

## CHAPTER XIII

*Different categories of human actions – Right and wrong use of triads – Study of human activities – Remembering the starting-point – Inner separation – Learning to see false personality – Masks – Buffers and weaknesses – Study of methods – Alarms – Impossibility of studying the system from an utilitarian point of view – Philosophical, theoretical and practical language – Three degrees of school – Right thinking – Long and short thoughts – Role of intellect – Different values – Right and wrong curiosity – Critical attitude – Influencing others – Story of the sly man and the devil.*

I WANT TO GIVE YOU SOME NEW MATERIAL TO THINK ABOUT. DO you remember the starting-point when the idea of triads was explained? It was said that every action, every manifestation is the result of the conjunction of three forces. This is the principle, and we must now try to understand how to begin to study it. In the study of triads and three forces one must be very careful and slow, using the principles given in the system and trying to apply and enlarge them when it is possible. One should particularly avoid hurry and invention.

The first point in understanding the meaning of triads is to remember that manifestations of energy, any kind of action, in the world, in man's activity, inside the human machine or in external events always consists of triads. We spoke of six different triads comprehensible to the human mind, each representing a different combination of forces. In order to limit the question, not to make it too complicated in the beginning, we will consider only human activity. But here we come to a difficulty. We have never thought of activity itself being different. We know the difference between wood and metal, for instance, and we will not mix them. But we do not understand that one action can be as different from another as two different objects. For us, in ordinary thinking, actions are the same, only one starts with one aim and has one result and another starts with another aim and has a different result. We think only about motives, aims and results, but not of actions themselves.

Q. Is then motive less important than we think?

A. It does not determine the action. You may have one kind of aim, but your action may be of a different kind. This happens very often. People start doing something with a certain aim in view, but their actions are such that not even by accident can this aim be ever attained. It is necessary to co-ordinate aim with action, otherwise you will never attain what you want.

This is what we must understand in relation to our actions and we must try to find different categories of actions. When we begin to look at human activity from this point of view, remembering that there are different kinds of actions, independently of results, intentions, emotions, material and so on, we will begin to see it. It is not the capacity to see that is lacking, but knowledge of this principle, which is new to us.

We cannot begin at once to look for all the six different triads which can be found in human activity, for they will become mixed in our minds. We must find standards for two, three or four kinds, as much as we can see. Look at your own actions and at those of the people around you and you will see certain differences. It is good material for thinking. All the absurdities of life depend on the fact that people do not understand that certain things can be done with only one kind of triad. They use a wrong triad, a wrong kind of action, and are surprised that the results are not what they wanted. For instance, it is no good trying to teach by beating, or trying to persuade with machine-guns. Find your own and better examples of the wrong use of triads and you will see that certain results can be obtained only by an appropriate action. Observe yourself and life in general; if you turn this study on yourself, you will see, for instance, that if you wish to know or change something in yourself and if you approach this problem in a formatory way, you will never get anything. Formatory thinking is an example

of an action that does not lead to understanding.

Q. Can you give an example of different human activities?

A. Take two simple examples in order to understand the idea. To build a house, effort is needed at every moment, every single brick must be put into place with a certain effort; no triad passes into another triad without effort. At last the house is built and furnished. Then, if you want to burn it, you just strike a match and put it to something inflammable, and the house is burnt. If you go deeper into it you will see that these are two different activities. You cannot build a house by the same activity as you burn it. In the second case one triad passes into another without any effort, automatically, after the first initial effort of striking a match.

Examples of the third kind of triad, in our experience, can be found only in conscious work, not identified work, or in some activity that has a peculiar quality of its own that cannot be imitated by others, such as artistic creation. Efforts at self-remembering and not identifying belong to this category. If you think about it you will understand that in order to paint a good picture, for instance, one must use a different triad from the one used in building a house or the one used for burning a house; something else is needed.

Another triad may be called invention, discovery, craft.

If you think about these four different activities, they will give you material for observing and comparing. Try to see why and in what they are different.

Q. I do not see the distinction between craft and building a house.

A. In one case only energy, only effort is necessary; in the other something more is needed, some knowledge or capacity for invention.

Q. Did you put efforts at self-remembering with art?

A. Yes, it is the same triad. Simple, blind effort, as in physical work, will not help in self-remembering. Neither will effort in the sense of invention, adaptation, help.

Q. I find it difficult to think of analogies to these activities.

A. Naturally, because you are not accustomed to think in this way. It is quite a new way of thinking. You are trying to think in the ordinary, logical, formatory way, and this is not sufficient. It is necessary to think not about words, but about facts. If you find four different kinds, in what do they differ? They differ in the form of effort.

Q. Is formatory activity destructive?

A. It is not destructive by itself, only deficient. But activities that begin with negative emotion are always destructive, they can be nothing else. Very often people do not realize this.

Q. I do not see how I can ever be sure into which category to place an activity?

A. You know enough to start. For every result there is a certain method. Different methods have different results. If you have a block of wood, you have to deal with it in a different way from dealing with a sick man. It does not matter about placing them in different categories. Example is the beginning of the whole thing. We try to pretend that things are more difficult than they are, but in reality we know all about it. We know that murder is one activity, and writing poetry is a different activity. We cannot murder successfully with the kind of energy used for writing poetry.

Q. Are there also different types of thinking parallel to different types of activity?

A. Yes, certainly. Every kind of activity has its own way of thinking, although we are not aware of it. But what happens is that people act in one way and think in another. Sometimes the two coincide, but often they are in a wrong relation to one another.

Q. But is not action the result of thought? Does not right thought always mean right action?

A. No, not at all. One can think rightly and act wrongly. Understanding is one thing; will and purpose, effort and decision are another: they are two different degrees of the thing. It may be said that right thinking is a step towards right action, but it does not yet mean that the action is right.

Q. How can one set about using the right triad?

A. At moments of effort, or soon after, you may realize that it is a wrong effort, that you cannot get what you want with it. For every definite aim there is a corresponding effort. If you catch yourself using a wrong effort, it means it is a wrong triad. You may not be able to use the right triad, but you can stop using a wrong one.

What is new about this idea of activities is that they are different *in themselves*. For us action is action. At present it is enough to understand that the results of actions we see in life – particularly if we do not like them or find fault with them – are often due to wrong triads used to attain a given aim. If we understand this we will understand that by a given activity we are bound to arrive only where we do arrive and nowhere else. To arrive at some other place we should use a different activity. But at present we cannot choose, because we do not know.

Q. Can one learn what actions to use?

A. Yes, certainly. You can learn from work. School-work can be done in only one way. So you try one way, another way, a third way and, sooner or later, you come to the right way. In ordinary conditions you cannot see the results of your actions, there are too many possibilities of self-deception; but in school-work you cannot deceive yourself. Either you get something or you don't, and you can get something only in one way. There are other methods of learning about different kinds of action, by intellectual understanding, but we will wait for that. I should like you first to understand the general principle better.

You see, effort, aim, motive, all enter into the word 'action' and the idea of action, so actions *are* connected with motive but not in the way you think. A certain kind of result can only be obtained by an appropriate action; at the same time motive also determines action. Motive is sometimes important, but with the best possible motives one can do the worst possible things, because we use a wrong effort, and a wrong effort will produce a wrong result. Suppose you want to build something and use the kind of effort that can be used only for destruction; then, instead of building, you will only destroy things, with the best intentions.

