

## THE HUMAN CONDITION

*‘Man, like a sleepwalker who suddenly ‘comes to’ on some lonely road has in general no correct idea as to his origins or his destiny.’*  
Idries Shah

### Humanity is ‘Asleep’

*‘Humanity is asleep, concerned only with what is useless, living in a wrong world.’*  
Sanai

- o Humanity is variously described as ‘asleep’ or ‘blind’ or ‘in a dream’ by many spiritual traditions. This refers to the highly selective and restrictive state of mind of most human beings caught up in conditioned patterns of thought, feeling and perception, thus preventing the development of our latent, higher developmental potential.
- o Various metaphors have been employed in the world’s spiritual traditions to describe the limited and attenuated awareness that typifies most human beings.

The Sufis characterize ordinary consciousness as a state of “deep sleep” or “blindness” – an overconcern with the irrelevant dimensions of the world. Gurdjieff’s image is that man places shock absorbers between himself and the world. “We must destroy our buffers; children have none; therefore we must become like little children.” In Indian thought, personal consciousness is compared to a “drunken monkey” living solely in his constructs – the world of “illusion.” This same thought is a metaphorical meaning of the “fall” of man in the Christian tradition. (1)

- o The state of ‘waking sleep’ has sometimes been likened to a form of conditioned hypnosis imparted by our surrounding family and culture. “We do not perceive ourselves and the world about us as they are but as we have been persuaded to perceive them.”

As he is organized, that is, being such as nature has created him, man can be a self-conscious being. Such he is created and such he is born. But he is born among sleeping people, and, of course, he falls asleep among them just at the very time when he should have begun to be conscious of himself. Everything has a hand in this: the involuntary imitation of older people on the part of the child, voluntary and involuntary suggestion, and what is called ‘education’. Every attempt to awaken on the child’s part is instantly stopped. This is inevitable. And a great many efforts and a great deal of help are necessary in order to awaken later when thousands of sleep-compelling habits have been accumulated. And this very seldom happens. In most cases, a man when still a child already loses the possibility of awakening; he lives in sleep all his life and he dies in sleep. Furthermore, many people die long before their physical death. (2)

- o Buddhist teachings regard suffering as the ‘First Noble Truth’ and point to the imperfections of the human mind as the root cause.

The Buddha taught that this life is an ocean of suffering. Everything is impermanent, so everything is always changing, changing, changing. Because we attach to things, we constantly suffer, since despite however much we love things they must always change and disappear and return to emptiness. But human beings are very, very stupid. We don’t understand this, so we don’t understand why our lives are filled with so much suffering. This is why the Buddha taught the First Noble Truth, “All things are suffering.”

Of course, many religions teach that this life has some suffering. But only the Buddha attained that this suffering is made entirely by our minds and it can be taken away the moment we gain true insight into the nature of our mind. Human beings also make a great deal of suffering for other beings because humans do not understand their mind. (3)

- o The underlying cause of violence and aggression in the world is the arbitrary divisions among individuals, groups, religions and cultures created by the self-enclosed human mind.

Fighting and hurting each other for the sake of idea and identity, as well as power and supremacy, is an indiscriminate human disease that keeps flaring up in all parts of the globe – yesterday in one place, today in another, and tomorrow elsewhere. It will continue as long as we human beings remain fragmented entities attached to self-image and group identity, which cut up the whole of humankind. It will continue as long as we live in ignorance of what we actually are thinking and doing to ourselves and to others from moment to moment. It will continue as long as we remain unaware of the fact that we *are* the “others.” The mind that is Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Christian, or Jewish is the same divided human mind. (4)

- o Human suffering and happiness alternate in response to the play of external conditions and circumstances.

You have not seen how painful is the life you live. You are like a child sleeping with a lollipop in its mouth. You may feel happy for a moment by being totally self-centered, but it is enough to have a good look at human faces to perceive the universality of suffering. Even your own happiness is so vulnerable and short-lived, at the mercy of a bank-crash, or a stomach ulcer. It is just a moment of respite, a mere gap between two sorrows. Real happiness is not vulnerable, because it does not depend on circumstances. Look at yourself fearlessly and you will at once realize that your happiness depends on conditions and circumstances, hence it is momentary, not real. Real happiness flows from within. (5)

- o Individual pain and suffering is largely self-created. “Man, restless and anxious, lives a half-crazed existence because his mind, heavily encrusted with delusion, is turned topsy-turvy.”

