

PRISON

Last week's meeting ended with a perennial question: 'Isn't the prison real?'

Behind the idea of a prison lies the presumption of another state of mind, which the System calls 'Real I'. Real I is more universal than our ordinary 'I', and we may have experienced moments in which we are closer to it: the separation from the rest of the world is less apparent, and the everyday world becomes magical.

But it is not easy to say what the prison (or wall) actually is. We would not all agree on this, since we all have different aims, and the prison could be defined as that which keeps us from attaining our aim. We have to think this out for ourselves as individuals by asking the right questions. For example: is the prison simply that we are separate from Real I? If so, what is the substance of the walls of the prison which cause the separation?

One way of describing the prison is in terms of illusion. Here, the prison is just part of the illusion, but we are so immersed in a sea of illusion that, rather like in the film *The Matrix*, it is difficult to see nature of the illusion. But we can get close to understanding it. It is an astonishing fact that the mind has developed to a state where it can deduce its own ultimate unreality—though it seems to prefer living in the illusion.

It's worth pursuing the reasons for this. One reason might be that the architecture and construction of the prison becomes more interesting—even less threatening—than the unknown world beyond its confines. Another reason might be that self-preservation demands that the mind has to perceive the body as separate from the rest of the world, and becomes identified with the separation.

In one view the mind was originally a tool in the struggle for biological survival. It had to learn the laws of Nature in order to conquer it and in this process arose the power of symbolic thinking and communication, the art and skill of language. Ideas and abstractions acquired the appearance of reality, the conceptual replaced the real, and human life became dominated by words. So, to escape from this prison of the verbal mind it is necessary to shift focus from the word on to what the word refers to, the thing itself.

The most common of all words is 'I'. It stands as a pointer to an experience which is direct, immediate and of immense significance. To be, and to know that one is, is the only actual reality we ever experience.

And yet the ordinary feeling of 'I' is intermittent and endlessly changeable—only if we dwell upon it sufficiently does there begin to arise a sense of what it really is. In any moment that we remember ourselves, our ordinary selves, here and now, there exists the immanence of Real 'I'. By learning to bring a memory of the continual presence of Real 'I' to these moments of self-awareness—even just the idea of it as the source of our being and all that we do—we will surely begin to 'remember ourselves' in the true sense of the word.

So it is only necessary to convince the mind that the simple feeling of 'I' is like Ariadne's thread which will lead us safely out of the labyrinth. All we have to do is hold onto it and start walking.

*

One thing is certain: unless we make efforts we won't get far. The major effort needed is to see our situation, and to do that we need to be 'present' more often. For the next few weeks we will try to have this feeling of the 'simple feeling of 'I' more often.

One of the major exercises in the System was never to use the words 'I' or 'mine'. This was a method of trying to free oneself from the usual changing small self, by reminding oneself that the only real 'I' is Real I. So during the week try it out and see what happens.

* * *