I have given you some examples, try to find parallels. Try to think, for instance, that neither the action that builds a house nor the action that burns it can paint a picture; at the same time the action by which you paint a picture is not necessary for building a house – a much simpler effort is required for that. Only a few people can paint good pictures, but everybody can take part in building a house. Then the same effort which is necessary for building a house is not enough to invent, say, a new kind of electric bell. And the action by which you invent an electric bell will not produce a good picture. Different kinds of action mean different triads, but at present it is better to leave triads and not to think which action means which triad, for it will only make you lose the meaning of the idea. You must only try to see the differences. From ignorance or impatience people often use wrong triads and explain their failure by bad luck, or by the devil, or by accident.

Q. When you carry out a certain action, should you try to think how that particular action compares with the examples you mentioned?

A. We should think by emotional understanding whether the action corresponds to our aim. Then, partly by mind, partly emotionally, we can realize whether the way we are going on can or cannot lead to the desired result. Sometimes we can feel this. Then we can either stop it or try to do it in another way.

For instance, you are talking to somebody, trying to persuade this person that you are right about something and he is wrong. The more you argue, the more he is convinced that he is right. Stop, and you may suddenly see that this person understands you. This happens very often. The more you argue, the more difficult it is for him to understand. Or you may even pretend to agree with him and in that way make him understand what you want. This is only an example, but you can find many examples yourself.

Q. I suppose in a case like that we should be capable of knowing whether to argue or agree?

A. If you do not identify you will see. Arguing is one way to persuade, agreeing is another. Generally what prevents us from seeing what method to use is identifying. It is a question of approach. Some approaches are right and others are wrong. If you go on observing you will see.

Q. As regards the law of three, can one observe it in daily life?

A. Yes, in self-study you can, but with patience. You will see that the system always plays the part of the third force between desire to change and inertia. If we have a sufficient supply of the third force, we are successful. In the work the first force is desire to learn and decision to work, the second is resistance. The more we work, the more resistance grows. Only with the help of the system can we conquer resistance. It is a question of consciousness and will.

Well, try to talk about something else. We cannot hurry with this question of different actions. It is actually beyond our possibilities of understanding at present, but if we go slowly, we may get something out of it. Almost every idea in the system is a test. If one can pass one test, one can go further.

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Please ask any questions you like and I will try to answer them. Many things get forgotten and become dull because we forget the starting-point. But the moment we connect things with the beginning, we see why we came, where we are going and what we want to get. We realize then what we have got from the system and see that we cannot expect more because the material we have is not sufficiently digested. We must always remember the starting-point, remember that it is connected not simply with words but with search for the miraculous. The system would have no meaning if there were no search for the miraculous.

For instance, I am surprised that you do not ask more questions about separation between 'I' and (for me) 'Ouspensky', because there must be many things that are not clear for you yet. In speaking, in writing, in thinking about the work or the people in the work one must always ask oneself 'Who is speaking?' 'Who is writing?' 'Who is thinking?' If you do that, then, after a little time you will be able to distinguish who is speaking and will begin to recognize the different voices. You must know your false personality and find its features, its faces, manifestations and voices. You must know what it consists of. Sometimes you can actually hear when false personality speaks. It is not much use going on without that, for you will only go on turning round and round in the same circle and always returning to the same spot. When you can be sure that it is really 'you', you can speak. You must already know and mistrust your false personality.

Q. If we do this, will it increase our progress in the work?

A. Nothing can be guaranteed. It should be important to do that without a question of future reward, because the idea of separation is sufficiently important in itself.

Q. How can I put more pressure into my work to wake up my desire to fight false personality?

A. Catch a moment when your false personality wants to do something or does not want to do something, and stop her. When you find a conflict between you and her, it will depend on you how you will act. If she starts fighting, this creates an emotional storm. If there is no fight, emotions are asleep. All things come through friction, friction between the place where 'I' can grow and false personality. Work on oneself begins from the moment one feels this division between what one trusts in oneself and what one cannot trust. What one can trust is entirely created by work. Before, it was just an empty place, but if one begins to work, something begins to solidify. But, I repeat, one can know it better and trust it more only if one knows one's false personality, otherwise false personality will mix with it and pretend to be real 'I', or the beginning of real 'I'.

Q. Is false personality a kind of mask?

A. People wear one or another kind of mask and believe that they are exactly like this mask

when in reality they are quite different. Each of us has several masks, not one. Observe your own masks and other people's masks. Try to realize that in different circumstances you have different masks and notice how you change them, how you prepare them and so on. Everybody has masks, but begin with your own. We never study masks, so we must study them; it is very useful. Very often we begin to acquire masks at a very early age; even as school-children we wear one mask with one teacher and another mask with another teacher.

Q. Is it a kind of self-protection, or is it imitation?

A. It is a kind of self-protection, and yet not only that. Sometimes, as you say, it has to do with imitation. You can see fifty or sometimes five hundred people wearing the same mask.

Q. If you took off the mask, what would you find underneath?

A. It is not so easy. You will find that behind this mask there is another mask. Or, if you do not work, it cannot be taken off – it grows to the face. But if you work, this mask is not necessary at all and, without it, life becomes much easier – there is less lying.

Q. Isn't a mask sometimes an ideal which one lives up to? Sometimes it makes you appear better than you really are.

A. Sometimes better. That is why I said it is not only a protection. You see, we want to know ourselves. When we find something in ourselves that we do not know, we have to study it. We think we know ourselves, and now we find that all we know is masks, and that masks change. What they are, how they come, what their purpose is – that is another question. We have to study masks themselves, not the theory of masks. We always try to escape into theories – theories are safe.

Q. Is it possible to see false personality as a whole?

A. It is possible, but not at once. It is necessary to work, to study it in yourself and in other people, then, little by little, you will see it as a whole, but for a long time you will see it only from one side or another side. Even that is better than nothing. But you must realize and never forget that it is there. That is the first aim of schools. If false personality remains on top, you cannot have anything – it will take everything to itself.

Q. About different voices, I notice that my voice changes with different emotions and different people.

A. Who has ears to hear can hear many changes of voice. Every centre, every part of centre, every part of a part of centre has a different voice. But few people have ears to hear them. For those who can hear it is easy to distinguish many things. For instance, if you speak the truth it is one voice, if you lie it is another voice, if you base things on imagination, yet another. It is quite unmistakable.

Q. Do you mean the intonation?

A. Yes, and also the actual sound of the voice. If you train yourself to listen, the emotional centre can hear the difference.

Q. You spoke about the possibility of a wrong separation. What did you mean by that?

A. Suppose I call everything I like 'I' and everything I dislike 'Ouspensky', it would be a wrong separation. The 'I' from which I observe is a point, it has no material existence yet, it is only the embryo from which 'I' can grow. If I give it material existence, it would be wrong.

Q. Should not some weight be given to it?

A. Yes, but only in relation to the work. Who remembers the aim, who wants to work is 'I', the rest is 'Ouspensky'.

Q. I feel I have nothing in me I can trust. If I get a moment of understanding, false personality seems to take it and the part of me that understood is gone. What can I trust?

A. This feeling that one cannot trust oneself comes at different moments in the work as a delusion, as an excuse, or it comes in the real form. But this is later on, at present it is realization of mechanicalness. For work, a certain time and a certain persistence are necessary. Now you must do what you can, with time you will be able to measure the results

of your work.

Q. Is vanity an essential of false personality?

A. It is one of the features of false personality in one or another sense. In some people it may be the chief feature, and then it is very obvious and visible, but very often these features are behind other things and do not show themselves.

