

Obstacles to the Intelligence of the Heart

Our teachings tell us that the main obstacles to progress are the constantly arising desires for worldly satisfaction. Psychologists say we can make our lives easier and live more comfortably if we understand and accept what it is possible for our ego's to achieve—if we can come to know ourselves, particularly our less conscious selves, rather better. Knowing better how we function intellectually and emotionally prepares the way for spiritual practice.

Why the emphasis on 'desires'? Because desires and emotion are inseparably connected. The energy of emotion itself, not any particular emotion, is a vital fuel for self-realization and a desire always has a personal emotion attached to it before it enters our field of consciousness. Vitality, as we have said before, *'consciousness is consumed only by desires'*.

Letting go of at least some of our desires leads to reduced movement—even to the point of complete stillness. Absence of all desires means a completely steady mind. Using the analogy of the *'equipage'*, the driver, in remembering to listen for the wishes of the owner rather than his own, can become still. This practice also calms the horses, the emotions. The mind is a mirror which when clean and polished provides a steady reflection. All spiritual practices aim to steady the mind and purify the emotions. This attention to cleaning and bringing light to dark corners of the psyche is something both gurus and psychologists have in common.

For most people, mechanically pursuing one desire after another, such a blissful and peaceful state of mind is a rare occurrence. Nobody is born with a wish to have few desires, yet in the course of a life one may learn to discriminate, using the intelligence of the heart, between those impulses that are of a spiritual nature and those which are not. Often, this process can stem from the disillusionments that frequently accompany worldly achievements.

As soon as we begin to observe ourselves from a conscious standpoint it becomes clear that large areas of our psyches remain stubbornly *unconscious*. We know that while we are each of us individuals we also all act in 'collective' ways or ways that are typical of our 'type'. The typology of character has been studied by all cultures and civilizations. In the Fourth Way we begin with the *'Equipage'*. As a blueprint of the psyche it makes our individually unconscious areas or 'blind-spots' easier to identify.

The crucial point is that the energy of 'emotion' (which is required for every aspect of the self-enquiry that will lead us to a better state of being), is being constantly dissipated by desires and feelings that we do not clearly recognise. Attention, stillness, awareness and self-observation, all these things require a particular energy — and although we may possess plenty of it, it is continually being unconsciously used up by other activities.

Each of us favours with our attention one or perhaps two functions at the expense of the others which must consequently perform less consciously. Balance, harmony of character, comes by developing and making conscious these functions which influence us imperceptibly. For example there can be great dignity in having a good intellect but only if it does not violate emotional values. Education inevitably favours intellect over feeling but in later life this can create many difficulties. The aim, of course, is to get head and heart to work together. Other cultures have taken this for granted. The Pueblo Indians told Jung that the Americans were mad because they believed their thoughts were in their heads, whereas any sensible man knows that he thinks with his heart.

We know it is only when love enters into the act of judgement that the concept of 'mercy' arises and reason becomes tempered by compassion. In the absence of feeling, logical thinking quickly becomes arid and inflexible. Spirituality is unthinkable without love and only through it can we experience the Oneness of the universe.

The emotional function is often that part of our 'mirror' most in need of cleaning. In fact, a great deal of feeling is relatively unconscious in almost everyone—not just for the intellectual stereotype who remains infantile in regard to emotional response but even for the so-called obvious 'feeling type'. For instance, the perfectly empathic hostess, skilfully keeping all her guests happy, may prefer to remain unaware of her own less-than-nice feelings and project them on to others instead.

People with spiritual aspirations are often embarrassed to be seen being aggressive, moody, selfish or envious; all the darker elements which belong, together with the lighter ones, to the human condition. But we know when things are kept in the dark that they tend to seep through anyway or even stage a dramatic break-out. But if they can be accepted as part of our nature they become available to modification. When aggressive instincts are acknowledged the reflex action changes into a feeling response. Allowing our emotions to become more conscious in this way allows them to develop and be refined into real spiritual qualities—tolerance, confidence and patience.

Paradoxically it's often at moments after we have gained some measure of stillness or purity that we can be assailed from within by feelings of anger, fear or shame. The balance we have momentarily achieved releases these unconscious contents which bubble up to the surface.

Most of us can remember moments when a rising tide of emotion just could not be controlled. Overwhelmed, we may have needed to rush from the room in order to regain self-control. We explain it by saying; 'I was not myself' or 'I don't know what got in to me.'

We take it for granted that we have different 'moods' which, for instance, can give rise to much anxiety and lack of confidence. Instead of being able to 'feel' correctly about a situation we may only be able to express a seemingly wayward and personal reaction. We can also be afraid of one another's moodiness—and have to wait for a 'good moment' to broach an important question. In cases like this the realm of feeling is not free because it is being ruled by unconscious desires.

Often, we say: 'there are certain things I just can't stomach'. What we mean is our feelings are in revolt against the idea proposed and we refuse to swallow it. In this way our feelings often play a much more powerful role in how we live our lives and inform our attitudes than do rational ideas. As Carl Jung put it: 'Was it any theory that made the Buddha what he was? No. It was the sight of old age, sickness and death that burned into his soul'.

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We might ask ourselves:

Where do all our good and helpful flashes of intelligence come from?

What is the source of our enthusiasms, inspirations and heightened feeling of vitality?

Does a loving relationship not always include 'suffering' in the awareness of being able to hurt the other. (not guilt, not anxiety, not pride)?

What happens when we are deeply moved by others?

What happens to your body when you suddenly feel life is very much worth living?