

AIM

Formulating an aim was stressed by the System in the attempt to make ideas practical.

It was said that our aims are usually too lofty and distant; the aim 'to be realised', like Jesus or the Buddha was all very well but it usually just contributed at best to good conversation or deep personal disillusionment at worst. Other aims, to be happy, to be conscious etc. were regarded as being too vague to be of much practical value

One line of advice was to take some small observation about our mechanicalness, some particular personal propensity for identification, and to see what could allow us to avoid it — and then make it our 'god' to practise this daily. To put everything into it and do it as if life depended upon it—like a lunatic with an *idée fixe*. For instance, take irritation; if one has an habitual temptation to become irritated—by people or inanimate objects, or any thwarted desire—to imagine that one is acting in front of the group when the next opportunity occurs. In trying to do something like this we really find out how serious we actually are about the whole business. Of course one must choose one's own example, the nearer to the bone the better.

In discussing the nature of aim 'the prison' is a good analogy. Most prisoners profess an aim to escape, but some are more serious than others. (We might be talking about different 'I's here, as well as our friends). Some prisoners begin to scrape away at the stones with inadequate instruments, dream up elaborate schemes, or try violently to overcome the warders, but those who do actually escape are usually recaptured and returned to an even worse confinement. Of those few who really attain freedom we hear little.

The prison is mostly too comfortable for the inmates really to want to be free. The food is quite good, we're used to it, the beds are comfortable enough, and all our friends are there anyway. And escaping is so serious, difficult, dangerous and plain hard work.

So even the aim to 'escape' is probably just pie in the sky. Something to divert us briefly in moments of ennui. Joining an escape group and going to meetings to discuss the possibilities just adds a pleasant extra dimension to prison life and helps us to sleep better at night— the sounds of suffering become less threatening, there is hope after all — but it doesn't often amount to much.

More seriously, self-observation can bring us to a stage where we see that the prison consists only of who we think we are and what we think life is; when these attitudes change, the walls and bars evaporate and we find ourselves in a different world. Often we find this happens quite naturally, but only briefly. Watching the sun set into a golden sea after an excellent meal and with an exceptionally fine Burgundy in one's hand, all seems well with the world and with oneself. There is a feeling of expansion which embraces everything and one's personal limitations are for a moment dispelled. But the next morning . . . business as usual.

Many things occur in life which quite naturally but temporarily rearrange the normal balance of the endocrine system which creates and changes our moods, so that we get a glimpse of a different world and a different self experiencing it. But these things are accidental; as Mr Ouspensky said: like finding a five pound note in the gutter, we can't make a living out of it. Realising this we may try different methods of waking up; meditation, self-observation, prayer etc, but it soon becomes clear that any significant development requires an aim, or a consistency of intention, that we seem not to possess. Aim

is clearly connected with will and as we know from the System and our own experience, our will is not one but many, and changes endlessly with the changing circumstances of life. And it is more subtle yet:

“If a man were able to work on himself everything would be simple and schools would be unnecessary. But he cannot, and the reasons for this lie very deep in his nature. I will leave for the moment his insincerity with himself, the perpetual lies he tells himself, and so on, and take only the division of centres. You must understand that the three principal centres, the thinking the emotional and the moving, are connected together and, in normal man, they are always working in unison. This unison is what presents the chief difficulty in work on oneself. What is meant by this unison? It means that a definite work of the thinking centre is connected with a definite work of the emotional and moving centres—that is to say a certain kind of thought is inevitably connected with a certain kind of emotion (or mental state) and with a certain kind of movement (or posture); and one evokes the other, that is, a certain kind of emotion (or mental state) evokes certain movements or postures and certain thoughts, and a certain kind of movement or posture evokes certain emotions or mental states, and so forth. Everything is connected and one thing cannot exist without another thing. . .”

Fragments p.347/8

The System shows us that to be able to complete any ascending octave, to ‘fill the intervals’ so as to maintain the momentum of the intention to escape this prison of mechanical ‘unity’, there need to be three related lines of action, three concurrent octaves, each to support the others as in turn their energies run down.

Externally this idea was expressed as ‘three lines of work’; work on oneself, work for other people, and work for the school itself. When one line begins to flag, the other two remain to support it and so allow the good impulse of the original intention to continue.

In our personal psychology too it is useful to consider a threefold aim, doing something, feeling something and thinking something so that the three strands support each other and can amount to something. We can use the natural law of repetition in our behaviour to help. Identify some repetitive action, a repetitive feeling, a repetitive thought, and aim, whenever they occur, to replace them with something else—an attentive action, a positive feeling, an inspiring thought.

Memory comes into this in a way which usually we do not employ. We can use our memories of happy states, those which have a deep meaning for us, by returning to them consciously. Make the effort to remember a particularly good time, remember how the body felt, what was in the heart and in the mind at these times, and specially the feeling of expansion and positive emotion that was present—and purposefully bring these memories to the moment we are actually in. We all have a store of memories like this and which we can use to our advantage in the cause of ‘self-remembering’. The ‘self’ who lived those times is something we can aim to bring into this moment.

When this state of expansion and positive emotion occurs, it is clear too that the outside world has also changed, showing us, if we care to look, that the inner state and the ‘reality’ of the outer world are intimately connected. In this good state it is also obvious that the foundation of both the manifest world, and our perception of it, is a condition of stillness —and that this stillness is the beginning of the perception of something beyond them both.

When we remember, in the clear space that naturally arises between one desire or action and the next, to attend to the feeling of ‘I’ in the present moment, we become aware that this feeling of ‘I’ exists

within this great stillness that supports everything. We take rest in this stillness according to our measure as the following advice from the Shankaracharya explains:

H.H. The rest or stillness at the physical level provides enough energy to employ in eight or nine hours of activity for any individual. . . This is how the human race keeps going without much trouble. At least people with common sense appreciate this and provide themselves with physical rest, and keep in good health and normal activity.

The rest at the subtle level, by cessation of conflicting desires, brings another dimension to the idea of rest. In this dimension of rest efficiency arises, and this works through all activities — ordinary physical work or artistic work. Thus, rest at this level between fulfilment of one desire and initiation of another, will be rewarded with efficiency.

The third or causal level of rest, which is profound stillness or total immobility, is in the realm of the Absolute. Since the causal realm cannot be described, one learns about it from its effects. One can see it in the activities and dispositions of such men who provide themselves with spiritual rest. There are three prominent features:

Firstly, they show love and affection toward everything they encounter. All activities will be initiated with love, and then held and nourished with love till they come to their fulfilment. All relationships with individuals or activities, direct or indirect, will be lighted and guided only by love and affection.

Secondly, their ideas, intentions or motives will be pure and simple. Purity and simplicity widen the horizon, and they think and work for the whole of humanity and only through the Laws of the Absolute. The divisions of groups, races or nations disappear and only natural laws are employed. Their thoughts naturally encompass the whole of the human family, and its intrinsic goodness.

Thirdly, the physical movements of such people are only geared to the natural rhythm, and the result is simplicity and economy of movement. They never rush into any situation; are never agitated; and perform all actions in an efficient, sublime and refined way. Whatever they do will emerge from stillness, be held in stillness, and again submerge in the same stillness which they experience in this great total immobility.

This would establish an idea or a standard for the common man to aspire to, if he somehow awakes to the need to improve his lot.

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