*Q: Nobody's life is entirely free of pain and sorrow. Isn't it a question of learning to live with them rather than trying to avoid them?*

A: The greater part of human pain is unnecessary. It is self-created as long as the unobserved mind runs your life. The pain that you create is always some form of nonacceptance, some form of unconscious resistance to what *is*. On the level of thought, the resistance is some form of judgment. On the emotional level, it is some form of negativity. The intensity of the pain depends on the degree of resistance to the present moment, and this in turn depends on how strongly you are identified with your mind. The mind always seeks to deny the Now and to escape from it. In other words, the more you are identified with your mind, the more you suffer. Or you may put it like this: the more you are able to honour and accept the Now, the more you are free of pain, of suffering – and free of the egoic mind. (6)

- o A frequent analogy of the human situation is that of a prisoner in a jail with invisible bars who is unable to escape. “Man is like someone who has the choice of traversing the earth, but has fallen asleep in a prison.”

Each human being lives in a jail. The prison is himself; and he is his own warder as well. While the warder is the prisoner and the jail, it is not surprising that there are so few escapes, and rescues are so rare. (7)

- o The outer events of the world are a reflection of the inner condition of humanity. Change must come from within not from without. “Man alone can destroy in himself the roots of pain. Others can only help with the pain, but not with its cause, which is the abysmal stupidity of mankind.”

*Q: Are you not at all concerned about the state of the world?*

A: I am reading newspapers. I know what is going on! But my reaction is not like yours. You are looking for a cure, while I am concerned with prevention. As long as there are causes, there must also be results. As long as people are bent on dividing and separating, as long as they are selfish and aggressive, such things will happen. If you want peace and harmony in the world, you must have peace and harmony in your hearts and minds. Such change cannot be imposed; it must come from within. Those who abhor war must get war out of their system. Without peaceful people how can you have peace in the world? As long as people are as they are, the world must be as it is. (8)

- o The normal waking state of ordinary man and woman is completely subjective, conditioned and based on imagination, devoid of higher awareness and insight.

In the waking state, however, a man can do something all the time and the results of all his actions will be reflected upon him and upon those around him. *And yet he does not remember himself.* He is a machine, everything with him *happens*. He cannot stop the flow of his thoughts, he cannot control his imagination, his emotions, his attention. He lives in a subjective world of ‘I love’,

‘I do not love’, ‘I like’, ‘I do not like’, ‘I want’, ‘I do not want’, that is, of what he thinks he likes, of what he thinks he does not like, of what he thinks he wants, of what he thinks he does not want. He does not see the real world. The real world is hidden from him by the wall of imagination. *He lives in sleep.* He is asleep. What is called ‘clear consciousness’ is sleep and a far more dangerous sleep than sleep at night in bed.

Both states of consciousness, sleep and the waking state, are equally subjective. Only by beginning to *remember himself* does a man really awaken. And then all surrounding life acquires for him a different aspect and a different meaning. He sees that it is *the life of sleeping people*, a life in sleep. (9)

- o There is an Eastern teaching story known as ‘The Magician and the Sheep’ that suggests that human beings are hypnotized in a state of ‘sleep’ which prevents them from seeing their true condition. “In order to act consciously with the intention of awakening, it is necessary to know the nature of the forces which keep man in a state of sleep. Man is hypnotized and this hypnotic state is continually maintained and strengthened in him.”

There is an Eastern tale which speaks about a very rich magician who had a great many sheep. But at the same time this magician was very mean. He did not want to hire shepherds, nor did he want to erect a fence about the pasture where his sheep were grazing. The sheep consequently often wandered into the forest, fell into ravines, and so on, and above all they ran away, for they knew that the magician wanted their flesh and skins and this they did not like.

At last the magician found a remedy. He *hypnotized* his sheep and suggested to them first of all that they were immortal and that no harm was being done to them when they were skinned, that, on the contrary, it would be very good for them and even pleasant; secondly he suggested that the magician was a *good master* who loved his flock so much that he was ready to do anything in the world for them; and in the third place he suggested to them that if anything at all were going to happen to them it was not going to happen just then, at any rate not that day, and *therefore* they had no need to think about it. Further the magician suggested to his sheep that they were not sheep at all; to some of them he suggested that they were *lions*, to others that they were *eagles*, to others that they were *men*, and to others that they were *magicians*.

And after this all his cares and worries about the sheep came to an end. They never ran away again but quietly awaited the time when the magician would require their flesh and skins.

