

5th May 1969

READING ONE

Letters have been received from readers in different parts of the world on that small book "Waking Up" asking for a bigger one on similar lines. They say they have friends who would welcome it. A lot of these people live in place where our meditation is not at present available; so it is more the "aim in view", rather than a particular method that they want to know about. They realize that the available pictures of man in the world are rather futile and are not leading people anywhere near happiness, and they feel sure that there must be a truer picture to be had.

It was evident to us that a much better book than that first one could be, one ought to be written, and now an attempt at such a book has been completed in rough and is being called tentatively "The Expansion of Consciousness" till the right name turns up. There are parts of it over which I should like your help. One of these is at the beginning; have is the first section: [There has to be a "Personal Story" because people who don't know us are saying that, in order to understand the book, they would need to know something about the author and his line of approach.]

"PART I THE SEARCH

1) Personal Story

I suppose many people would agree that the driving force behind the restlessness of the younger generation all over the world to-day is a profound discontent with all the established outlook and opinions with which their parents and ancestors have so long appeared to be satisfied, and a desperate desire to find out and think for themselves whatever the cost. The more serious realize that you cannot uproot the whole fabric of civilization without losing the little you have, and feel that something new has to be grafted on.

No one of course has yet come up with any practical suggestions as to how this can be done, and most seem to entertain the vain hope that a solution will come up from "free discussion", when all the "free discussion" we hear consists in shouting the other fellow down!

The very negative and despondent attitude of the older generation particularly in this country, contributes to the unrest in the form of a sort of 'creeping paralysis', for which there is no justification. For there is no reason to suppose (in spite of threats like the Hydrogen bomb) that humanity is "on the way out". Geologically speaking, our species 'man' is young—perhaps at the experimental school-boy stage on the way to growing up into 'homo sapiens'. Though very clever and intelligent, it is obvious that he is a long way from being wise. He must go much further in the discovery of himSelf.

That, at any rate, will be the attitude expressed here by this author whose only qualification, perhaps, is that having himself been discontented and restless for many years he was prepared to try anything. During all that conventional education at public school, university, and medical school and the first part of the ensuing 40 years of private and hospital practice, I suffered from the Voltairean scepticism that the "Art of medicine consists of pouring drugs of

which one knows little into “patients of whom one knows less.” I wanted to know myself and my patients better and find out why some people got ill. Prepared to enjoy all sides of life, I found everything good and enjoyable to be surrounded with artificial barbed-wire entanglements and rigid ‘establishment’ opinions and regulations.

After learning from anybody I could find and experiencing everything I could get my fingers on, I came to the conclusion that the source of Truth, happiness, success and good relationships with other people lies in oneself; that there are different ways of reaching this source for different people; and that the cause of all our troubles lies only in ignorance of our own nature, knowledge of which (in spite of the scientific explosion) remains on a quite medieval level.

On the way to this conclusion I met, in the 1930’s, the Russian philosopher, P.D. Ouspensky, whose vast knowledge and courageous search for Truth impressed me so much that I stayed as close to him as possible until his death in 1947. This man used to say that the secret of life lies in “finding and remembering oneself”, and, that being so, there must have existed a simple natural method by which anyone could achieve this. He himself had never found it, but if we, the large circle of his friends, would only persist in this search, we should *interest* someone who knew the method and the Knowledge derived from it. In any case, whether we succeeded or not, there could be no search more rewarding.

It was not until 1960 that our discovery of a system of ‘meditation’ derived from India, but recently introduced to the Western world, took me to that country where I was introduced to one of the heads of the Tradition which had centred round this system for twenty-five centuries (and even longer). At one of the early conversations on the shore of the Ganges at which there were present about seventy Westerners and a larger number of Indians, some remarks by this man were translated as follows:

“All our troubles arise from not remembering ourselves. This is difficult to explain. It is as if each of us lives in a small unfurnished house with bars on the windows, not knowing that there also exists a large and spacious house with all the furnishing one could need. Through meditation one first of all comes out of the small house and for a while one sits between the two; later one comes to realize the existence of the big house, so that after a time one can go there when one wants to and even come to live there. Through this meditation, in short, we begin to be what we are; but first we must come out of what we are not. We are not those turning thoughts, those worn-out opinions, those conflicting desires, that changing ego. Well then, what are we? We are everything in creation and all creation is in us. The splashing river, the song of birds are telling us what we are, but we never listen or remember.” (1)

Naturally these words, so similar to those of the Russian, rang a bell; this seemed to be the end of the search; and, contact being established, the author and some of his friends have stayed with him on five subsequent visits, the verbatim answers to our questions being translated and recorded on tape.

