

ESCAPE

It was suggested last week that the practice of being aware of the simple feeling of 'I' is the key to escape from the illusory prison, but it soon becomes clear that to develop this capacity requires a different sort of attention than we normally have. So what does this development of attention require?

The Philokalia gives a description of attention as:

Attention (wakefulness) is a heartfelt rest from all thought. It is the steadfast fixing and stationing of the mind in the door of the heart.

This is not a general definition of attention, but it is what we are after. The 'setting up of attention' which can lead to this new state requires first of all something to happen every day in the three lower rooms, and in particular to the moving centre—for unless actions and movements are attentive there is little hope of escape from identification. But it really can and does happen! Here's a description we used before:

Gradually ... the application of what I had learned in former years became possible. It was mainly due to the introduction of the three Nervous Divisions which could be observed separately – and in moments of awareness together. System ideas came to be more emotional and a parallel with religious feeling was established.

...It is impossible to say just when self-remembering passed from thinking about it to its (at times) successful three-fold aspect and when the blessed right place in oneself was found. [*Some Recollections*, ZC]

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What really needs to change, and which fortunately, in fact, is the only thing we can change, is the habitual emotional attitude towards our lives and who we think we are.

Dr Roles commented:

'We all have a built-in view of ourselves, of the life we lead and the life around us; and a built-in daily pattern based on that. If we could only change our attitude towards ourselves and to life, it would alter the pattern of our day to a slight but significant extent and then things would begin to turn to profit—psychologically, spiritually and even practically. The difficulty is to understand what it means to know who we really are—to 'realise' ourselves—what is needed, and what is possible. The more we understand, the less we have to interfere with our outer life. There is nothing wrong with our lives; it is the attitude we are taking towards them that needs to be changed.'

So how does attention become more emotional, and begin to engage the heart as well as the mind? Though this is for individual experiment and will relate to aim, it is certain that it requires a change of attitude to who we imagine we are, and what we think we are doing.

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We have a powerful ally to help us in change of attitude: the ability of our minds and emotions to *discriminate*. In the System this is part of what is called Conscience.

Acquiring a practical habit of discrimination begins by observing what is helpful and what is not helpful towards self-realisation—or if this too grand an aim—just ‘being present’. There are activities, both external and internal, that help and those that have a neutral or negative effect. The System is very precise about this—the teaching is called the Six Activities of Man—and we can start, as ever, by making our own observations.

During the week, let’s try to come to a state of attention whenever we have a spare moment, and observe how the quality of attention is related to factors such as mood, physical state and external events.

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