This tale is a very good illustration of man’s position. (10)

### **Legends and Myths**

- o Many millennia ago, according to certain esoteric teachings, humanity attained a state of heightened consciousness and development which, for reasons unexplained, deteriorated to the present condition of ‘sleep’ and ‘blindness’. “At some time in the past, a shortage of technicians who know what really is happening caused a majority of the ignorant to take the place of most of the wise.”

Many thousands of years ago, something went wrong on this planet. Man lost the power to raise himself from his lowly state to the one which is his destiny. Many people came, from time to time, to remind man of his high destiny. (11)

o In some religious traditions like Christianity and Islam the myth of the 'Fall from the Garden of Eden' is employed to imply loss of the primordial state through veiling of the higher consciousness. "The recovery of the Edenic state lies through the inner purification of the heart, which will allow the contemplative to see the transcendent realities perceived by Adam before the Fall."

o The record of history shows that the present sad state of humanity has ancient antecedents.

Our way of living, since time immemorial, has been a series of contradictory, perplexing, incomprehensible events created by the fragmented, self-enclosed, conditioned mind. Except for brief moments of pleasure and joy, we have existed in conflict, strife, violence, and unspeakable sorrow, at the same time yearning for peace, harmony, and happiness for ourselves. We have not clearly understood the root cause of this dilemma. (12)

o A Sufi teaching fable alludes to events in the far past which have important ramifications for contemporary humanity.

Once upon a time there lived an ideal community in a far-off land. Its members had no fears as we now know them. Instead of uncertainty and vacillation, they had purposefulness and a fuller means of expressing themselves. Although there were none of the stresses and tensions which mankind now considers essential to its progress, their lives were richer, because other, better elements replaced these things. Theirs, therefore, was a slightly different mode of existence. We could almost say that our present perceptions are a crude, makeshift version of the real ones which this community possessed.

They had real lives, not semi-lives.

We can call them the El Ar people.

They had a leader, who discovered that their country was to become uninhabitable for a period of, shall we say, twenty thousand years. He planned their escape, realizing that their descendants would be able to return home successfully, only after many trials.

He found for them a place of refuge, an island whose features were only roughly similar to those of the original homeland. Because of the differences in climate and situation, the immigrants had to undergo a transformation. This made them more physically and mentally adapted to the new circumstances; coarse perceptions, for instance, were substituted for finer ones, as when the hand of the manual labourer become toughened in response to the needs of his calling.

In order to reduce the pain which a comparison between the old and new states would bring, they were made to forget the past almost entirely. Only the most shadowy recollections of it remained, yet it was sufficient to be awakened when the time came.

The system was very complicated, but well arranged. The organs by means of which the people survived on the island were also made the organs of enjoyment,

physical and mental. The organs which were really constructive in the old homeland were placed in a special form of abeyance, and linked with the shadowy memory, in preparation for its eventual activation. (13)

- o There are allegories which suggest that human evolution has in some way been intentionally obstructed at a remote period in the past and then later restored.

According to the myth that Gurdjieff develops in *Beelzebub's Tales*, at a certain period in the history of the earth it was perceived by the Higher Powers that a very undesirable and dangerous situation was developing on the planet Earth which could endanger the equilibrium of the entire solar system and, in particular, the evolution of the Moon. For this reason, the Higher Powers intervened and brought about the insertion into man's physical nature of an organ said to have been situated at the base of the spine and called by Gurdjieff the 'Organ Kundabuffer'. This prevented man from seeing the situation as it really was and led him to base his values solely on the satisfaction of his own desires and the pursuit of happiness. The organ had the effect of arresting the evolution of man and ensuring him a blissful though animal existence.

Gurdjieff says that it was necessary to arrest human evolution before the last Ice Age. He says that this was connected with the development of the Moon and is consistent with conditions in the Solar System 100,000 and 70,000 years ago, when Neanderthal man appeared. The transition to modern man with the full power of speech and endowed with creativity occurred about 35,000 years ago and was complete at the end of the Ice Age about 12,000 years ago.

