

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 28

THE DIFFERENT STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS THE MATERIAL "I" THE REACTIVE "I" THE DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF THE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL CENTERS

The only real way for man to arrive at self-knowledge is through self-observation, which he can practice in two forms, the apparently passive form of meditation and the more active form of self-remembering. At the outset, this observation permits him to know what he is not, the illusion he takes himself to be, and particularly his automatic, mechanical way of functioning in his three major poles or centers, the higher pole of thought, the median pole of feelings, and the lower pole of the physical center, with the awareness that each of these poles is itself divided into three sections, likewise physical, emotional, and intellectual. This will permit him to become aware of his own fragmentation and the extent to which he is dominated, one after the other, by each of these parts, preventing him from being himself.

Observation is always done from the outside. Observation creates a separation, a space between the one observing and what is being observed. For what pertains to the external world, this is obvious. But when we decide to observe ourselves, there is this same separation ; an observing "I" can thus observe a given part of our body or become aware of what we are thinking, as well as the way these thoughts express themselves in our body when they contain an emotional charge. We can thus enter more and more deeply into ourselves, for example by being centered in an "I" that is conscious of the "I" observing the part of ourselves that is observing. We could continue even further and enumerate quite a number of successive "I's," each of them different from the others.

This actually implies increasingly higher levels of consciousness, starting with an ordinary, material, low level of consciousness and progressing toward a higher consciousness after passing through several intermediary levels. For ordinary man, there exists nothing higher than ordinary consciousness, as he lives practically exclusively in the material world. This consciousness consists above all of an "I" that acts physically, to which are added an emotional "I" and an "I" that tries to think from time to time. This ordinary consciousness may occasionally have more extraordinary experiences, but these are very fleeting and do not repeat themselves often. This sometimes occurs because it is possible, for various reasons, for a sort of breach or opening to appear in ordinary consciousness, through which a higher consciousness may then enter. But since ordinary man has not yet completely awakened to this level of consciousness, he is incapable of remaining in it, and he naturally cherishes the memory of such a blessed state for the rest of his life.

These different levels of consciousness correspond to different energies, of which there are twelve in all ; the material "I" corresponds to the sixth, automatic energy, the reactive "I" to the energy immediately above it, sensitive energy, the divided "I" to conscious energy, and the true I to creative energy.

Unless he undertakes a specific work on himself to overcome his ordinary state, man functions primarily in the material “I” with its automatic energy and the reactive “I” with its sensitive energy.

The material “I”, man’s lowest “I”, is composed of the material sections of the different centers; these sections are said to be mechanical as they function exclusively with automatic energy (we recall that man consists of three centers, a physical, emotional, and intellectual center, and that each of these centers is in turn divided into three sections, a material or physical, emotional, and intellectual section). Ordinary man, driven by his material “I”, functions indeed like a machine, acting from the material sections of his centers. He perceives only what is of a material order and believes only in physical things, since for him the material world alone is real. Although he is capable of having feelings and emotions, which are always connected to his physical and, at best, social instincts, he cannot perceive them in the other person, in whom he sees only a material object that he seeks to use for his own benefit ; from an intellectual point of view, he thinks like a machine, that is, with a rote memory that simply reconstructs things exactly as he has learned them.

Another way of recognising people who function in this material “I” is that they tend not to respect other people’s well-being, and particularly the well-being of what belongs to all human beings, namely the earth. The degradation of the earth is related to the fact that humanity is living increasingly in the material “I”, and if our age has had one ecological insight, it is that the human race is intimately bound up with the future of the earth.

Certain people, men no. 1, live predominantly in the physical section of their physical center, and their interests are related above all to their desires and physical needs. Other people, men no. 2, exist mainly in the physical section of their emotional center, harboring a very critical attitude toward other people and generally seeing only their weaknesses; they tend to base their relationships on their own need to dominate, and are incapable of making the slightest compromise since they are only able to see one single aspect of things. The third category, men no. 3, have their center of gravity in the physical section of their intellectual center – the formatory apparatus – and are capable of accumulating a great deal of knowledge by making use of their memory, and even of appearing very logical, but they are lacking the capacity for synthesis, the sign of true intelligence.

All of these people who function from their material “I” are eternally unsatisfied, unconsciously searching for something, the seed of which they carry within themselves and which they can never find in the material world. Indeed, the human spirit exists only when it is cultivated, and if we have developed nothing over the course of our lives, when we die, nothing will remain.

It goes without saying that this material “I” exists in every person, in the ordinary man just as in the greatest of sages. The important thing is to know how to use it rightly, that is to say, to use it for entering into contact with everything that is of a material order; but we must remember that when we function exclusively with this “I”, we are no more than a machine.

The second level of consciousness is characterised by the reacting or reactive “I”, which is formed by the emotional sections of the different centers and functions with sensitive energy. Sensitive energy is the higher energy that we are capable of controlling voluntarily ; in contrast to automatic energy, it presents us with a possibility of choice, although this does not yet represent real choice but only an impulse toward something. But its most important contribution is that it

enables us to have real consciousness of both the external and internal worlds. Our entire life is bound up with this energy, which is never neutral, as it constantly either propels us toward or away from something. We are thus continually driven by our attractions and repulsions, our sympathy or antipathy toward people and things. This part of ourselves that is constantly driven by feelings cannot lead us to reality.

