

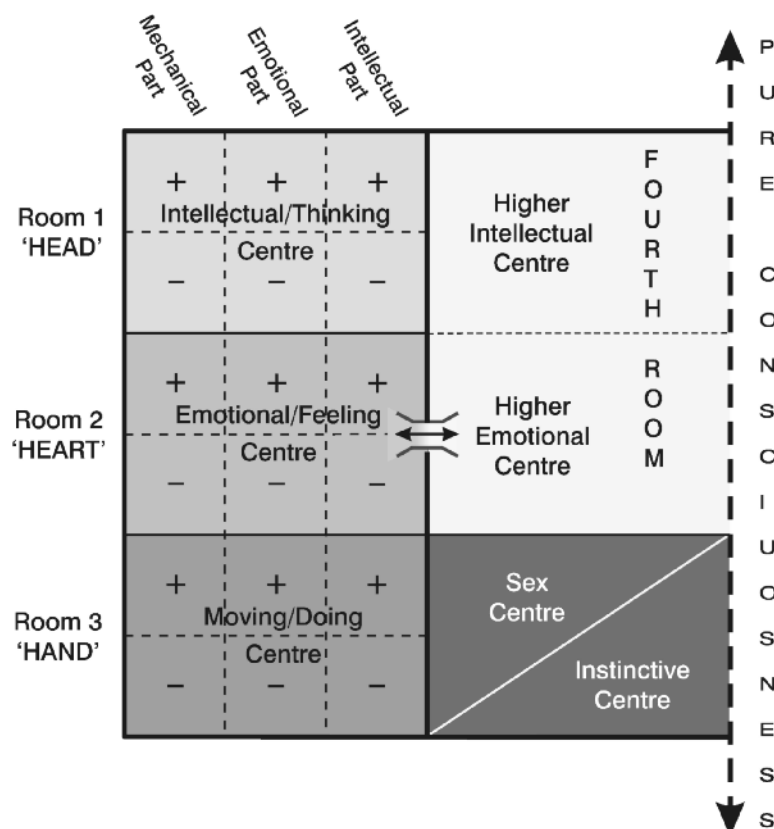
Self-observation — What do we see?

Last week someone asked, 'How do you distinguish between self-remembering and self-observation? Which comes first? Although our aim is to remember ourselves, at first we don't really understand what this means. When we start, we can only do it from the 'personal' viewpoint of whichever 'I' is present at the time and this is constantly changing. Consequently our efforts are short lived and the span of our attention quite brief. By observing the changing sense of 'I' we begin to establish an impartial, non-judgmental observer; an observer who is just a silent witness to what is going on inside us. The development of this silent witness is what can lead us to true Self-remembering—the real, permanent Self who is always present but which we have forgotten.

If we keep on trying, questions will arise, 'Who am I— really?' and, 'Who is doing all those things in my life when I don't remember I'm there?' To get much further we need to look more closely at what is going on inside us and find out whether it is possible to discover a different kind of attention.

The System says that a human being can be seen as an assembly of several different centres of consciousness and energy, each with its own functions, each with its own kinds of attention, and that from all these arise many different 'I's. It used to be said that man is 'a three-brained being'.

The diagram shows a human being as a house of three storeys furnished with several rooms, seven in all perhaps, but of which we habitually inhabit only three and even these are generally dark and disordered. We may know of the presence of a fourth room in our house, a room full of light where many different possibilities exist; we may have been there, perhaps quite often when we were young, but we seem to have forgotten how to find it at will.



Each room is divided into three parts, the moving or mechanical part, the emotional part and the intellectual part. Each of these again is divided into two, positive and negative. In all these different departments of ourselves live many little 'I's, each with its own tone of voice, its own definite likes and dislikes. Many of these little 'I's like to stray into rooms where they have no rightful place, insisting on

trying to do work for which they are not fit and neglecting their own work in the process. Although the cast of characters that makes up 'me' is constantly changing, we have become so accustomed to the ceaseless ebb and flow of our different moods and personalities that we can continue unfalteringly to regard ourselves as being a 'real' person. Having 'my body', which always *is* a whole being, is fundamental to maintaining this conviction and the trick is further accomplished by the very mechanicalness we wish to be free from. Simply to function as a separate entity all the parts must naturally work in unison, and mostly unconsciously, so that we can survive physically and socially. From all this we 'construct' the ego, and it is sheer illusion. Here is part of the original description:

"You must understand that the three principal centres, the thinking, the emotional and the moving, are connected together and, in normal man, they are always working in unison. This unison is what presents the chief difficulty in work on oneself. What is meant by this unison? It means that a definite work of the thinking centre is connected with a definite work of the emotional and moving centres - that is to say a certain kind of thought is inevitably connected with a certain kind of emotion [or mental state] and with a certain kind of movement [or posture]; and one evokes the other, that is, a certain kind of emotion [or mental state] evokes certain movements or postures and certain thoughts, and a certain kind of movement or posture evokes certain emotions or mental states, and so forth. Everything is connected and one thing cannot exist without another thing . . ."

(ISM p.347)

Although this diagram is based on the actual structure of our physiology and neurology it is only superficially an anatomical diagram. Centres, as such, do not exist in this form, but this is how we *experience* ourselves. The System provides a coherent framework with which to understand more about what we observe going on in ourselves. It describes us *as we feel ourselves to be*.

It is said that in our daily life we just chug along, propelled almost exclusively by the mechanical parts of centres whose attention is automatic and intermittent. Both the emotional and the intellectual parts of all three centres require a special degree of attention in order to function on purpose. It does happen, of course, but not as much as we might like, and generally in response to some external event. Often, we simply don't know how to generate the right attention. All the great exponents of art and science have somehow been able to practice this special attention to produce the work that sets them apart, but in fact any excellence we see in any field is a result of a greater capacity for attention. It doesn't have to be special or spectacular, all the tasks of our routine life can acquire a beauty and economy that reflects this same capacity for a greater attention.

In the past, it was thought that only by long struggle and effort could we clean up our house and let in the light, but after meeting the Shankaracharya, Dr Roles began to learn that there was a much better and quicker way. The simple practice of keeping still—being attentive and doing nothing at all for a few moments as often as we can—provides the right energy for the house to begin quite naturally to be restored to its proper order. Light begins to grow in all the rooms and this makes it possible, when any *feeling* arises, to know whether or not it is helpful to our true heart's desire. Then, the three centres can begin to function in a new, more consciously directed unison. We begin to be able to *say* what we *feel* and *do* what we say. This specific order of action in our three main centres is perhaps the most important requirement for progress on the Way.

It is seen in the diagram that there is a doorway in the emotional centre through which can flow the light and energy of the higher emotional centre. This is related to attention as being the 'steadfast fixing and stationing of the mind in the door of the heart' that we spoke of last week.

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Practical Work

By trying to observe ourselves in the context of the diagram in this paper, it may become easier to begin to adjust the sense of what is 'me' and what is 'mine'. This week, we can start to get a feel for the different centres and the many 'I's who inhabit them. Which of them works best, which gives us the most trouble? (The Movements may have taught us quite a lot about this already) Another way is to try to observe what takes us away from a state of attention. Is there a pattern to it, or does it seem random?

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