Q. If work against false personality is a process, does it mean that one can go up and down?

A. Yes, and you must understand in yourself the power and magnitude of false personality, then you will understand that very often people have nothing else, or even if they have some possibility it is quite outweighed by false personality. False personality decides everything. In ordinary life false personality controls every moment, except perhaps moments when one reads or thinks of something. But when one works and magnetic centre begins to grow, sometimes it happens that false personality may disappear for ten or fifteen minutes and give magnetic centre a chance to manifest itself. That is how false personality disappears. It does not entirely disappear, it just goes away for a time. This is what we must try to do – to make it disappear for a time.

Q. Is it only by separation that one can work on identification?

A. Only. Without realizing the difference between 'I' and false personality all efforts only strengthen the weaker side. As I said, this separation is the basis of all work on oneself. Unless this idea is understood, nothing can be attained, in everything one must start from that. This is the real difference between people in the work and not in the work. People who are not in the work think that they are what they are. People in the work already understand that they are not what they seem to be. This separation must pass through many phases, but it must begin.

Q. When I see what a balloon of false personality I am, is the thing to do to try and see how I got that way?

A. You have to study yourself. Only one thing can help and change your position and that is getting to know yourself better. This implies many things. There are different degrees and depths of realization and understanding. When one understands sufficiently one will do something, one will not be able to sit and let things go on by themselves. Try to make your question more concrete: what is it you have been trying to do and what do you find you cannot? Then we can discuss it. Maybe you begin from the wrong thing, in a wrong way.

Q. Can one find responsibility in oneself?

A. Certainly. But in relation to what? You begin certain work; you have a responsibility towards this work – at least you should have. But who? If you call everything 'I', you must know by now that there are many 'I's; some have responsibility, others have no responsibility, because they have nothing to do with this work. It is only a question of observation to see that.

Q. I see that it all comes back to the question of how to understand more.

A. I am trying to explain, first, how you should study yourself. You must find your particular obstacle which keeps you from understanding. When you find it, you must struggle with it. It needs time, it cannot be found at once, although in some cases it is so clear that one can see it almost immediately. But in other cases it is necessary to work before one can see it.

Q. Will group work help in this?

A. You must not put too many hopes in group work, because, although it is useful for showing many things, experimenting, testing and so on, in group work one is in an artificial atmosphere, artificial circumstances. The moment one comes out of a group, one is in natural circumstances. So group work may show the way, but work must be in ordinary circumstances. What is the use if you are very good in a group, and become identified and a machine the moment you walk out of the group? It will be quite useless.

Q. If someone in a school here has a very bad feature, such as bad temper, is special

assistance given to overcome it?

A. Only when one has studied and used all the general methods does one come to special characteristics. It is necessary to place this feature, to find the cause. Causes may be different. Some bad feature may be so strong that it may be the last to go – one cannot tell beforehand. If you begin to struggle with obstacles in the wrong order, you will get no results. At the same time it is necessary to have it in view.

Q. If it is a negative emotion and you observe and resist it, does it change?

A. It depends on the emotion. In most cases it is simply delayed. We do not know how to resist. There is a special key for every emotion. We must find the master key, and for this it is necessary first to know the machine.

Q. If one feels depressed or irritated, what steps can one take against it?

A. First one must try to remember oneself and, secondly, to remember that what is depressed is not oneself but one's imaginary picture of oneself. Man's progress begins from the moment he realizes that what he is is one thing and his imaginary picture of himself is another thing. When he sees that he is smaller, weaker than he thought, that he is all sham, he is on the way to development. He has practically nothing, but enough to develop.

Q. Since I have no permanent 'I', if I try not to identify with one 'I', do I identify with another?

A. You must understand that you were given certain ideas in the same way as Mr Gurdjieff explained them, that is, gradually, first giving one aspect of an idea and then another. Many things are explained first in an elementary way, and then more details are added. When we speak of a man who is not in the work, we say he has no 'I'. If a man starts to study and make efforts, this already means a certain state; he has magnetic centre, and magnetic centre is the beginning of 'I'. So he no longer has the right to say that he has no 'I'. Naturally, he cannot say that he has a complete and permanent 'I', but he must already have a line of action, and this must mean an 'I'. It is not yet fully conscious, but it grows.

Q. What are the kind of things to look for in trying to separate false personality from the rest of oneself?

A. It is necessary to understand the features of false personality – what makes it up. You may be able to see it in the glimpses you remember of the age to which you can attribute the beginning of false personality.

There are two things that are permanent in us – buffers and weaknesses or features of false personality. Everyone has one, two or three particular weaknesses, and everybody has certain buffers that are especially important, for they enter into all his decisions and his understanding of things. This is all that is permanent in us, and it is lucky for us that there is nothing more permanent, because these things can be changed. Buffers are artificial, they are not organic, they are chiefly acquired by imitation. Children begin to imitate grown-ups and create buffers, and some others are unwittingly created by education. Features or weaknesses can sometimes be found out, and if one knows a feature and keeps it in mind, one may find certain moments when one can act not from this feature. Everybody has many features but two or three are particularly important because they enter into every subjectively important situation in one's life; everything passes through them, all perceptions and all reactions. It is very difficult to realize what this means because we are so accustomed to it that we do not notice it; we are too much in those features, we have not got enough perspective.

Q. Must the chief feature necessarily be bad?

A. It is chief weakness; unfortunately we cannot think that our chief feature is strength, because we have no strength.

Q. How can it be weakness if there is no not-weakness?

A. It means mechanicalness. We are mechanical in all things, but in one or two things we are particularly mechanical and particularly blind; that is why they are chief weaknesses, for we

cannot see them. Other things, that are not weaknesses, we can see.

Q. What would you call a weakness? Do you judge by ethical standards?

A. No. As I said, a weakness is a thing in which you are most mechanical. Naturally, things concerning which you are absolutely helpless, where you are most asleep, most blind are bound to be your chief weaknesses, because there are degrees in everything. If there were no degrees in our qualities and manifestations it would be very difficult to study. We can study ourselves only because of these degrees. Even features are not always the same; sometimes they are more definitely expressed, and sometimes, in rare cases, they show themselves to us a little, and only in that way can they be found. But features are difficult to see in oneself. You will realize better what being more mechanical and less mechanical means if we take another example, say illness. If we are ill, we become at once more mechanical; we cannot resist the external world and things in it even as much as we resist them ordinarily.

Q. You say we have nothing but weaknesses. Surely desire to be free is not a weakness?

A. There can be one or another kind of desire. Suppose one realizes one's weakness and wishes to get rid of it, and at the same time one does not wish to learn the methods of getting rid of this weakness. This would be a second weakness, helping and protecting the first weakness.

Q. But if one makes constant efforts?

A. Again, that will belong to the other side of you, to what I call 'you'. This 'you' is not a power or a force, it is merely a combination of certain desires, desires to get rid of something. If you realize that something is wrong, and you formulate a desire to get rid of it, then if you can keep your mind on it sufficiently long, it becomes a certain plan of action; and if this line of action is sufficiently prolonged it can attain results. Only, it is necessary to add again that several different lines of action are needed to attain results, not just one line. We have to work at the same time on one thing and another thing and a third thing. If we work on one line we will get nowhere.

Q. I did not understand it when you said once that we cannot change anything but we must act differently.

A. Try to think: while we still remain as we are, we have to act differently. You cannot change at once, change is slow. But you have many things to do, and if you do them in a wrong way you will never change. Being a machine is not an excuse, although people use it: 'I am a machine, I cannot change anything', and so they do everything as before. Before you came to the work you explained everything by accident. Now you come to the conclusion that to-morrow will be the same as to-day unless you change. You cannot change, but you have to 'do'. So it is necessary to understand on what lines you must do things differently. Everybody has two or three particular things where he is accustomed to act in a certain way and where he must try to act differently. These things are not the same for different people. You remember what I said about knowledge and being? The idea is to change being at exactly that point which is difficult for every person. One person must understand certain features and avoid them, another must understand what is lacking in him and try to acquire it and so on. That is why school is necessary. We need constant reminding about many things.

