

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 10

LEARNING TO KNOW OTHER PEOPLE

Up until now, we have described the means for knowing oneself. It is now time to examine how we can learn to know other people.

In order to know ourselves, all we have to do is observe. By the same token, in order to know other people, all we have to do is observe them.

There are two ways of knowing other people : by means of psychological theories, which explain *what* to observe and analyse, but only give us fragmentary knowledge, and by means of observation, which places more emphasis on *how* to observe. The second method proposes that we practice observing from a neutral state, without judgement and without analysis, in a state of receptivity that includes all of our senses. It is easiest to begin with the physical observation of our postures and attitudes. This kind of observation develops our intuition and renders all theories useless. But this of course presupposes that we have the will to make this kind of effort.

Conversely, when we find other people boring or prefer theoretical books to real observation, this prevents us from really knowing other people. Ordinary man functions mechanically according to his attractions and repulsions, which have their source in his animal instincts. When we are not spontaneously attracted to something, we become bored.

Man on the Way is capable of freeing himself from this mechanical functioning by making the effort to observe other people, by considering them to be subjects of his study, for example. Through his observation of other people, he acquires greater knowledge of himself, but also of man in general. And in this way self-observation and observation of other people complement each other.

Any change in ourselves must necessarily begin with observation. We can only change the person we really are and not the image we have of ourselves, and the only way we have of truly knowing ourselves is self-observation. To this end we must create a place in ourselves from which we observe, in other words, an observer in us.

The first thing we notice is man's mechanical functioning in his three centers (physical, emotional, and intellectual), no different from a machine; this is the beginning of the path.

Man is born with an essence that represents the active force, and a personality that is at this point still a blank slate, representing the passive force; his mother serves a neutralising function, as the third force – the role of the third force is to organise, structure, and permit the two other forces to exist.

When he is separated from his mother and enters into contact with ordinary life, which now becomes for him the third force, his personality begins to grow, becoming itself the active force, while his essence diminishes, now serving the role of passive force. This is the usual situation of ordinary man. There are also certain people who do not succeed in fully detaching themselves from their mother, whose personality does not have enough strength to develop correctly; both the personality and essence of these people remain incompletely developed.

By practicing a spiritual path, a second birth is possible, and our essence is able to grow once again. For this to happen, we must first have an awareness of our current state and a nostalgia, or curiosity, with respect to a higher state of being. This requires efforts and a voluntary decision, as it does not happen automatically

in a single lifetime. Then the forces can be redistributed once again: the Path becomes the third force, the essence becomes once again the active force, and the personality the passive force.

Our work on the Path and our efforts of observation permit our essence to develop and refine our capacity to observe and perceive this essence. If we were to employ the image of an egg, the essence (the yolk) develops from the positive qualities of the personality (the egg white), eventually breaking the false personality (the shell). It is to be noted here that breaking the egg shell is not a gentle, but a forceful action, and requires shocks and efforts.

Our essence is still imperfect, incomplete, and contains both what we have inherited (such as our temperament) and the condensate of all our previous incarnations. Certain aspects of the personality – our features and character – have their source in weaknesses of the essence, which are integrated into the personality between the ages of one and three. A feature of the essence may be transformed, but only by means of intense, conscious, and repeated efforts; it is not exclusively dependent on heredity.

In the same way, a transformation of our physical body is possible in spite of the structure imposed on it by heredity. This phenomenon can arise when a particular kind of contact exists between two people, in which their etheric and astral bodies intermingle.