

Self-remembering: the Conscious Shocks

A crucial observation was made last week: that even if we do attain a state of self-observation and become aware of our mechanicalness, if we do begin to see that we are indeed the automaton animated by invisible strings the System describes, even so, the possession of this knowledge seems to make no appreciable difference. Following this remark it was also suggested that we cannot in fact remember ourselves because we do not know what Self-remembering is.

Perhaps we cannot remember our true Self, Real I, the Atman, because we are simply not acquainted with it? Or, even if we do remember, the memory has dimmed from lack of use? Even the logical method of thinking tells us the nature of the Atman must be beyond the range of our usual state of consciousness, confined by the limited energies at its disposal. It is as if we are trying to see the radiance of the full spectrum of light whilst wearing infra-red goggles. Unless we let them slip and open our eyes, the possibility of seeing real light is simply unavailable—life remains a monochrome experience. And even if we do this, the initial shock of the light may dazzle us for a long time.

The System describes the process of waking-up in terms of energy, vibrations—in terms of an octave of refinement requiring two extra shocks, two stages in an ascent where something new must come in to help us.

It is said that in the ordinary course of things, in our normal daily life, impressions, everything we see and hear, feel and think, everything we taste, all this enters our awareness but somehow does not make much impact—whether arising from within or without our impressions do not naturally develop in the way that the food we eat and the air we breathe are transformed and metabolised into the refined energies that fuel and light up our higher functions. Sometimes, of course, external events demand an emotional reaction; an unexpected jolt, pleasant or unpleasant, may be so strong that an impression goes deeper and wakes us up, but this is not the rule—as Mr Ouspensky liked to remind us, we can't count on living off the money we may find in the street.

The System proposes that the energy for developing impressions, for lifting our state, is in fact ready within us, waiting to be used; we just don't know how to access it. Our ordinary impressions can move us more, but to do this they need to be lifted by an emotional energy that will imbue them with a new life and a greater meaning.

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The impressions octave, like the octaves of food and air, is an ascending scale of refinement which works by the triad OCN. In this triad a substance must meet with an energy two levels higher than itself in order to rise to the next step. But even at the first step, where impressions enter as Do 48, there is not enough of the higher energy, and it must be found with the help of a different triad—ONC. Impressions come in as O 48 but there is not enough C12 in the right place to raise them up to the next note of the scale. The impasse is resolved only when some extra energy, N24, is provided by the emotional centre—some sharp dart of feeling, sattva, comes in to enliven the O48, opening a channel and allowing the required C12 to flow in. This is called the first conscious shock and it is self-remembering that makes it happen—for when we wake up to ourselves in the moment the right kind of emotional energy begins to flow.

Heart and head are now both present, the cerebral hemispheres begin to communicate more freely and if this state is maintained for a little time we begin to experience the next step of the octave of perception, Re 24.

As long as head and heart remain in contact—and this requires only continued stillness, the quiet, impartial observer must remain present—then the octave continues naturally to the next step, Mi 12. Here, impressions become exceptionally vivid and emotional but because of our ever changing state, the succession of little ‘I’s’ clamouring to take the stage, the likelihood of this new emotion turning suddenly negative becomes much greater. And when impressions become too strong we often block them out, preferring to keep ourselves safe in the comfortable status quo at level 48. From early childhood we learn many strategies for doing this within ourselves but with age the process becomes habitual, operating automatically below the threshold of consciousness, and so we sometimes unwittingly reject the good as well as the bad for any surge of strong emotion can seem to threaten our equilibrium. This moment when impressions become intensely emotional signals the interval, the threshold that must be crossed to become aware of the full presence of the Atman, and the System teaches that to pass this threshold, to raise our perception to its full potential, a second conscious shock is required.

Anytime our impressions become more vivid and intense this process is beginning to happen naturally, some ‘emotion’ is coming in from somewhere—but it comes in many forms. It may be visceral as when we unexpectedly meet danger; or sexual, in a moment of strong attraction; and all the feeling interactions with the people in our lives, all the joys and crises of our domestic and worldly life provide emotional shocks which can lift and intensify our appreciation of the present moment. But for the shock to be truly conscious, if it is to lead us to the realisation of Real I, this particular octave demands a specific, special energy—for these natural shocks in life are habitually met by personality, the shifting array of little ‘I’s’ who arrive with an ordinary, personal level of emotion that tends just to fizzle out or to become negative, so allowing us to fall gratefully back to the humdrum continuum of life at the level of H48.