Q. How can I make better use of moments when I feel the miraculousness of the system?

A. Make more regular efforts, not occasional efforts. You know why I always speak about this? Because it is self-deception to think that one can awake without special and long work. We must realize how difficult it is. Thinking, not thinking, talking, not talking, feeling, not feeling, everything keeps us asleep. Now we speak theoretically about it, but work cannot be theoretical. The fact that one is asleep must become a permanent realization, one must feel it emotionally. But by itself this realization will not make one awake: special efforts are necessary to wake oneself up for a moment.

Q. Is it not necessary to be fairly awake to formulate one's aim?



A. This is another thing. Realizing and understanding are possible in a kind of half-sleep; just as one can find one's way home, so we can find the way to our aim. Awakening is a long process.

Q. Is hesitation between two different aims a sign of sleep?

A. Partly of sleep and partly of incomplete understanding. When one knows what is most important, one has no hesitation.

What we must think about now is methods – how to awake, which forms of work are best. But what is the use speaking about methods to awake if one does not fully realize the fact of sleep. What do you think about it, what do you feel about the state in which you are, have you any observations? This is very important, because there are many things about which we can speak seriously only if we have no doubts about this point. So it is necessary to think about this state and its different effects and consequences. If you take one day of your life and try to go over it, you will see that there are many things you would not have done if you were not asleep, because they were unnecessary or wrong, or that you did many other things rather than one particular thing, because for that particular thing it was necessary to be awake. All these conversations, systems, theories can help only if, together with this, you work on yourselves.

Q. One realizes the danger of being asleep, but has one something to compensate for the increasing fear of unpleasantness brought by awakening?

A. If I am asleep and do not know it, the dangers are there just the same, so if I begin to see the dangers it is better than not seeing them, because then I can avoid them.

Q. I find that when I discover a method to make me remember myself, this works for a few times and then wears off.

A. You must always change those methods; they do not work for long – it is part of our state. Take it as a fact; there is no need to analyse it. The more new and unexpected things are, the better they will work. This is connected with the fundamental principle of all mental and physical life. We observe, in the ordinary sense, only changes in our associations. We do not feel permanent associations; we notice only changes. So when you are accustomed to them, you have to make some kind of alarm; then you get accustomed to this alarm and it does not work any more. If you make your alarm-clock ring permanently, you will notice it only when it stops ringing.

Q. Does the realization of being asleep create its own force for awakening?

A. If one realizes one is asleep, one must study means and methods to awake, but it must cease to be a word; it must become a fact based on observation. Only then is it possible to speak with more precision and more practically about it. When one realizes one is asleep, at that moment one is already half-awake, but it is not long enough; the next moment something begins to turn in one's head and one gets carried away into sleep again. This is why one cannot awake by oneself, why elaborate methods are necessary – one must be shaken and shaken.

Q. And who is to do the shaking?

A. This is the question. A certain number of people who want to awake must agree among themselves that when one of them is asleep someone else may be awake and will do the shaking. But making such an agreement needs sincerity; those people must really want to awake and must not get angry or offended when they get shaken.

Q. What kind of shaking do you mean?

A. Ordinary shaking. One finds one way, another, another. Alarms are also necessary, but it is even more necessary to remember to change them as often as possible. If one feels comfortable, one is asleep, but if one puts oneself in an uncomfortable position it helps one to awake. Pleasant things only help sleep.

Q. Can one find one's own alarms?

A. One can try, but it is necessary to have constant change and variation and choose things

that will awake one. Otherwise we can awake for a second, decide to keep awake and imagine we are awake when we are really doing all this in a dream, with dream alarms. This is why constant control is necessary, and constant verification as to whether they really awake one or simply create new dreams, or whether one just does not hear them any more. There is no reason to take too big a thing; but if one tries to take some small habit and check it, that may serve as an alarm, but only for about a week. Next week another will have to be found, perhaps something in connection with the people one lives with or something like that. One must find many alarms.

Q. I find I am more aware of myself when alone, so I try to see as few people as possible.

A. No, no, you must try to remember yourself in all conditions. If you remember yourself when alone, you will forget yourself when you are with people, and if you remember yourself among people you will forget yourself when alone. If you limit yourself to one set of circumstances, you lose at once. The best time to try to remember yourself is when circumstances are most difficult, and the most difficult circumstances are not when you can choose to be alone or not alone but when you have no choice. And why are the most difficult circumstances the best? Because then self-remembering gives the best results. In easy circumstances, if you decide to be alone or not alone, you may get some results; but if you find yourself in a most difficult situation and still manage to remember yourself, the results will be quite incomensurable.

Q. Is there any action one could take, besides self-remembering, to discourage inner considering?

A. Do that, and that will show you. It is all the same thing: if you consider, you cannot remember yourself. If you want to stop considering you must remember yourself; without remembering yourself you cannot stop considering.

Q. Does self-remembering help one to get over such a thing as poor health?

A. I do not know about that. This is a doctor's business, not ours. We are told that it produces certain chemical effects, but not at once. We can study it only psychologically; we do not know about the chemistry, but we can say that we will *feel* different. Generally speaking, I can say that every time one tries to study the system from a utilitarian point of view, it fails. The system is not made for that. In some cases self-remembering can produce a physical result one does not expect, but if one tries to work for this result, it will not happen.

Q. But isn't physical health important?

A. Certainly one must try to be more or less healthy, so if one is ill one must see a doctor about it. The question of health is important, but you cannot put it together with the question of consciousness. To use these ideas in the interests of health would be quite futile, though quite unexpectedly they may help.

Q. Does consciousness require directed attention and will?

A. All these things: attention, consciousness, unity, individuality, will, are different shades of the same thing. We divide them, but they are the same. We may have them all for short moments, but we cannot keep them. If you observe yourself for a sufficiently long time, you will find moments of practically everything. But only *moments*. Our aim is to increase these moments, to strengthen them, to fix them, as you fix a photograph.

Q. How should one do that?

A. All work leads in the same direction. Finding names for the things we do not possess will not help. It is necessary to do something about it.

Q. Do moments of attention depend on absence of distraction?

A. There is always distraction, only we should have control. If we rely on circumstances, work will be in emotional parts of centres, not in intellectual parts. If it is in intellectual parts, it needs directed attention. Our centres are there, fully developed, waiting to be used, but we do not use the higher parts of them.

Q. Does one have to sacrifice anything besides ‘all nonsense’ in order to attain higher states?

A. ‘Nonsense’ is perhaps a good word. But when you sacrifice it, it is not nonsense for you. Objectively it may be nonsense, but if you felt it to be nonsense there would be no sacrifice.

Q. There is a conflict in me, and though I know what I want it does not make any difference. I still do the thing that is bad for me.

A. This means that you only know. To be able to ‘do’ is different. Knowledge by itself does not give enough power to do what you want. You have to accumulate energy slowly, chiefly by struggle with imagination, with expression of negative emotions, with talking and so on. This will give you the possibility to do what is better for you.

Q. If you had a different attitude towards things, your emotions would be different, wouldn’t they?

A. What different attitudes? And what things? How can I answer? There are millions of things in the world and millions of different attitudes. You see, this is a practical question; it cannot be asked in this language. Try to see how your question will sound to another person, because you know what you mean by different things and different attitudes, but I do not know.

