

LIFE

If meditation can be said to unlock the door to the Treasury, there is also the Marketplace where the wealth from the Treasury is to be spent. There is one view that one should be committed to life, to politics, social issues or football and throw oneself into it, lose oneself in it. Live life with passion. On this view the best one could do for society is to charge oneself up with the energy of Sattva, and go out there and dish it out. At the opposite pole is the attitude that one should try to keep detached, to keep a space from what goes on, not to be swept up in life, not to be identified, not to waste the precious energy of meditation.

Of course there is also a middle way, but the idea of the need for detachment leads to consideration of the kind of influences we are subject to (or indeed subject ourselves to), and the extent to which they affect us (or indeed the extent to which we allow them to affect us). There is a tendency in our teachings to regard what is found in ordinary life as something rather low, full of second-rate or third-rate influences; just the passing show. The System clarifies this by speaking of three types of influence:

Man lives in life under two kinds of influences. . . The first kind consists of interests and attractions created by life itself; interests of one's health, safety, wealth, pleasures amusements, security, vanity, pride, fame etc.

The second kind consists of interests of a different order aroused by ideas which are not created in life but come *originally from schools*. These influences do not reach man directly. They are thrown into the general turnover of life, pass through many different minds and reach a man through philosophy, science, religion and art, always mixed with influences of the first kind and generally very little resembling what they were in their beginning.

. . .

We will call the first type of influence influence A and the second kind of influence, influence B. [P D Ouspensky, *Psychological Lectures*]

It was then explained that by becoming open to B influences, someone could build up a *magnetic centre*, which would help them to find a school. It was said of the teaching of a school that it

is different from both influences A and B and may be called influence C.

. . .

Influence C may be transferred only by word of mouth, by direct instruction, explanation, and demonstration.

The exposition of the idea of different influences was related to the beginning of the journey, finding a school, but the idea applies also to day-to-day life, and is worth exploring further. First, though, we should be quite clear about the differences between the influences and also whether we have found the distinctions between them to be useful and accurate. In particular there is a grey area between influences B and C in that there is now much easily available writing, directly

stemming from influences C, but not in an oral tradition as such. Perhaps we could all give examples of what we would put in each category.

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There is a very striking passage about the 'true Self' which the Pewsey Group had in last week's meditation meeting:

Sit comfortably, feel your body and let your body relax. When the body is relaxed then the Pranas find themselves moving and agitating for the body gives them no more moving support. Here one feels nervous. Slowly the Pranas also adjust and a smooth and balanced breathing follows. Then of course comes the mind, the most mobile of all. When it doesn't find moving support of body and Pranas, it picks up points to play with and starts rocketing. It would rush to any minute source of sound and engage in unnecessary duels with any thought or idea it can provoke. At this stage one needs to create a feeling of expansion of body so that the body covers the whole of the Universe. Once this is established, everything would seem to happen in your own body, and the Self emerges as the observer. Now the Self takes command and observes that certain things are happening here or there, and he lets them happen without bothering about them. He only watches whatsoever is happening. This deprives the mind of its power, and it loses hold and speed and ultimately quietens down.

This of course applies specially to the meditation, but something similar happens from time to time in the waking state: suddenly, the Observer appears. Then, what is described by the writers of the *Philokalia* as *nepsis*, watchfulness, happens:

Watchfulness is a continuing fixing and halting of thought at the entrance to the heart.

[St Hesychios, 8-9th c. *Philokalia*]

For the Desert Fathers and the later Orthodox monastic tradition, watchfulness was the means by which sin was to be overcome and by which God was to be found in the stillness. Perhaps for us it is in part the way by which useful influences are welcomed and the others left alone? Or, at the level of the Observer, are all influences the same and just toys to be played with? And can certain influences trigger off the appearance of the Observer?

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If there is time could we return to a further discussion of the ideas of the System, how they might be presented today?

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