This reactive energy is present in all the centers, and it is especially pronounced in the young child, who functions practically exclusively in his reactive "I". True education consists in helping the child to move away from his reactive "I", since otherwise he will never learn to become free, remaining the eternal slave of his moods and desires. If this "I" is predominant in an adult, it is going to drastically limit his life, which he will pass constantly seeking out what he likes and avoiding what he does not like, giving rise to behavior that is completely lacking in common sense and often harmful in many ways. These people, who only function at the level of what they happen to be feeling, have a totally subjective vision of the world, which they believe nonetheless to be objective, as they are imbued with the conviction that their truth alone is valid in spite of the fact that it changes according to the whim of their momentary moods; they are themselves incapable of recognizing this, believing themselves to have a stability that they do not have. They may even show considerable intolerance toward people who do not share their attractions and aversions, taking their own individual reactions to be objective. The truth, however, is not a matter of what we like or do not like.

The unfortunate fact is that most people take themselves to be this reactive "I", and this prevents them from having any real contact with other people and things and thus from understanding them, since their feelings serve as a wall between them and this understanding. And this is also true, alas, of their understanding of themselves.

In the spiritual domain, the reactive "I" can present a major obstacle, since people who live in this "I" generally have very strong convictions based on what pleases them ; they tend to cling only to what they like and have difficulty hearing anything else or adopting a different point of view. The seeker of truth must learn to master this sensitive energy in order to be capable of not identifying himself with his reactive "I", with all the feelings of attraction or repulsion that exist in him, remembering that his true I is quite different from this reactive "I".

Nevertheless, just as the material "I", the reactive "I" has its place in us, since it permits us to fully experience our feelings, and our goal is not to become indifferent. Someone who begins to understand and master this energy preserves it in his sensitivity or sensibility, where it is in its place, and he actually becomes more and more sensitive as a result. Sensitive energy, like automatic energy, enriches the people who understand and control it, but ruins those who do not, overflowing out of its own proper domain and making them its slave.

The goal is thus to succeed in mastering our reactive "I", because when we have done so, it ceases to steal the sensitive energy that would otherwise be lacking for the development of our higher centers or higher I. To this purpose, observing and understanding this lower "I" do not suffice; we must struggle against our attractions and aversions and occasionally do what we do not like doing and not do what we like doing. When we practice this exercise, we become more conscious of this sensitive energy, of the manifold reality of life and the necessity of opposites. We cease to be conscious exclusively of fragments and become capable of perceiving a larger unity, of perceiving reality as a whole. At this

moment the reactive “I” becomes a real source of energy for us, transforming our lower “I’s” into something higher.

The study of the centers’ different sections which describes, among other things, the “I’s” that most characterise man – such as the material and reactive “I’s” – is among the most effective for understanding the true functioning of human nature. There exists another study of considerable interest in this respect, namely that of the three centers. Each center consists of a positive and a negative part. We will presently describe the emotional and physical centers with reference to the three sections of their positive part, physical, emotional, and intellectual.

We will begin with the different sections of the emotional center. In the physical or mechanical section can be generally found all tendencies toward lower feelings such as envy, jealousy, egoism, hypocrisy, spitefulness, cruelty, and so on, as well as all forms of sentimentalism, easy humor, and our need for sensations. In the emotional section are to be found feelings of a religious or moral order, aesthetic emotions, and the true sense of humor, which contains no form of cruelty. Finally, there is the intellectual section, which contains the faculty of artistic creation ; for this artistic element to truly manifest itself, however, the intellectual sections of the instinctive and moving centers must also participate. If this is not the case, for example, if we have not worked to develop our artistic technique, the artistic impulse of this intellectual section of the emotional center will manifest itself differently, in the form of dreams. This is the reason why it is important to try to remember our dreams, to recall them, in order to develop this intellectual section (especially when we do not possess artistic technique).

This section can also be developed by becoming interested in art, by experiencing artistic emotions and giving our voluntary attention to all emotions that are of a moral, religious, or spiritual order. But the methods *par excellence* remain meditation and self-remembering, which also permit us to harmonise all of our centers.

This intellectual section of the emotional center is the part of us that one day becomes our magnetic center. And our higher centers are born here when they receive, also in this section, influences of type B and C. When we function more and more often in this intellectual section of our emotional center, as well as in the intellectual section of our intellectual center, this prevents our energy from being wasted and renders it available for the construction of our immortal body.

Moving on to the different sections of the physical centers: we recall that the physical center actually consists of three centers, the moving, instinctive, and sexual centers, and that among them, only the moving center has three sections. Its mechanical section governs all the movements that we can characterise as being automatic or instinctive, particularly those that arise from imitation. Its emotional section is where we can find the pleasure of movement and the desire to move, which manifests in the child’s delight in playing and the adult’s pleasure in sports. In the intellectual section, as in the mechanical section, there exists a form of imitation, but here it is imitation of an intellectual order – imitation of the voice, the sense of speech. It also contains an element of creativity, the possibility of mechanical invention.

The instinctive center governs everything that is of an instinctive order – our reflexes, blood circulation, digestive movements, and so on. We can enter into contact with the functioning of this center by observing how our thoughts, feelings, and emotions exercise an influence upon these instinctive movements.