Q. I am asking in connection with right attitudes as a weapon against negative emotions. Does an attitude mean accepting or rejecting?

A. It is not a question of rejecting, it is a question of understanding. When I speak about right and wrong attitudes in this connection, I mean attitudes to negative emotions in general, and negative emotions in general are a subject for conversations about the working of the machine. When you speak about your own observation or your personal work, you must describe which negative emotion you mean: jealousy, fear, anger and so on. There can be no generalization, because negative emotions are very different and attitudes are different. About one you can say one thing and about another, another thing. If we take negative emotions all together, they have a certain common quality, but when you speak about your own observations you must take things on a different scale, not speak of attitudes, negative emotions, imagination, identification, as though they were abstract things ten thousand miles away from you. It is possible to use these terms for the explanation of general features, but you cannot use them when you talk about your own work. You have a certain personal work to do. You come with a certain aim, you want to get something, and something inside hinders you – and yet you speak about attitudes, negative emotions, considering and so on. Speak about real things. These terms can be in a book, and you speak as though you were taking phrases from a book.

You must understand that in our system – or in any system for that matter, whether it is acknowledged or not – there are three different languages, or three ways of thinking philosophical, theoretical and practical. When I say ‘this is theoretical’ or ‘this is philosophy’ in answer to a question, it means that the language is wrong. You cannot ask something in a philosophical way and expect a practical answer. An abstract question cannot have a concrete answer.

You must understand that the difference in meaning between these words ‘philosophical’, ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ is quite contrary to the ordinary meaning attributed to them. The philosophical is the easiest approach, the theoretical is more difficult and more useful, and the practical is the most difficult and most useful of all. There can be philosophical knowledge – very general ideas, there can be theoretical knowledge – when you calculate things, and there can be practical knowledge, when you can observe and make experiments. In philosophical language you speak not so much about things as about possibilities, in other words, you do not speak about facts. In theoretical language you speak about laws, and in practical language you speak about things on the same scale as yourself and everything around you, that is, about facts. So it is really a difference of scale.

Things can be taken on these three scales, and many things change completely according to

the scale on which they are taken they are one thing on the philosophical scale, quite different if taken on the theoretical scale, and on the practical scale quite different again. Try to find examples. Some things can be taken on all three scales, some only on two, and some on one. Even speaking with oneself one must not mix these three scales, otherwise one will create more confusion than there is already and only understand less and less.

Q. Is an effort to self-remember practical?

A. It may be practical, it may be theoretical and it may be philosophical.

Q. Objective consciousness seems to belong to the philosophical scale?

A. Quite the reverse: it is very practical. But if you mean for us, then, certainly, objective consciousness is a philosophical idea. At the same time the study of descriptions of glimpses of this state is possible. If one studies these descriptions and tries to find similarities, it can become theoretical.

Q. I should like to understand more about this division. I do not know what is practical.

A. It means what you can do – in all senses. Only, ‘doing’ can be on one scale or another scale. Doing is always more important than thinking or talking. So if we take it that philosophical is thinking, theoretical talking and practical doing, the practical is more important.

Q. What is philosophical thinking?

A. Thinking on a very large scale. A thing may look very beautiful on the philosophical scale, the same thing taken on the theoretical scale may be a very narrow and stupid theory and, taken practically, it may be a crime.

When I first heard about the division into philosophical, theoretical and practical, I was told that schools of knowledge which came from higher mind could be divided into three classes practical schools were the highest, then came theoretical and last philosophical schools. But ordinarily we understand by practical such things as gardening, making boots and so on. By theoretical knowledge we understand mathematics, geology, etc, and by philosophical we understand what we usually want – philosophy. But according to this system philosophical schools are merely preparatory schools.

Q. When I first came to lectures I thought the word ‘school’ meant a school of thought, but now it seems to be just like the school I was in when I was a boy.

A. Exactly. It is not a question of thought, it is a question of doing.

Q. Isn’t it in a way a school of thought too, since doing must come from thinking?

A. Certainly there must be a certain amount of thinking, for without thinking we can do nothing, but thinking is only an auxiliary process, it is not the aim. In a school of thought it is sufficient to think about freedom, whereas we want *to be* free, we are not satisfied with merely thinking about it.

Q. Would this school be of all three kinds or only one?

A. I think it is better to say all three. It has three sides. Also, some people take the system philosophically, others theoretically and yet others practically. You must not forget that the same thing can be taken in different ways.

Q. Is, then, this system connected with philosophy?

A. It cannot be quite free from it. In some ways it is a legitimate form of thinking. But in thinking of man’s development, of man’s progress, it is better to look for psychological landmarks and not for philosophical ones. Psychological landmarks are facts, the others may be imagination. Even if a man’s intellect is dealing with big philosophical problems, his being may be on quite a low level. But if a man is more conscious, then all his sides can develop.

Q. Who assesses psychological values?

A. There are definite objective signs by which one can judge – definite inner standards. At a certain point they may become objective. As I said, we do not look for philosophical landmarks, we want psychological landmarks. It is very important to understand this. Philosophical conclusions may be just words, rhetoric, but about psychological landmarks there

can be no mistake – for oneself.

Q. Is it lazy to use philosophical thinking?

A. Not necessarily. Sometimes there are things you can take only philosophically, others only philosophically and theoretically. There are things to which we have no practical approach and for which we must find analogies. So sometimes it is quite right. But there are things which you can take only practically, for only then can you value them.

Q. You spoke of ‘thinking in new categories’. This seems to me as impossible as being able to ‘do’.

A. Quite right. At the same time, when you begin to understand different categories, you will be able to think, at least sometimes, in a different way. But this is not the whole description of right thinking. Very often you do not think in right categories because you do not have enough knowledge. Even in our state we can think better or worse.

Q. When I try to think in a new way, I do not know where to start.

A. You have plenty of material – this system. Try to reconstruct it in your mind, to imagine that you are explaining to somebody the ideas of this system. Try to reconstruct what this system says about man and the universe. If you do not remember something, ask other people. This is a good exercise. Either you turn your thoughts and control them, or they turn by themselves. If they turn by themselves, you cannot expect positive results. In order that they should give results you have to drive them.

Q. Shall I have to find new words for all system words and ideas when I imagine that I am explaining the system to people outside?

A. You cannot invent new words. There is a definite rule that when you speak of the system you must speak using exactly the same language in which you learnt this system, and refer to the origin. There will never be any necessity for you to disguise it.

Q. Is it that we cannot think differently until we remove our old ways of thinking completely?

A. No, you cannot wait for this; you have to do so now. One example of thinking in new categories is that thinking must be intentional. We do not realize that whether something is intentional or unintentional changes everything.

Q. If you try to arrest the mechanical process of thinking and to think in a new way, does not the other way of thinking tend to become mechanical too?

A. Yes, everything has a tendency to become mechanical, so when you are trying to do something in a new way you must watch not only what you intend to do but many other things. Identification must not enter into it, imagination must not enter; you must learn to control associations and have only those you need, rather than letting them control you.

Q. But is there any other kind of thinking besides associative?

A. There is controlled thinking. You can limit your thinking to a certain definite point or aim. Associative thinking is accidental. We can go on thinking by old associations without any attempt to change them, or we can try new associations by introducing new points of view.

