

COURSE SYNTHESIS NO. 7

INDISPENSABLE ON THE PATH OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE: SELF-OBSERVATION AN EXERCISE FOR DEVELOPING OUR CAPACITY OF OBSERVATION TOWARD THE MASTERY OF OUR EMOTIONS: OBSERVATION OF THEIR PHYSICAL MANIFESTATIONS

In order for us to evolve, our knowledge of ourselves needs to be as precise as possible, since in order to change something, we need to know what to change. And self-knowledge necessarily begins with self-observation.

One of the essential tools of Psychoanthropology consists in the practice of self-observation. To observe means simply to watch – how we move, how we react, how we think.

When we observe, our tendency is to judge or analyse what we observe. But when we judge or analyse, the process of observation comes to a halt; we are in a different center, but we are no longer in the observer. We must return again and again to this self-observation, since the more we observe, the better we will know ourselves.

The goal is to gradually succeed in creating an “observer” in ourselves, and this observer becomes a center from which, progressively and more and more subtly, we will observe our outer and inner functioning.

The serious practice of observation has several effects: we will very soon start to become aware, for example, of the difference between what we really observe and our (often flattering) image of ourselves. This observation needs to be as complete and impartial as possible; for this reason it must have the following eight essential characteristics:

Without criticising

Without feeling guilty

Without wanting to change what we observe

Without analysing

Without becoming identified

In a precise manner

With all of our senses

As often as possible

The “observer,” which is first to be found in the intellectual center, gradually changes its position until it becomes an autonomous entity, and we call this the “magnetic center” or “essence.” The gradual reinforcement of this “observer” creates a space which allows us to distance ourselves to an increasingly greater extent from the elements which we are observing – physical, emotional, and intellectual – and which we characterise as a “machine.” The space that is thus created allows higher elements to enter. In particular, we will gradually be able to substitute more and more noble attitudes for the habitual mechanical and conditioned reactions of the “machine.”

In order to accelerate the creation of this “observer,” two types of efforts or exercises are proposed:

The first is an effort on the intellectual center through the “watch exercise¹”. At the very beginning, this exercise will serve to show us how difficult it is for us to remain concentrated and attentive. With practice, it will permit us to improve our capacity for observation and concentration, teaching us to focalise our attention in several directions simultaneously.

The second is an effort on the emotional center; by practicing it we can learn to distance ourselves more rapidly from our negative emotions. Before practicing the exercise, we must remind ourselves of the following:

The principle cause of all our suffering is our negative emotions. These negative emotions, which we create and which we grant space inside us, originate in our childish attitude, which consists in accusing outer events instead of accepting and welcoming them simply, and then constructively searching for solutions.

To practice the exercise:

When we are in the grip of a negative emotion, we must not use the ordinary “recipes,” such as invoking “positive feelings,” reasoning and rationalising about the situation, “escaping” into a physical activity (digging a hole, going running, taking a cold shower, etc.). Instead we must adopt the reflex of observing one single thing : what is happening inside us physically at the moment. We must observe this as completely and as precisely as possible.

True observation permits us to avoid losing the energy we normally would have lost in struggling against the manifestation of the negative emotion, allowing us instead to gain a certain amount of energy, which is going to permit us, unexpectedly, to find a reaction to the situation that is more just – because something higher is capable of entering.

¹ This exercise consists of three stages, and we must not pass on to the following stage until we have succeeded at the preceding one:

1. **Stage 1** : watch the second hand, keeping your eyes fixed on it, for one minute.
2. **Stage 2** : identical to **Stage 1**, plus : count from 1 to 12 during the first 30 seconds and from 12 to 1 during the following 30 seconds. Repeat this stage several times in succession (a maximum of 3 times), until it becomes difficult.
3. **Stage 3** : identical to **Stage 2**, plus : inwardly recite a text that you know by heart.