

THE STAIRWAY

Somehow we have to really understand that we are almost entirely mechanical, and that this means almost all our own precious thoughts, feelings, opinions and prejudices. To move to a new place we have to really understand, and accept, where we are to begin with. Like the tale of the traveller in Ireland asking his way to Dublin, being told by the old man leaning on a gate, “Well, I wouldn’t start from here.”

The Western System gives the concept of a preliminary stairway of understanding up which we must climb before we are fit to start upon the Way. Somewhere along this stairway we need some powerful experience, or energy, to allow us to abandon the deep conviction that we are in control of our own progress.

How can we come to really believe the extent of our mechanicalness? We know perfectly well from our knowledge of the world around us that everything outside our personal affairs is indeed mechanical. There may be a Conscious cause for the universe, even a conscious cause for our own individual existence, but the manifestation of this cause unfolds through the working of Laws by which our concepts of good and evil, right and wrong, in fact any dualistic point of view, are revealed as being deeply subjective and conditioned by the context and the aim of the experiencer. To eat is good, to be eaten is bad, and yet everything eats and is also eaten by something else

Mechanicalness really means the results of the working of Laws. After the first conscious cause of the creation where the Absolute divides into its three-fold aspect, the next stage is the introduction of time, space and ‘mechanicalness’. From here on down, each stage becomes increasingly complex and limited in its sphere of action. As embodied human beings we cannot be free of mechanicalness, but we do have some choice as to what level of mechanicalness we inhabit—in the same way that H₂O can be ice, or water, or steam. Only the silent impartial observer which is an ‘atom’ of the Absolute, Real I, can be entirely free; everything else must proceed according to the laws which themselves cannot be changed.

This is why the system tells us that we must first become free of the wrong working of our centres and begin to be able to act as we were really designed to do. This is what is happening on the stairway; the lowest levels of mechanicalness, those which preclude the possibility of an observer, are being left behind.

Every thought, feeling, movement and response is mediated by a range of controls which operate beyond the limits of our perception. Mind, emotion and body are all sustained by a network of different functions, neural, chemical, hormonal, muscular, digestive, etc. etc. all of which input and respond to all the others, the whole subliminal process miraculously creating the unified being we regard as ourselves. But this apparent unity—and the ever-changing sense of individual self which arises from it—is paradoxically both the growing point and also the biggest obstacle to any further development.

To pass beyond the limitations of our habitual mechanical ‘unity’ and allow it to give way to a greater, more conscious unity, we need to involve all three centres. This is the basis of the fourth way. We begin with the mind, but to *convince* the mind we need not only to emotionally experience the truth of the ideas but also to support the process with the practice of attentive

action and movements. Being attentive keeps us in the moment, now, and, in this moment, trying to practice the ideas will arouse the necessary emotion.

In this way, briefly to begin with, we can become trusting enough to abandon the restraint that the little 'I' exerts upon every moment. For it is the inexorable grip exercised by this little 'I' which constantly squeezes the present moment into the past or the future.

(Modern neurology describes how the seat of this little 'I' is the dominant left hemisphere of the brain, constantly examining the present in the mirror of the past and assessing and planning strategies and consequences for the future. The passive right hemisphere, if allowed, produces an untrammelled awareness of the moment, 'now', and a much wider feeling of our essential unity with the whole creation. To consciously remain silent and attentive in the moment is the beginning of the process of integrating these two separate 'unities' into something greater.)

In practice, this brings us to the often unpalatable idea of 'service'. If we come to understand that we are not the 'doers' but really are the instruments of an unknown creator we find that the only way to develop, to remember this relationship, is "to decide that all our activities are done because of the inspiration of the Real I, done only for the Real I, and are being done by the forces made available by the Real I."

We are told that: "the relationship between Real I and the little individual I is always present. There is never a moment when the relationship is not working, it is just that we forget this relationship." To remember it we need to follow something like this advice from the Shankaracharya:

- a) Physically, you devote yourself to universal service, considering yourself everyone's servant.
- b) Emotionally, be magnanimous and give importance to the Supreme Power, keeping in mind its unlimited benevolence.
- c) Intellectually, you identify your true Self as being one with the Absolute, who witnesses everything and shows Himself in all the forms you see.

This describes the level we need to be at to start upon the Way. The manifestation is still mechanical, but certainly less so than we habitually are. It certainly also describes how we would like other people to act towards us. It works by the triad of refinement in all three centres. Discrimination with the mind. Goodwill in the heart. Attentive action with the body.

A little genuine practice of this automatically creates the energy to practice more; and by doing so we can come to attract the miraculous energy of higher forces to help us on the way.

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