Q. About right thinking; when I try to think of something connected with the system, it peters out.

A. For right thinking it is not sufficient just to think about the system, it is *the way* you think that is important. You can think rightly or wrongly about the system or about something that has no relation to the system. So it is not a question of the subject but of the method of thinking. And the method cannot be described. You must find examples of wrong thinking and examples of right thinking, and then compare them. We must learn to control our mind; we must understand formatory and defective thinking and be able to use our whole brain instead of only a small part. The only thing that can help in this is to remember oneself. You must try to find some personal connection, some personal interest in the question you want to think about, then that will grow and develop. By personal I mean what you thought before, questions about it which came to you by themselves and that you could not answer, or

something like that. And when you find that now you can see more, that may give a push to other things.

Q. In thinking about some idea of the system it is difficult to keep a line of thought compared with the ordinary things that happen in one's head – the material is so limited.

A. No, the material is very big – something else is limited. Either desire is limited, or effort is limited, but not the material.

Q. I should like to know the cause of the resistance to keeping out other thoughts that come creeping in.

A. There are two causes – the cause of resistance is one thing and the cause of the thoughts that come interrupting is another. The second shows our ordinary way of thinking – we can never keep a line because accidental associations come in. Resistance is another thing; it is the result of a lack of skill, lack of knowing how to deal with it, lack of experience of intentional thinking on a certain line. This capacity must be educated.

I can tell you what is lacking in our thinking, but if you have no observations of your own about it, it will mean nothing to you. Each thought is too short; our thoughts should be much longer. When you have experience of short thoughts and long thoughts, you will see what I mean.

Q. I have been struck by the limitations of our thinking capacity. What do they depend on?

A. Only when you have examples of a better kind of thinking in yourself, using higher parts of centres, having more consciousness, will you see on what these limitations depend. We know our mind is limited, but we do not know in what it is limited. When you know these two ways of thinking and are able to compare them you will know where the difference lies and then it will be possible to speak about causes.

Q. Is the development of a man with a very good intellect bound to be quicker than that of another whose intellect is not so good?

A. Sometimes yes, sometimes no; not so much can be done by intellect as by balance of centres and development of consciousness, because even in the ordinary state man 1, 2 and 3 can be more awake or less awake, more conscious or less conscious. A man with a good intellect may be quite asleep, and then he may be too sure of his own intellectual achievement and too identified with it to start working. His intellect may stop him. This often happens. Often intellectual development prevents study because a man is too argumentative, demands definitions for everything, and so on. Development of intellect alone is not sufficient, very soon work on emotions becomes necessary.

Q. I noticed that people who have never thought often seem to find less difficulty with the work than others who have thought. Which is better?

A. Both are no good – one who does not think and one who thinks too much.

Q. Does the same thing apply to people who are considered brilliant in life?

A. People who are considered brilliant may be very different, so it is difficult to speak about them all in one category. They may be really brilliant, they may be just pretending to be brilliant, or other people may pretend that they are brilliant. But if you mean people who are very identified with their brilliance, then it may be very difficult for them, only not as a result of their brilliance but as a result of their identification. Sometimes an advantage in life means a disadvantage in work, for the better man 1, 2 or 3 one is, the more self-will and wilfulness one has to conquer. The easiest and most advantageous from the point of view of the work is to be quite an ordinary man.

Q. Is it not essential to become successful in life? Or should one be unidentified with life activities, whatever the result?

A. Both are necessary. Success is not dangerous in itself, if only one does not identify with it. The aim is not success or failure, but non-identification. Success may help in many things.

Q. How big a part does intellect play in the system?

A. Intellect plays a very important part because we begin with it. It is the only centre which obeys itself. But development of intellect can go only up to a certain limit. Possibilities lie in the emotional centre.

Q. Have we anything to control our thoughts now?

A. If you have interests in the right direction, those interests control all other things to a certain extent. If we are not interested, we have no control.

Q. You said that in trying to think rightly about these ideas you need to use the intellectual part of the intellectual centre. Can you do that by trying to control attention when you think?

A. No, it is a simultaneous action; you cannot divide it. The fact is that about certain things you can think only in the intellectual part – if you think rightly and formulate rightly what it is you want to think about. Then, certainly, you have to keep yourself on this idea without going into imagination. So the function itself determines the place.

Q. I have come to the conclusion that I do not know how to think about what I want to think about. Is it because of buffers?

A. I think it is simply that we are not accustomed to think about these ideas – we do not think it is necessary to think about them. If we realize the necessity, then perhaps we will be able to. But buffers have nothing to do with it.

Q. I think that the general experience is that early contact with the system brings more destruction than construction.

A. From my point of view, the idea of construction and destruction is wrong. Nothing is destroyed, but if we imagine that we have something we do not have, then when we start working we may see that we thought we had something but now find that we have not. This means that it is an illusion and we have to sacrifice it. We can have real things or illusions. We lose nothing that we really possess; we only lose the idea that we possess something which we do not possess.

It often happens that people become disappointed in the work because, from the very beginning, they start choosing and take some things and not others. So after some time they do not have the system but their own selection from it, and this won't work. Other people want to understand only intellectually and do not want to make experiments with themselves and observe, but without practical work it is impossible to move.

Q. Shall we be told when we can start practical work?

A. You have been doing some practical work from the very first. If you had done only theoretical work, it would mean you have done nothing. This work is practical from the first.

As I have often said, the first condition is that we must never forget what we want to get. People come to this from different sides. Some want to know. They realize there is a certain knowledge and that, maybe, there are somewhere people who know, and they want to get this knowledge. Other people realize their weaknesses and understand that if they can get rid of them things will be different. So people come with different aims and they must never forget the beginning. They can be reminded, but that will not help much if they themselves do not remember.

Q. I wish I could strengthen my aim. I go on reacting in the same way as before and seem to be as mechanical. I suppose it is necessary to try harder?

A. Trying hard will not help by itself; it must be based on understanding. It is more a question of valuation, general valuation, valuation of the ideas. About almost everything you can think in a new way – a better way than before. You can understand and connect together many things you could not put together or understand before you came. Only, unfortunately, you want to keep all the old ways of thinking and have the new at the same time, and so there is no room for the new.

Again, if you have some habits of negative emotion, you cannot remember yourself while you have them; so in order to remember yourself, in order to work, you must have a little free

time. It is not so much that there is no aim as that you do not want to sacrifice anything. You cannot keep everything you possess and have new things as well.

Q. Is it lack of unity in man that makes it so difficult to find the practical connection between the aim of the system and the aims of ordinary life?

A. There are no aims in ordinary life; that is where you make a mistake. In ordinary life one aim crosses another aim and destroys it or changes its nature, so that in the end there are no aims.

Q. You say that the man in the street has no aim. But when you get older you do not fly about so much, you become interested in one thing.

A. It is one-sided. There are many other sides of one's being and knowledge that this line does not touch at all. Some people can develop a certain oneness even in life, but these are exceptions. If, as you say, one becomes interested in one thing, only one group of 'I's develops this interest; others do not know about it; only a small minority is concerned. So there are two questions here: the question of minority and majority and the fact that if a line of interest appears it does not touch many other things and occupies only a small part of one's being. The whole being never takes part in it.

I think that what was said before about this question of values in the work and in ordinary life must be understood better. In ordinary life there are so many imaginary values that it is useful to clarify a little. In life the best things have no meaning; people see what is small but miss what is big. In the work you have to do many different things first in order to feel that you are waking up. Then other things come; everything comes, for this is only the beginning.

