no reason, then is the time to ask the question: 'On whose behalf is my attention wandering around in time and space?' And you will always find it is on behalf of a temporary, finite self that you go. So that is the time to explore the nature of this self on whose behalf our attention is wandering around in time and space.

## Contemplation

*Attention is Awareness plus an object. Relieved of its focus on an object, attention flows back to its source and knows itself as pure Awareness.*

## Annex: *The Misunderstanding about Self-remembering*

*The following is an extract from a paper written by Dr Francis Roles in 1960 (ref FCR 1960/49):*

Quite early on Mr. O. began to think on correct and independent lines. In the very same passage in 'Fragments' (p.118) before the mistake occurs he writes:

I decided to draw no conclusions whatever, but to try to remember myself ...

The very first attempts showed me how difficult it was. Attempts at Self-remembering failed to give any results except to show me that in actual fact we never remember ourselves. ... The first impression was that attempts to remember myself or to be conscious of myself, to say to myself *I am walking, I am doing, and continually to feel this I, stopped thought. When I was feeling I, I could neither think nor speak; even sensations became dimmed.*

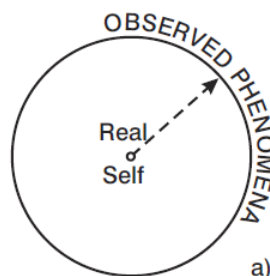
About 1935, when I first began to sit with him alone he would often say: 'Something is missing in the System. Either G. didn't know or he forgot. We are told that everything depends on remembering ourselves and next minute we are told, "You can't remember yourself". If man is meant to remember himself there must have been some simple natural method. But it's been lost. I could never find it. Once in India, I heard an echo of such a method.' And he told it me. 'Try it if you like', he said, 'but I can't teach it because it's not the real thing – it's only second hand. Perhaps you have to find the real thing.' ...

*(The paper goes on to describe Dr Roles's meeting with the Maharishi and gives an account of his and his colleagues' experience with mantra meditation. Then in an addendum to the paper, Dr Roles explained the new understanding he had gained of the real meaning behind the idea of the double-headed arrow. ...)*

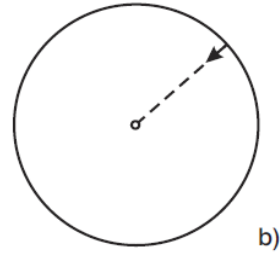
But at what point on the double headed arrow is the observer situated? Where is his standpoint? It is no more at the inner end of the arrow than at the outer. In each case his attention is supposed to be directed *towards* these points.

If it is taken instead that *there is never more than one arrowhead* at any particular moment, the idea of attention being divided is overcome. It can be taken that the inner end of the arrow is the standpoint of the observer, and from there his attention is directed outwards – and this may mean on either external phenomena or what is happening inside his own mind. It is easier to see the stages of development of consciousness if the arrow is taken as a radius of a circle, the centre of which is "Real I" and the circumference being the world of observed phenomena.

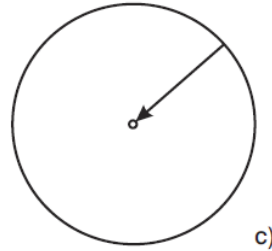
a) Relative consciousness or waking sleep: the inner end of the arrow is rooted very shallowly and there is no connection with one's Real Self. The degree of consciousness depends on the place where the observer is 'rooted and grounded'.



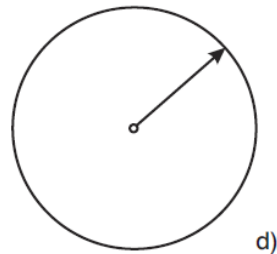
b) In order to penetrate deeper, the direction of the arrow is reversed; sensations of external phenomena are dimmed and the arrow of attention penetrates within.



c) Self-consciousness is reached when the head of the arrow penetrates the centre of the circle and remains there.



d) The inner end of the arrow is then fixed here and the attention again directed outwards. When this becomes possible, the state of cosmic consciousness is achieved. The observer has full attention on external phenomena at the point of the arrow, the inner end being rooted and grounded in the Real Self.



Many stages must exist between (b) and (d), with different degrees of penetration towards the centre, and different points along the line where the inner end of the arrow is fixed when attention is again directed outwards, since the point of anchorage is not necessarily situated at the same point reached by the inner end of the arrow in the previous stage. This must come only with repeated practice, as we are reminded in the simile of 'dipping the cloth in the yellow dye.' Only after repeated dippings will it retain the yellow colour. Only when the anchor is let go and firmly fixed deep down on the sea bed is the ship safely at rest.