It is a fact that the evolution of man stood still for nearly a hundred thousand years and started again with a bang thirty or forty thousand years ago. According to Gurdjieff this was done to ensure that the energies needed would be transformed. This state of affairs continued until the danger of man's ceasing to transform energies had passed. Then the organ was removed and man's evolution again proceeded. But a mistake was made. Those who were responsible for the operation had not foreseen that during the many generations when man was living according to the pleasure principle, he would develop a habit which would be transmitted by heredity to his descendants: this is what Gurdjieff describes as the predisposition to the properties of the 'Organ Kundabuffer'. The conclusion is drawn that although man is free to attain his own fulfilment – to pass through all stages of development – he is nevertheless obstructed by his inability to see the situation as it really is. Man, in order to realize his own destiny, must live by *conscience*; but this has been buried in his subconscious, and with his ordinary conscious mind he continues to live as if he were dominated by the working of the 'Organ Kundabuffer'. Man lives by his rights and, in particular the right to pursue happiness, and disregards his obligations, in particular the obligation to pay the debt of his existence. The consequences of the properties of the 'Organ Kundabuffer' are described as all kinds of egoism, self-love, vanity, conceit, adulation and all that we regard as fundamental defects of character and at all times have agreed to treat as unworthy of man. In spite of this, we continue to live under the dominance of our own egoism and the other properties of the 'Organ Kundabuffer'.

Man was created with conscience and, because our true destiny is to achieve full being, something in us is not satisfied with life limited by the effects of the 'Organ Kundabuffer.' (14)

## Predominance of the Lower Nature

*‘Man has been created with animal qualities as well as angelic qualities; the latter constitute his real essence, while the former are merely accidental and transitory.’  
Al-Ghazalli*

- o The structure and evolution of the human brain suggest that the modern neocortex and the more primitive regions of the brain have an antagonistic yet complementary relationship.

Living an uneasy coexistence within us are our older emotional nature, dating back to the origin of our species, and our cognitive or rational nature with its relatively new neocortex (only about five hundred thousand years old, some neurologists say). Our unfinished business, then, is to reconcile and harmonize our emotional and intellectual sides. (15)

- o A great deal of the social and interpersonal behaviour of human beings is rooted in the animal level of behaviour (our heritage of animality). “Human beings resemble animals in being attracted to the aspect of things which immediately attracts them. As with animals, sometimes these things are suitable for them, sometimes not.”

This parallel of unregenerate man as largely animal, endowed with faculties which he cannot yet properly use, is frequent in Sufi teaching: ‘The more animal the man, the less he understands of teachership. To him the Guide may seem like the hunter, requiring him to enter a cage. I was like this,’ states Aali-Pir. ‘The untrained hawk thinks that if he is captured, as he calls it, he will be enslaved. He does not realize that the hawkmaster will give him a fuller life, perched freely on the wrist of the King, without the perpetual preoccupation of food and fear. The only difference between human and animal here is that the animal fears everyone.’ (16)

- o The human animal, unlike other creatures, is estranged from his or her natural being and essential nature.

Human beings think that human beings are very clever animals. But despite all their intelligence, if you look closely at what has happened in the world you see that human beings are actually the stupidest animals, because human beings don’t understand human beings. A dog understands what a dog should do, and cats understand what cats should do. All animals understand their job and only do it. But we don’t understand our correct job and correct way in this world, and instead we live only for ourselves. (17)

- o Human stupidity, ignorance and foolishness are reflected in a wide variety of individual and group behaviour. “The distorting effects of anger, greed, envy, and so on are not really regarded by Sufis as human, but rather as pre-human.”

*Q: Are people really as stupid as the Sufis make out? If they were, how could society function as well as it does? How can one test whether people really do behave in such an absurd manner as some of the people in Sufi stories and teaching narratives do?*

A: People really are as stupid as the Sufis make out. Society works as well as it does because not everyone is stupid all the time. The Sufi enterprise helps them by showing up stupidity to forestall its appearance at times when it blocks understanding. There is little need to test whether people really do behave as the ones in stories and narratives, because the newspapers are full of accounts of this behaviour, and hence it is displayed everywhere all the time. You do not need, after all, to 'test' whether a cherry is red – you can see it easily, once you know what red is.

And may I ask *you* a question? If people were not as stupid as they are made out to be, would they tolerate the kinds of individuals and organizations which exploit them? Who votes for the lying and improbable politicians who, remember, actually rule over so many of us? (18)

o Many grown adults behave as though they were infants or children.

Many problems arise in current cultures because numerous adults behave like infants, while it is part of the convention to treat such behaviour as that of – adults. But parents would not allow it in their own children.

These people are still educable, even though their education might have to be similar to that given to children. We make few facile assumptions about 'natural' or 'basic' knowledge being already in children. Oddly, we assume that adults know a lot of things which they do not. (19)

o The term 'mass psychosis' has been coined to describe a "series of aberrations characteristic of all or most members of the functioning society, aberrations considered by everyone to be 'normal.' We are living in a world where honesty and the correct assessment of situations often seems like insanity, at best like humour."

o Much of the behaviour of contemporary humanity, especially war and destruction, makes a mockery of such notions as 'civilization' and 'progress.' "Human beings have an infinite capacity for both self-development and self-destruction."