If we really want the impressions octave to develop to the stage where the second conscious shock can come in to complete the journey home—the eternal moment ‘now’ as the small I realises, rather than just remembers, that it is in truth the Atman—for this we need to learn to generate a very special emotional attitude; in some sense we have to fall in love with our true Self.

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The first development of the impressions octave allows us to be aware of ourselves in the moment, to be present, and if we allow this state to prosper despite whatever may be happening around and within us it becomes clear that neither this little self, this automaton of whom we become momentarily aware, nor the self who is observing it—neither of these are the real Self we are trying to remember. So how can remembering something we have only heard about—though perhaps we have momentarily glimpsed it from time to time—how can this dim little memory be transformed into a full-blown realisation?

In the original System it was thought that the same triad, ONC, was needed to fill the interval where the second conscious shock is required, and that this involved a tremendous struggle with negative emotions—the interval was only to be passed by somehow transforming our own

negative emotion into positive. Though some few people did find success in this way it was always perceived as being a rare event, terribly difficult to achieve, and only following the meeting with the Shankaracharya and the discovery of the method of meditation was it understood there was actually another way.

The second conscious shock comes also from above. It can be given to us directly by the Atman. We may call it 'grace' — for which we can only wait in stillness, without expectation—and it is given by yet another kind of triad, NOC, in which we, the aspirants, are the passive force and here we need neither act nor struggle. The N, neutralising force, the concentrated sattva of positive emotion is the gift of the Atman, coming to meet the waiting, passive O, the little self waiting quietly, just being present with confidence and patience; and the resulting C, the active force created by the meeting of these two, is a new kind of life. No active effort is called for; indeed, effort, any personal desire or visualisation, may usually preclude it.

The first conscious shock can now be understood as being the way to prepare us to wait for this miracle, and the process itself, as explained, presents the resolution of the paradox that we *cannot* do, and yet we *must* do. The System shows there is in reality nothing to be done—and yet somehow we must practise the discipline of learning to remember the true Self, of waking up, coming into ourselves in the moment, much more often than we usually do. We must do *something* in order to realise there is nothing to be done.

In the Shankaracharya's terms we only take small steps, like infants, and then the Param Atman will surely come running to meet us. In practice this 'discipline' is not as daunting as it may sound; the word in this sense means just 'systematic support', some regular practise. As well as the meditation there are the gaps, the moments of stillness between activities and desires where this higher, enlivening energy is naturally available. Even in the ordinary life we cannot live without these moments but if we become more aware of them and extend them just a little they become the open doorway to an entirely new life. If we consistently foster some loving memory of our Creator at these moments—which happen many times every day—and if we allow the actions and desires that follow these gaps and this attentive remembering to be performed not entirely for ourselves but also in service of the Divine, then the remainder of the journey will be completed for us. We merely prime the pump, the miraculous flow is freely given.

Although we know all this, we have the theory, even priming the pump can appear a difficult task, even these little steps seem to tire us quickly; but it is also true that if we genuinely want to, if we really see the sense of it, we can learn to rest in the moment more often and for longer. We just have to remember that little bit of sattva we always have ready and bring it to bear on the moment, now, whatever it may be. Dr Roles assured, and demonstrated to us, that this new habit can be established within three weeks if we really want to—but, as with anything we want in life, we have to make a resolution, a short term commitment to ourselves, and stick to it, giving it good professional attention with good will and good humour. It's as if we're suffering amnesia and have forgotten who we are in love with, but we are beginning fitfully to remember we are in love with someone.

The Saint, Nisargadatta, gives a description of how it came about for him.

I am now 74 years old. And yet I feel that I am an infant. I feel clearly that in spite of all the changes I am a child. My Teacher told me: "That child, which

is you even now, is your real Self. Go back to that state of pure being, where the 'I am' is still in its purity before it got contaminated with 'this I am' or 'that I am'. Your burden is of false self-identifications — abandon them all." My Teacher told me—"Trust me. I tell you; you are divine. Take it as the absolute truth. Your joy is divine and your suffering is divine also. All comes from God. Remember it always. You are God, your will alone is done."

I did believe him and soon realized how wonderfully true and accurate were his words. I did not condition my mind by thinking; "I am God, I am wonderful, I am beyond." I simply followed his instruction which was *to focus the mind on pure being 'I am', and stay in it*. I used to sit for hours together, with nothing but the 'I am' in my mind and soon peace and joy and a deep all-embracing love became my normal state. In it all disappeared—myself, my Teacher, the life I lived, the world around me. Only peace remained and unfathomable silence.

From 'I am That'

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