

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 11

TOWARD SELF-MASTERY LEARNING TO CONTROL THE OUTWARD MANIFESTATIONS OF OUR INNER LIFE

In order to learn to know other people, we can begin by observing them physically – their gestures, their physical attitudes, and so on. But our observation of other people must naturally be discrete; the other person should not notice that we are observing him!

This observation often leads us back to ourselves, as we have the very same behaviors and the very same mechanisms. And it brings us to the realisation that the other person is a mirror of ourselves. The difference between the other person and myself is no more than appearance and illusion, since we all function mechanically.

The observation of other people, and what we learn about ourselves in the process, teaches us to see that our emotions and feelings, and our entire inner life, are manifested outwardly in our physical expressions.

If we truly observe ourselves neutrally, the long-term effect is that we develop intuition; we perceive without fail what the other person is thinking or feeling just by observing the outward signs.

When we learn to observe, we realise the extent to which we are unconscious and asleep, and the extent to which the lives other people seem to us dreary and monotonous. For us, on the other hand, this practice of observation makes our lives richer.

We are habitually identified with the external things that are happening in our lives; we generally do not even know what we are in the middle of experiencing.

The frequent return to a state of observation creates, like meditation, a space between the one who is observing and what we are observing (our thoughts, our emotions, etc.). Help, or an influence of a higher nature, can then enter this space, but only if we are in a conscious state.

In reality, we are dependent on higher help. Alone, man can do nothing. When he becomes aware of his mechanicalness, there is the risk that he will fall into despair. We can only escape from this mechanicalness and unconsciousness by means of a path, a teaching that guides us, and by means of school work, which casts light upon what would have otherwise remained hidden. We can only evolve through help; all the rest is merely a preparation for receiving this help. In order to receive help, we must prepare ourselves by purifying our negative emotions and feelings, and prior to this, we must of course have observed the existence of these negative emotions. Once we have seen our negative emotions, in order to not become identified with them, we must learn to observe them without judging ourselves or feeling guilty, and then we must find a strategy for working against them. In this way, through struggle, our evolution can progress, and we can receive help.

Man has very little control over the outward manifestations of his inner life (his thoughts, emotions, and so on); he either expresses them, like the child with his natural spontaneity who screams and stamps his feet when he is angry, or he represses them, manifesting them instead in his physical tensions, for example, or through nervous tics, trembling, dirty looks, or – as a last resort – illness.

The goal of an adult human being is to control the outer manifestations of his negative emotions, without repressing them and without creating tensions. He only manifests an emotion when he has decided to do so, and not because he is overcome by the impulse of the emotion.

With ordinary man, life enters him through his senses and acts upon his physical center. Then the same information enters his emotional center, which reacts: it likes or it doesn't like. His thoughts arise from his emotions, and these are the source of the actions he takes in his life. This is what ordinary man calls will, whereas he is in fact doing nothing more than obeying his desires and wants.

Evolved man reverses this process; at a certain point he decides to place himself under the influence of higher principles. He acts according to these principles and his will is directed toward applying them. His thoughts arise from these principles – he thinks according to what he has really understood – and from this will and these thoughts, emotions of a higher quality are born.

The work of evolved man is thus to escape from his mechanicalness and act consciously. To this end he observes other people and himself, and after a certain time he learns to control the outward expression of his emotions, down to their very subtlest manifestations.

But this is not easy.

A practical exercise can help us progress more rapidly, first in our efforts of observation, and afterward in the control of our outward manifestations. It consists in looking in a mirror when we are in a negative emotion, or talking when we are in such an emotion in order to hear the tone of our voice, or watching how we move and walk differently. Thanks to the practice of this exercise, we start perceiving our slightest tensions and begin to be able to control them.

Furthermore, when we begin to have control over our outward expressions, we begin to be able to control the emotions themselves, and then we are no longer the plaything of these emotions. But we have to do so without repressing them; we have to make these efforts because we have decided to work on ourselves. In this way we gradually succeed in separating ourselves into two parts, and this allows us to choose what we want to express. Then we are rendering a great service to ourselves and a great service to other people, since we no longer pollute them with our negative emotions.

We can notice how we also have an influence on other people simply through what is physical, through our gestures or positions, which have a mechanical action upon the other person's psyche and intellect.

Some day we can even decide to outwardly manifest the opposite of what we are feeling, like an actor, but consciously; but before this it is preferable to begin with simpler efforts.