Aim is necessary in the work, but it cannot be an arbitrary or invented aim. There can only be one aim – to awake – and it can only come when you realize that you are asleep, otherwise there is no necessity for it. All other aims, however one may formulate them, must be in line with that. Then, when one wants to awake, one begins to see obstacles, one sees what keeps one asleep; one finds a quantity of mechanical functions, talk, lying, negative emotions and so on, and one realizes that all life consists of mechanical functions that leave no time for awakening. One understands then the need to suppress them, or at least to make them less strong; then one may have time for awakening.

Q. My problem is, do I really want to awake?

A. What can I say? Suppose you come to a shop and ask: 'Do I want to buy something here or not?' It is the same in this case. So how can I answer? You must understand that at first you get only unpleasant things. *Maybe* (I only say maybe) the possibility to get something pleasant depends on the capacity to accept something very unpleasant; maybe this is the only chance. And if you agree to have something very unpleasant, you always get more than you bargained for. If you agree to half a pound of unpleasant things, you get twenty pounds. The great question is, what is the coin in which we have to pay. Effort is not really currency yet; effort has to be exchanged for something else and something else again, until you get to something that can be currency. It is very complicated. But what frightened you?

Q. Suffering is the word in my mind. I do not think it is in me to face unpleasant things.

A. It is a matter of taste. What does 'unpleasant' mean? It means paying. I quite agree that it is better to get things for nothing, but such a method has not been invented yet. Either one understands this and says: 'I will pay, only I must know how'; or one doubts and says: 'I had better either not pay, or pay to myself.' Then nothing happens.

Q. At first I was anxious to work. Now I find there is too much to be done and I feel it is hopeless.

A. Although it seems much in description, it all comes to the same thing. It needs time; it is an organic process. Things have been going wrong for many years, it is necessary to give them time to turn round.

Q. Sometimes I feel very frightened that I do not know what I am doing or what I want. I



allow myself to get very negative.

A. First you must not allow; and second, when in a state of doubt, you must remember to try and bring up other 'I's which have a certain valuation. This is the only way to conquer doubts.

Q. There are times when I feel a great revulsion for this work and a longing to escape, because there is something in me which I do not want to give up. How can I struggle with it?

A. Either you have to escape, or continue to hesitate until you become sure of one thing or another. You must not do anything while you hesitate; it is very important to remember that. Just as in the case of understanding you must choose only things which you understand better and think about them; so in relation to doing, you must choose things about which you are sure, and not spoil your life by things which you do not understand. If you think rightly, that is to say, if you collect and keep only the things you understand, and try to do things you understand, their number will increase. But if you fill your mind with things you do not understand, you will never move. This is a very definite part of the system's method.

Many things we know very well but we continue to deceive ourselves, mainly about words. It is very difficult to understand the value of words. 'Poor in spirit' are those who do not believe in words and 'rich in spirit' are those who believe in words. Often people say, 'If I do this and that it will be beautiful'. They do not understand that it is impossible to do exactly as they wish, that each thing will be a little different and in the end everything will be quite different. Then, when they see that it is different, they say, 'Yes, but the original idea was good'. It was not good. It only looked beautiful as an idea, but in realization it often becomes its own opposite. It will necessarily change because of friction. There are some ideas that can pass through triads and others that cannot, that can exist only in the form of one force, or half a force, or a quarter.

Q. I believe that the understanding we are seeking is attainable only by some. Is it not probable that many of us may get to a blank wall of elimination and no further?

A. Nothing can be guaranteed. But if one wants something and tries to work and does not show some particularly unpleasant feature very difficult to deal with, one has a chance. That is all I can say. One has exactly the same chance as everybody else. One person may have very good and beautiful features, and yet behind this have one small feature that makes work very difficult, more difficult perhaps than for somebody else who does not have such brilliant features.

Q. Is conscience what would help most to know oneself?

A. Yes, it is a necessary element; one has to pass through it. It is the most unpleasant thing in the world, because in the ordinary state we can hide things from ourselves. If we do not want to see something, we just shut our eyes and do not see it. But in the state of conscience our eyes will not shut.

Q. How can one bring the ideas of the system into daily life?

A. By studying yourself and studying the system. Everybody has many personal questions and problems, but at present the system stands apart. Little by little you will learn to connect it with more and more things and after some time ideas of the system will enter into everything.

Q. Is it then a waste of time to talk unnecessarily, to laugh and joke when one feels like it?

A. There is nothing wrong in it by itself. What is wrong is what increases mechanicalness. Passing time in chatting and laughing is one of the most mechanical things. It depends on what you want. If you decide to have a rest, it may really be a rest. But if you cannot stop it, if it gets hold of you, then it is wrong.

Q. I can observe what a great deal of energy I waste in vague imaginings, day-dreams and worrying, but I am powerless to prevent this.

A. The whole system is a way of preventing this. But first you must study. You are dealing with a very complicated machine and you must know it. By studying it one learns what must remain, what must disappear, what helps and what hinders, what one must remove, what one

must encourage. People either do not realize that they can change, or if they realize it, they take it too easily. They think it is enough to realize, to decide, and one will change. But realization, by itself, will not produce a change; we have too many tendencies created in us. We must know how to struggle with them.

Q. I am constantly up against my past. The roots are far back.

A. Quite right. Only there is no direct method; we have to begin with to-day, we cannot change yesterday. Try to change to-day and this may produce a certain change to-morrow. This is everybody's state, a condition in which we have to start. But it is not an obstacle that cannot be overcome.

Q. I have been very negative lately about the conditions in which I found myself, and I feel I cannot see clearly what attitude I should take.

A. It is quite true that in certain conditions one identifies too much with something and loses the possibility to see the difference of things. Sometimes it is impossible to do anything, and sometimes it is possible to struggle. Besides, we have a tendency to magnify and exaggerate. The conditions may not be so bad. There are many points of view, and only you can decide what the case is really like.

Q. The difficulty is that I do not know what is right and what is wrong in ordinary life, and this acts as a screen or a whitewash over my actions.

A. We cannot say we do not know. We know, or at any rate we should know. Nobody can live without certain ideas of right and wrong. But when you come to the system and understand the basis of it, you see that right is connected with consciousness and wrong with mechanicalness. If people are a little conscious, little as they can be, so to say approximately conscious, they have a better direction. Even standing in the same place, but turned one way or another, makes a difference.

Q. Is it wrong to ask questions to satisfy curiosity?

A. Curiosity is a normal thing, if it is strong enough to make you study and if it is a right kind of curiosity, because there are different kinds. Right curiosity is a very important intellectual emotion.

Q. Where does our curiosity for truth come from? And why are we curious at all?

A. Curiosity is a special emotion which exists in each centre. In the intellectual centre it is connected with desire to know. But how do you connect it with the idea of truth? It is simply an intellectual process. Intellectually we distinguish what is true and what is false, and naturally we are curious about what is true and not about what is false, again only in our mind. Although we do not know what truth is, we can know what is definitely not true. Our mind is so made that we can know what is false, although in many cases we cannot say what is true.

Q. What is the difference between desire to know and ordinary curiosity?

A. What makes the difference is on what it is directed. If you want to know your neighbour's business that does not concern you, or if you want to know about triads, these two desires are in different parts of centres. Ordinary curiosity is just weakness, foolishness.

Q. I suppose I lack the right kind of curiosity, because I find difficulty in asking questions. Either I am too lazy or I think I can answer them myself.

A. If you really want to ask certain questions, you will ask them even if you think you already know the answer. If you try to *think*, you will have questions; you are bound to have many questions now, only you do not formulate them. It is impossible not to have questions, for there are hundreds of things you would like to know. So you must think about these things and try to formulate them.