It was quite a long time before the importance of the words ‘to come out of what we are *not*’ became apparent. *The mind becomes what it takes in and dwells on*; and conversely, if you don’t attend to something it ceases to exist for you; but if you try to get rid of it, then it grows and grows, because that very effort just fixes your attention on it more and more.

He has later told a story to illustrate a practical test of this statement which anyone can apply:

“A man came to a master to be instructed in meditation. ‘Before we go on to that,’ said the Guru, ‘try to remember anything you saw on the way here.’ the man confessed that the only thing he could remember was a monkey in a tree making offensive gestures. ‘Well then, first go into the next room and come back when you have got that monkey out of your mind.’ After an hour the man came back bathed in perspiration and said, ‘In spite of all my efforts, the monkey is only getting bigger and bigger.’ The Guru then explained to him that trying to get rid of something only fixes your attention on it. ‘If you find it so difficult to get rid of a chance impression like the monkey that way, how would you expect to get rid of all the debris that has accumulated and taken root in your mind through the whole of your life up to now. The meditation will teach you a quite different and better way.” (1)

Christians torment themselves with their sins; psycho-analysts delve for the causes of neurosis; both often fix what they are trying to get rid of. Punishing a child is in most cases less effective than diverting his mind.*

*(Insert):Ouspensky used to tell a Russian story to make this point: Passers-by were intrigued one day by seeing a man sitting by the roadside with tears streaming down his face, eating red peppers. The more he ate the more he cried. In response to kind enquiries he managed, between sobs, to stammer out, ‘I’m punishing the fool who bought these dam’ p-p-peppers.’

The essence of true meditation is to fix your attention for even a few minutes on the one thing you want, and consign all the rest to oblivion. Other practitioners have found the same thing. The unknown author of the 14th century ‘Cloud of Unknowing’ (2) recommends that when we strive to reach God by ‘a sharp dart of longing love’ we put all that we don’t want under a ‘cloud of forgetting’. The Zen masters make students disown what “is not theirs” by getting them to see the thing clearly in its right perspective:

“A Zen student came to Ban-Kei and complained, ‘Master, I have an ungovernable temper. How can I cure it?’ ‘You have something very strange,’ replied Ban-Kei, ‘show me this thing you have.’ ‘At the moment I can’t show it to you,’ replied the other. ‘When will you be able to show it to me?’ asked Ban-Kei, ‘It arises unexpectedly,’ replied the student. ‘Then, concluded Ban-Kei, ‘it cannot belong to your own true nature; if it did, you could show it to me any time. When you were born you didn’t have it, and your parents didn’t give it to you. Think that over.” (3)

But there is much more to be found in those words “come out of what we are *not*” than our own ingrained habits of thought and feeling. Most of us are content to borrow other people’s opinions, believe all the lies we are told, and imitate the fashions and behaviour which

happen to be “in” at the moment. To realize our own individual potential and become creative people, we must discover the source of inspiration, happiness and Truth hidden deep within ourselves, and then acquire the courage to live according to its dictates, which can be called our “conscience”.

“Though love repine and reason chafe,
There came a voice without reply:
‘Tis man’s perdition to be safe
When for the Truth he ought to die.”

Discussion

Though I would like to begin this book in this way (because many important things open up from here) there is something in the suggestion that it needs a fuller “lead-in”, in the form of a short introduction along these lines:

What is the main cause of the discontent and unrest seen everywhere to-day? While it is essential to human progress that each new generation should be impatient for something new, what makes to-day so different? Talking with more responsible people, students and others, reveals something valuable and important if you leave out what seem to them irrelevant and unsatisfactory issues, like politics, colour, anarchy, leftist infiltration, etc. The genuine students seem to have a valid case when they claim that while the whole of society and the way of living is different to-day, the university curriculum created centuries ago for a stratified society, has not changed with the times.

This book attempts to give evidence for the view that, while surface conditions are always different, the fundamental cause is always the same; and that though remedies have always existed, they too have to move with the times.

I would like you in your discussion to express your views for me and suggest better ways in which they can be formulated.

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- (1) Shantanand Saraswati, Shankaracharya of the North: Personal communication.
- (2) “Cloud of Unknowing”, Ed. by Abbot Justin McCann, Burns Oates, London, 6th ed. 1952, ch.7, p16.
- (3) “101 Zen Stories”, Senzaki, Paul Reys, Ryder & Co.