

'Six Activities of Man' — Introduction

The rather scary idea raised in last week's material—that to discover who we really are we must separate ourselves from the person we continually imagine ourselves to be—poses such an immediately uncomfortable threat that something in us rises up at once to rebel against it. The speed and intensity of this reaction reveals the ever-ready vigilance with which we defend our 'person', despite any intellectual appreciation we may have acquired that this 'person' is in fact a most transient and insubstantial entity arising only from the myriad things with which we identify.

But this mechanical *vigilante* itself is just another inhabitant of the illusion we seek to dispel, and beyond the illusion, the fact remains that we do have an essential core of being which can be neither lost nor eliminated, by anything, even by death. *And we do know what it is.* As Bill Hager said last week: from time to time everyone experiences a clear awareness, in waking directly from the deepest sleep, of a golden moment in which we know neither our name, nor where we are, nor even that we possess a body at all. And yet this can be the strongest and purest feeling of 'I am' that we ever encounter, a momentary glimpse of who we really are, and which if left to itself, uncluttered by body, mind and the whole gamut of desires and fears arising out of them, will reveal itself to be one with the Self of the whole universe.

So why do we so seldom allow ourselves to rest in our essential reality? Mr Ouspensky considered that in practice the development of Self-awareness is mainly a matter of duration. We have only to let this natural feeling of 'I' remain alone, without interruption or distraction, for a little while longer than we are usually able. Two minutes of being 'present', the beginning of Self-remembering, if allowed to endure will naturally flower first into self-consciousness and then universal consciousness.

Consciousness, like everything else in the manifest universe is a threefold phenomenon. Waking, dreaming and dreamless sleep are the three fundamental states, in each of which we experience the Self, Real 'I', in a differently qualified form, and the object of this Work is to go beyond them all to discover what the Vedanta calls 'Turiya', 'the Fourth', the Mighty — the condition of Truth as it really is, entirely transcending and yet including everything that can be known.

One practical way to allow this insubstantial 'person' to first remember and then to realize its divine origin is found in Mr Ouspensky's development of the System's teaching of the law of three (which stems from the three Gunas of the Vedic tradition) into what he called the Six Activities of Man.

He says that there are only six possible combinations of the original three forces which manifest the Will of the Absolute to start the Creation. All human activity can be categorised into six fundamental streams of energy; everything we do, say, think and feel results from the intermingling, in us, of these six immutable channels through which the energy of the Absolute flows without cease.

Here is the list, which every busy mind will immediately demand:

1-2-3	Active → Passive → Neutralizing	Growth (attentive action)
2-1-3	Passive → Active → Neutralizing	Refinement
1-3-2	Active → Neutralizing → Passive	Destruction
3-1-2	Neutralizing → Active → Passive	Crime
2-3-1	Passive → Neutralizing → Active	Inspiration, discovery, healing
3-2-1	Neutralizing → Passive → Active	Genuine creativity, Self-remembering

The *order* of the forces is what determines the nature of each 'triad' and which creates the infinite variety of our human experience.

It becomes immediately obvious that these labels are inadequate, and even a whole chapter of words describing each triad would still provide only a pale description. To 'know' what these triads mean, we need to employ our emotional 'intelligence' as well. It is said that we can learn to 'taste' the difference between them quite distinctly, and the organ possessing this sensibility is what we call 'Conscience' — and further, that it is the observation of these different activities in ourselves and in the world around us that greatly helps this power of 'Conscience' to wake up.

As we have said before, Mr Ouspensky described Consciousness as the intellectual or mental awareness of Truth, and Conscience as the emotional awareness of Truth. In our individual lives the latter is perhaps even more important than the former. Conscience is what advises us, feelingly, in the moment and without doubt, that this, or that, is right, or wrong, for me.

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From the list above we can see two triads that end with, or create, neutralizing force, the energy of Sattva which is required for the silent impartial observer to be allowed to appear in our consciousness.

In the first case, the triad 1-2-3, *actions* are performed with attention, the *body* is made to be attentive. When walking, we just walk. This is the first step, good actions, or, as we have been told, 'Attention is the source of success, success depends upon attention. Without attention, nothing can be done.'

The second case, the triad 2-1-3, begins with *a quiet attentive mind*, the mind is passive, receptive and aware. This allows discrimination, a sifting of the fine from the coarse, to be brought to bear upon whatever is happening in the moment. It can easily be seen in the practice of any kind of skill. The quiet mind allows the learnt skill, the technique, to be directed freely and appropriately to the task in hand. Playing a musical instrument, writing an essay, cooking a fish pie. Another name for this 'refining' activity is 'good professional work'. All our practices, meditating, being present, and attending our meetings, for instance, should employ this triad.

Regular practice of these two triads will create enough Sattva for a third triad, 3-2-1 — which depends upon that supply of Sattva to begin its manifestation as Self-remembering.

These first two activities are called the 'preparatory triads' and they provide the energy we need to move ourselves from where we are. This preliminary work is only to find a state in ourselves where we can hear the teaching sufficiently clearly so as to understand and wholeheartedly be able simply to do what we are told. In one sense, this is entirely dependent upon the energy at our disposal. The understanding of the 'Six activities of Man' is a step towards knowing in practice how to provide ourselves with the energy we need to discover our heart's desire.

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