Q. What does it really mean to have unity? I thought it was the same as permanent 'I', but now I am not so sure.

A. It may be the same; it depends where you start from in your understanding. You may make

a decision, and then two or three days later act against it and justify yourself. Or you may want to struggle, try not to do something you usually do, and when you find yourself doing it again, you realize that you have no unity. Even in our state we can strive to attain unity, that is, collect ourselves, or we can be dispersed and do nothing about it.

Q. When one is struggling to do a job one does not like, what can one do to do it well, apart from not identifying?

A. At first, when you are trying to do a job of work, you cannot catch the right point from which you can do it, because work of one or another kind can be done only from one point in yourself and it is sometimes very difficult to find this point. For instance, it is often like that when you want to write a letter, but once you start you may write more than you thought you could. The whole thing is finding the right point of the right centre. For everything we do there is a certain part of a certain centre that can do it, or at any rate do it much better than any other part of the same centre or of other centres.

Q. Does doing a thing well involve some measure of subjection of false personality?

A. To a certain extent it may be understood that way. It means that, if one can do something well, one is able to have a certain standard by which one can measure both how other people do things and how one does things oneself and see when one does something in a wrong way. If one has nothing like that, if one can do nothing well, one has no standard.

Q. I have a certain critical attitude to people I see a lot and I tried to stop it, but it has come back again very badly.

A. Yes, sometimes it can be a very oppressive thing and more difficult to stop than people think. There is only one thing – just to look at it from the point of view of personal profit. Does this critical attitude give you anything or not? You will see that it gives you nothing. We often forget this question of personal profit, yet it is not only legitimate, it is the only criterion. Sometimes we spend enormous efforts, time and emotion on things from which we can get no benefit. Perhaps this will help you not to criticize. It is just the same as criticizing the weather.

Q. I often think that things are arranged badly.

A. And you can arrange them better? You can struggle with this way of thinking not at the time when you feel emotionally but later, when you can see better, if only from the point of view that we have to take everything as it is. You cannot change it, you can only change yourself. This is the only right attitude, and if you think sufficiently often about it, this emotional element will disappear and you will see things on the right scale, in right relationships.

Q. Is there a way to prevent expressing annoyance? I lose such a lot of energy by it.

A. And by expressing it you may create cause for another annoyance. Try to catch yourself on that. When you express annoyance, try to see that you do it not because you realize that you cannot help it but because you deceive yourself by thinking that you do it for a purpose, you wish to change things, people should not do this thing and cause you annoyance, and so on. But after you have expressed it, it may be worse, they may annoy you even more. It is quite useless to produce wrong results. If you think about this wrong result, maybe you will find the energy not to express your annoyance, and then the cause may disappear, because what annoyed you before would make you laugh. We often think we express negative emotions, not because we cannot help it, but because we should express them. There is always something deliberate in it.

Q. But cannot you be rightly angry if something is wrong?

A. The most dangerous negative emotions come from the feeling of injustice, indignation. They make you lose more energy, and they are worse if you are right.

Q. Why is it worse if you are right?

A. Because you justify it. If you are wrong, you can see that it is absurd to be angry. But this is not a complete explanation. Start looking at it from this point of view: remember that there

are very big things that are wrong. We usually identify with small things and forget the big. If we begin to think about the big things we realize that it is no use identifying with one small thing that is wrong. And one small identifying leads to another small identifying. But again it is not a complete explanation.

Q. Can people have a permanent influence on others?

A. Yes, to a certain extent they can, as much as you permit them. If you let yourself go in this direction and let them influence you, they will have an influence. But if you say to yourself, 'I do not want to be influenced', they will have no influence. Remember, they are machines; can a machine influence you? Yes, if you allow it. Suppose you see a wonderful car and would give your life to have this car, it means that you are influenced by this car. It is just the same with people. You are open to the influence of other people as much as you identify or consider.

Q. In relation to work, can one do people harm by influencing them in a wrong way?

A. Yes, one can – with some people, not with everybody. Some people are very easily influenced, so if you give them wrong ideas about the work it may do harm. This is why in speaking with people it is always necessary to be careful not to be misunderstood, not to give a wrong impression.

Q. Would you explain why deep sleep should follow a moment of interest and urge to experiment, and why during sleep all desire to repeat the experiment goes?

A. Every function, every effort, needs energy, and awakening needs special energy. If at the moment of awakening something wrong happens, if there is some kind of identification, or something like that, it produces an enormous waste of energy, and after that one may be asleep for a long time without remembering the possibility of awakening. But only if something wrong happens at the moment of awakening. And in our present state something wrong can happen any moment, because we do not know what is happening. For instance, some negative emotion may come in and produce such waste of energy that none will be left for a long time. So the most important moments to try to remember oneself are moments when one is habitually most identified, for if one can remember oneself at these difficult moments other moments will be easier. But if one chooses only the easiest moments, then at difficult moments one will never be able to do it. It is necessary to try both.

Q. In your view, if a man could live the whole of his life in a state of consciousness, could he do no wrong?

A. We cannot take such extreme cases and speak of 'always'. But if a man were to become even a little conscious, if he were able to control himself occasionally for half an hour or even for a few minutes, it would make such an enormous difference that all we know about ordinary man would be inapplicable to him. About doing wrong, that is a different question. If a man can remember himself even to this extent, you can say definitely that he will do nothing more or less serious without knowing what he is doing, and at a moment when he is doing something particularly important he will become conscious.

Q. Could you tell me the difference between two men on their death-bed, one of whom has learnt the art of self-remembering and one of whom has never heard of it?

A. No, it needs an imaginative writer to describe this. There are many different possibilities – the men may be very different and there may be different circumstances.

I think I had better tell you a story. It is an old story, told in the Moscow groups in 1916 about the origin of the system and the work and about self-remembering. – It happened in an unknown country at an unknown date that a sly man was walking past a cafe and met a devil. The devil was in very poor shape, both hungry and thirsty, so the sly man took him into the cafe, ordered some coffee and asked him what the trouble was. The devil said that there was no business. In the old days he used to buy souls and burn them to charcoal, because when people died they had very fat souls that he could take to hell, and all the devils were pleased.

But now all the fires in hell were out, because when people died there were no souls.

Then the sly man suggested that perhaps they could do some business together. 'Teach me how to make souls', he said, 'and I will give you a sign to show which people have souls made by me', and he ordered more coffee. The devil explained that he should teach people to remember themselves, not to identify and so on, and then, after some time, they would grow souls.

The sly man set to work, organized groups and taught people to remember themselves. Some of them started to work seriously and tried to put into practice what he taught them. Then they died, and when they came to the gates of heaven, there was St Peter with his keys on one side and the devil on the other. When St Peter was ready to open the gates, the devil would say, 'May I just ask one question – did you remember yourself?' 'Yes, certainly', the man would answer and thereupon the devil would say, 'Excuse me, this soul is mine'. This went on for a long time, until they managed somehow to communicate to the earth what was happening at the gates of heaven. Hearing this, the people he was teaching came to the sly man and said, 'Why do you teach us to remember ourselves if, when we say we have remembered ourselves, the devil takes us?' The sly man asked, 'Did I teach you to say you remember yourselves? I taught you not to talk.' They said, 'But this was St Peter and the devil!' and the sly man said, 'But have you seen St Peter and the devil at groups? So do not talk. Some people did not talk and managed to get to heaven. I did not only make an arrangement with the devil, I also made a plan by which to deceive the devil.'

The above text constitutes Chapter XIII of *The Fourth Way* by P. D. Ouspensky.