

SELF-REMEMBERING

This term we have been studying some of the ideas and diagrams which are the foundation of the cosmology and psychology of the System's view of man and the universe. In exploring the vast and complex picture it describes we can sometimes begin not to see the wood for the trees—and forget that the object of all this effort and learning is to know the nature of 'Real I'.

There is an aphorism in the System that 'to know all we need know very little, but to know that little we must know pretty much'. In one sense this 'very little' is our own nature—'Who am I?'—and the 'pretty much' is what we need to understand to be in a position to really know it. We have also, on several occasions, come upon the paradox that the ego, the feeling of 'I' in its ever-changing but consistently experienced nature is both the solution and the obstacle to the search for truth.

The System never attempts to explain or describe the nature of 'Real I' and originally this had perhaps to do with avoiding unnecessary and useless imagining which could only deny real understanding. The method was to learn to remember ourselves—to acquire the ability to be aware and present to ourselves in the moment—and by doing this one thing, all the obstacles, all the habitual wrong functioning, negative emotions, identification etc., could be overcome or drop naturally away and begin to allow a state of being in which 'Real I' would be revealed.

What was never said, and which becomes known only through practice, is that the small 'I'—in whatever state it finds itself—is in fact itself a reflection of the 'Real I'. It may be only a pale reflection, or one disturbed by psychological shadows and currents, all the movement and distraction generated by thought, feeling and sensation, but nevertheless this small 'I' is the only direct contact we have with reality and is the one thing which will lead us to it if we can learn to maintain for long enough a state of still awareness.

This small 'I' is a reflection of a greater reality. Initially, on observing this reflection, we confuse the limited and the unlimited, but by regular practice of maintaining a silent observer and returning to it as often as we can remember, the confusion will gradually clear away. As we said last week, the true role of the mind is only to observe and discriminate, to sift the fine from the coarse, until the reflection can become true and one with its source.

In fact, there are times that occur quite naturally in every day when the stream of thoughts and desires, all of our willing and thinking, falls briefly silent and in that fleeting interval 'Real I' is momentarily present. On a larger scale, in deep sleep, 'Real I' is again present without qualification or limitation.

At every shift of our consciousness—whether slight, as in the brief gap between one desire or activity and the next, or in the big shift from one state to another as in sleep and waking—the knowledge and experience of Real I is made available to us. Without these regular connections with the source of our being we could not exist, even though we are not usually conscious of them. To become conscious of the permanent presence of 'Real I' is the aim of all our efforts and this is another big shift, from ordinary waking state to Self-consciousness, a shift as startling as the moment of awakening from a deep sleep.

If truth is what we seek, truth about ourselves and the miraculous creation in which we exist, there is no other way to find it but to keep on returning to the remembrance that we must be present. To remember what needs to be remembered is the source of success.

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The following quotation is from a talk by the late Shankaracharya Shantanand Saraswati:

If you begin to be what you are you will realize everything, but to begin to be what you are you must come out of what you are not. You are not those thoughts which are turning, turning in your mind: you are not those changing feelings: you are not the different decisions you make and the different wills you have: you are not that separate ego: Well, then, what are you? You will find when you have come out of what you are not, that ripple on the water is whispering to you 'I am That', the birds in the mango tree are singing to you 'I am That', the moon and the stars are shining beacons to you 'I am That': you are in everything in the world and everything in the world is in you since for you it only exists because it is mirrored in you; and at the same time you are that – everything.

You might like to think over Easter what he means by 'I' and 'you'.

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