

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 36

THE SEVEN LINES OF WORK ON ONESELF

On a Path, Work on oneself takes place along seven lines, and each line is necessary. It is essential to work on all seven lines at the same time in order to progress on the Path. When we neglect one of them, this hinders our progress. In the following, we will examine and try to understand each of them.

Among these seven lines, the first three are active, the fourth neither active nor receptive, and the final three receptive. In each of the two groups of three (three active and three receptive), the first line is from the outside toward the inside, the second takes place on the inside, and the third is from the inside toward the outside. The fourth line, neither active nor receptive, corresponds to an inner state.

The first line, which is active, corresponds to the necessity of seeking outside of ourselves what we are lacking, in order to become more than who we are, in order to progress on the Path. We have understood that alone, we can do nothing, and we accordingly seek the help of what is higher than ourselves. The first step consists in meeting the Teaching. The following step consists in all of our efforts to gather and receive the knowledge present in this Teaching. This is not simply a matter of taking in information, but also of understanding this information, of making it our own in such a way that the knowledge becomes alive in us.

In order for this first line to be complete, we need to go beyond the theoretical knowledge that can be acquired from books. This is possible through our efforts of observation, which permit us to verify the reality of the information for ourselves. It is utterly useless, for example, to know that we are divided into a multitude of little "I's" unless we have actually observed this in ourselves. We therefore need to assimilate the knowledge we have received. Otherwise it remains at best useless to us, or at worst it turns into a poison, just as undigested food in our body.

The second line, also active, takes place within ourselves. It consists in the inner Work of struggle against all that is negative in us. This presupposes that we have seen, thanks to the knowledge we have acquired from the first line, what is lower in us, all our anger, greed, vanity, jealousy, and so on, as well as how these features and emotions imprison us and prevent us from attaining a higher level of ourselves. The second line is the struggle against a part of ourselves that prevents us from changing. This Work of destruction entails suffering, the suffering caused by separating ourselves from a part of ourselves to which we have become attached. It is certainly not pleasant for someone who is greedy to become aware of his excess and begin to live with more moderation, or for someone who is vain to see the illusion of the image he is always projecting to other people and to renounce this image. If we were capable of instantaneously understanding everything to which these negative features give rise in our lives, we would bypass this suffering completely, since we would then be capable of immediately separating ourselves from what is negative in us. We would see into the illusion of it all and detach ourselves, without any need for suffering.

Normally, we do not suffer when we throw away a useless thing. Unfortunately we are lacking the energy to do so inwardly, and we generally need to suffer much and make many efforts before we finally understand. But this also means that our efforts to understand enable us to diminish our suffering.

The third line (again active) is from the inside toward the outside. It can be summed up in one word: service. Through our service, we give back what we have received in the first line. This is the great principle of spiritual economy: the more we give, the spiritually richer we become, the opposite of the way things work in the material domain. This is further reinforced by our understanding that when we do not give back what we have received, it is bound to poison us eventually.

Work on ourselves on the second line allows us to step out of our egocentrism and develop the qualities of service. Service concerns, first of all, the people who are close to us or whom we often see, and it can take on very different forms, material, emotional, or intellectual. In a larger context, it may consist in transmitting the Teaching at all levels, from giving conferences to simply hanging up a poster, with the aim of serving the evolution of humanity and the planet.

The first three lines are active, and the last three are receptive. In the fourth line, we are neither truly active nor truly receptive. This line is very particular, and we will return to it after having studied the receptive lines.

Receptivity does not mean passivity. Receptivity implies will. Passivity means letting ourselves be swept along, giving in to something – to sleep, for example. Someone who sleeps during the conferences can be characterised as passive. On the other hand, someone who is sitting quietly, listening, and trying to understand is in a state of receptivity. Passivity is not far-removed from sleep, whereas receptivity implies a state of wakefulness.

In contrast to the first, active line, which consists in seeking something outside of ourselves, the fifth, receptive line consists in allowing something from the outside to enter us on the inside. In this line, we allow ourselves to be helped. This means that we are in a particular state, the state of receptivity, which permits the instructor or group to help us. It means that we listen to the instructor without telling ourselves that we already know it all. It means that we listen to other people without making justifications when they point something out to us that concerns ourselves. It means that we listen to the person who is speaking in the group while remaining immobile. This is the line of humility, and it is the line that particularly needs to be worked on by the people who are convinced that they already know everything and are always right.

The sixth line, which is receptive, takes place within ourselves. This is the line of meditation, in which we sit down and let things unfold inside us. For this to be possible, we need to be attentive to what is happening in us, observing the thoughts that arise, our body's reactions – its tensions, its tendency to make us come out of the posture, etc. – but without remaining attached to them. The moment we are no longer in the observer, who does nothing other than being attentive without focalising on any one thing in particular, we are no longer in this state of receptivity. At this moment we are nothing more than that what we are attached to, whether it is our thoughts, emotions, or physical sensations such as pain. This line of meditation, of self-observation, is the line of self-knowledge.

The seventh, receptive line is from the inside to the outside. It corresponds to the manifestation of what is most profound in ourselves: the Absolute, God, divine grace, the baraka, the divine in us. Such a manifestation is only possible when we are in an inner state of receptivity, but it does not depend on our own decision; we can only prepare ourselves to receive this force that transcends everything ordinary man can possibly imagine. This is the faith that moves

mountains. It is given to us, but at the same time it exists within us, not outside of us as the people who pray in churches and holy places would have us believe.

To receive this force, it is necessary to work on the other lines. Nevertheless, there is no direct connection between the efforts we make on the other lines and the reception of divine grace. We can neither provoke nor deserve it. Without divine grace, man on the Path would not have enough energy for his evolution, for attaining what is Higher in himself. This line is especially active in those people who encounter the Path without really having searched for it, and who then can do no otherwise than follow it, even if they had been perfectly happy with their life as it was before. They have been kindled with the fire of the Teaching, because in reality, they have already been connected with it for a long time.

Neither active nor receptive, it is very difficult to characterise the fourth line. In contrast to the seventh line, in which the divine takes possession of man and propels him to action, this line is a particular state of being which certain people refer to as a state of grace, in which everything becomes easy for the person who is in this state. It is as if the ego were temporarily put to sleep, and we act justly and appropriately toward everything that presents itself, without effort. This state is characterised by a natural altruism, a remarkable effectiveness, and a presence to everything around us. This state does not last, but appears spontaneously and may disappear from one moment to the next. It is closest to what is called the state of “self-remembering,” not the effort of self-remembering, but the true state of self-remembering which appears spontaneously. It can only appear when we have already made sufficient efforts on the Path. It corresponds to the meditative state, not in seated immobility, but in action. When we have attained a sufficient degree of evolution, we can provoke this state ourselves, since we know where to find the energy for doing so.

In order to evolve harmoniously on the Path, it is indispensable that we practice each of these seven lines. It is up to each of us to determine which of the lines we neglect. Some people who are very active, for example, will have a tendency to forget about the receptive lines, neglecting their meditation, for example, whereas others who are by temperament more focused on their own inner world need to make sure they devote sufficient attention to the third line, the service of other people. When we have the impression that we are stagnating, or even regressing on the Path, this is the sign that we have neglected at least one of these seven lines.