

## CONSCIENCE

### Part 1

'Conscience' has a special meaning in the System, and it is a concept that has developed over the years. It was first introduced by G in the context of the idea of 'many I's'. In a characteristically devastating commentary on the human condition, he began:

The chief thing that you forget is that you are not beginning from the beginning with a nice clean, new machine. There stand behind you many years of a wrong and stupid life, of indulgence in every kind of weakness, of shutting your eyes to your own errors, of striving to avoid all unpleasant truths, of constant lying to yourselves, of self-justification, of blaming others, and so on, and so on. All this cannot help affecting the machine. The machine is dirty, in places it is rusty, and in some places artificial appliances have been formed, the necessity for which has been created by its own wrong way of working. [P D Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*]

The 'wrong way of working' means in part that over the years we divide ourselves – our ordinary personality – into many 'I's'. We are one person with our parents, another with our children, another at work, and so on. Everyone has at least half a dozen roles in life and probably thousands of minor subdivisions of their personality (though it must be emphasised that this is well short of the complete compartmentalisation present in some clinical personality disorders).

Many of these 'I's' are inconsistent with each other, but it is the 'artificial appliances', so-called 'buffers', that keep the different 'I's' separate. An 'I' is like one compartment of a train, which is cushioned from the impact of the other compartments by buffers at each end. G said that "Buffers are appliances by means of which a man can always be in the right. Buffers help a man not to feel his conscience."

G was at pains to distinguish Conscience as he used the word from its ordinary sense of 'awareness of morality', which he pointed out was highly subjective and culturally variable. What is right in one place is wrong in another. Morality is relative.

He defined Conscience as follows:

Actually the concept 'conscience' in the sphere of the emotions is equivalent to the concept 'consciousness' in the sphere of the intellect. And as we have no consciousness we have no conscience.

Consciousness is a state in which a man knows all at once everything that he in general knows and in which he can see how little he does know and how many contradictions there are in what he knows.

*Conscience* is a state in which a man *feels all at once* everything that he in general feels, or can feel. [P D Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*]

He went to say that to achieve unity buffers have to be destroyed; it was the fire of Conscience which alone can fuse 'all the powders' together.

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Ouspensky does not mention Conscience in his introductory lectures which were first given at the start of the expansion of his activities in the 1930's (*The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution*). Perhaps he thought it was too advanced for beginners, but he attached great importance to it. His definitive statement came in a meeting in 1937, where he said that:

The aim of the system is to bring man to conscience. Conscience is a certain quality that is in every normal man. It is really a different expression of the same quality as consciousness. Only consciousness works more on the intellectual side, and conscience more on the moral side: it helps to realize what is good and what is bad in one's own conduct. How does conscience work? By uniting emotions. We can experience on the same day a great many contradictory emotions, pleasant or unpleasant, on the same subject, either one after another, or even simultaneously. And we do not notice it because of absence of conscience. Buffers prevent one 'I' or one personality from seeing another. But in a state of conscience a man cannot help seeing all these contradictions. If in the morning he said one thing, in the afternoon another, in the evening yet another: he will remember it. But in life he will not remember it, or he will insist that he does not know what is good and what is bad.

The way to conscience is through destroying buffers. And buffers can be destroyed through self-remembering, not identifying, etc. [P D Ouspensky, *A Record of Meetings*]

Ouspensky spoke of the danger of losing Conscience: he said that it was loss of Conscience that made rulers like Hitler and Stalin so powerful because they had none of the normal inhibitions. He also said that 'Conscience bites', and that when it awakes for a moment in ordinary life, 'particularly at first, it always brings suffering, for it is unpleasant to face the truth about oneself.' Of course there is much in what Ouspensky taught that is the same as the original teaching, but Conscience has now been placed centre stage as the aim of the System for the individual. Dr Roles remembered that Ouspensky had said that "Conscience was the most important thing for the individual. It told a man or a woman what was right and what was wrong at any particular moment for them [79/20]."

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There is more to be said, particularly in Dr Roles' teaching, about Conscience in relation to the 'emotional realisation of truth' and its role in providing the 'good impulse'.

Meanwhile, making observations of Conscience in one's own experience is simple if sometimes painful, and we need some real examples to proceed further.

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#### *Footnote on morality*

Ouspensky said that [to work towards realisation] a man must start with sense of right and wrong, otherwise nothing can be done. Such a man will question conventional morality but 'When he realizes the necessity of objective, permanent right and wrong, then he will look at things from the point of view of the system.' He said that there is a different morality for Man No 1, 2, 3, 4, etc; it does not mean that one morality is wrong, but that one cannot be explained by the other.

## Shivananda on Conscience<sup>1</sup>

Conscience is the light of the Soul that burns within the chambers of your heart. It is the little spark of celestial fire that makes known to you the presence of the Indweller, the author of the divine laws of truth and holiness. It raises the voice in protest whenever anything is thought of or done contrary to the interest of its Master.

Conscience is the voice of the Self which says 'yes' or 'no' when you are involved in a moral struggle. It is a call from within to do an act or to avoid it. Conscience is the internal monitor. Conscience is a form of truth which is the knowledge of our own acts and feelings as right or wrong. It is a sensitive balance (scales) to weigh actions. It is a guiding voice from within, the faculty or principle by which we distinguish right from wrong. This sense of duty is conscience. Scrupulousness is conscience. Conscience is a silent teacher.

Conscience is a moral faculty. It is a delicate instrument or sense that tells you then and there what is right and what is wrong. It is the soundless inner voice that shows you the path of virtue and godliness. It is indeed very, very delicate. It is very easy to stifle it, but it is so very clear that it is impossible to mistake it.

Conscience is above reason and discussion. It is a sudden, dictatory command to plunge deep into the depths of virtue, or to rise high above the level of vice. The positive elements that adorn conscience are truth, courage and justice.

Conscience is a needle that points steadily to the Pole Star : "Do this action, it is right." It warns you also: "That is wrong, do not do that."

Conscience is a great ledger. All your offences are written and registered in this ledger. It is a terrible witness.

Conscience is the best Minister of Justice. It threatens, promises, rewards and punishes, keeping all under its control. If conscience stings you once, it is an admonition; if twice, it a condemnation. To act against the conscience is to act against reason and Divine Law.

### How Conscience Operates

When you do a wrong action, the conscience pricks you. It says to you in a clear small shrill voice, "Do not do this wrong action, my friend. It will bring misery to you." A wise man at once ceases to act further.

Conscience warns you like a teacher or a friend, before it punishes you as a judge. It tells you to behave in the right manner.

Cowardice asks, "Is it safe?" Avarice asks, "Is there any gain in it?" Vanity asks, "Can I become great?" Lust asks, "Is there pleasure in it?" But conscience asks, "Is it right?" Conscience prompts you to choose the right way instead of the wrong, and informs you that you ought to do the right thing.

The first impulse of conscience is apt to be right. If there are pin-pricks and twists in the conscience, if there is a sense of shame and depression in the heart, know that you have done a wrong action. If there is exhilaration and cheerfulness, feel that you have done a virtuous action.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the full text of a quotation used by Dr Roles. If time permits it could be read at the meeting.