"People believe in progress and culture," said G. "*There is no progress whatever.* Everything is just the same as it was thousands, and tens of thousands, of years ago. The outward form changes. The essence does not change. Man remains just the same. 'Civilized' and 'cultured' people live with exactly the same interests as the most ignorant savages. Modern civilization is based on violence and slavery and fine words. But all these fine words about 'progress' and 'civilization' are merely words."

This of course produced a particularly deep impression on us, because it was said in 1916, when the latest manifestation of "civilization", in the form of a war such as the world had not yet seen, was continuing to grow and develop, drawing more and more millions of people into its orbit. (20)

## Heedlessness or Forgetfulness

- o Heedlessness or lack of attention is one of the major characteristics of human life. “Heedlessness, confusion and inattention must be set aside as they interfere with both effectiveness in ordinary life situations and the attainment of higher, more refined, perceptions.”

The ability to pay attention, to remember what we know, is the cardinal problem of humanity. It is the foundation that supports all other human weaknesses and psycho-pathology. It is inherent in our constitution that we lose sight of our divine origin: it is habitual that even as we remember we begin to forget. The thrust of spiritual teaching is to encourage people to pay attention long enough to *develop* their capacities to remain awake.

Although many systems of morality describe the right way to live, they often fail to show how their principles can be put into practice. A first step in overcoming heedlessness is to learn to recognize it in your own life. It is as mundane as misplacing your glasses or as extreme as the story told about Norbert Wiener, the famous cybernetic researcher, who, one day, was walking along a path between two buildings at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology when he met a colleague; they talked for a few minutes and as they parted, Wiener asked his friend to tell him which direction he had been walking when they met. He did not recall if he had been on his way to lunch or had just finished it. (21)

- o One of the major forms of heedlessness in everyday life occurs when a person’s awareness is trapped by dwelling on the past or generating expectations of the future.

*Q: Here is something which strikes me as being rather significant, and it happens every day, one does one thing while thinking about another. For instance I often happen to put my keys down somewhere, and the next moment I can’t remember where they are, because I was thinking of something else and I was not really present. Is this not a very ordinary example showing that most of the time we are not present to ourselves?*

A: Yes it is. We are always somewhere else, living ahead or behind in time, we long for the future or we regret the past. We are never really here. This flight in time is of great significance. If we turn away from the present, or rather if the present is so often unable to hold our attention, it is because we conceive of it as being a known and registered reality, therefore devoid of interest, or as a disappointing one. Just so long as we have not understood that true bliss is not in objects but in us, we continue to place our hope in the future and keep racing ahead. We thus live in a state of imbalance, bent upon, and striving endlessly towards, the future.

What we must come to understand is that awareness in the present is the only true starting point and that this starting point is at the same time the point of arrival. (22)

- o Faulty perception and understanding play a major role in everyday human life.

*Q: Again and again the Sufis claim that people do not register truth, and that the ordinary mind is not reliable. But surely all our knowledge of life and of ourselves is based on a reliable understanding of facts. Surely Sufis are only talking about a minority of people. If they are, why bother with them?*

A: On the contrary, Sufis are talking here about a majority of people. It is interesting to note that it is only lately that others are catching up with this very great problem. I call it a problem because if it is true that people ordinarily are prone to considerable mistakes in perception and understanding, and are easily misled by wrong information, then this stands, as the Sufis say, as a barrier to real understanding.

This has been demonstrated again and again. On television, in one programme as an example, it was shown that people hardly ever know what they have seen: 'as eye-witnesses, humans are in the disaster class.'

From 525 questions asked of witnesses to staged events, only 52 – one in ten – were correct: and this from a selection of people who had been alerted to watch for something and could still not see it. The social consequences might include people being imprisoned on inaccurate eye-witness testimony. The consequences for the perception of things which are there in a higher sense are what the Sufis talk about.

It is precisely because of the unreliability of vision, of memory, of wanting to believe, of induced belief: whether in religion, in motor accidents, or in the lives of invented individuals, that the Sufis say that an objective perception must be acquired before even familiar things can be seen as they are. (23)

o Heedlessness erects a barrier that effectively prevents higher perception and understanding.

The analogy of someone not being able to perceive inner dimensions of reality in ordinary life is that of people who look at familiar things and still do not notice what they may mean. This is 'heedlessness', and the equivalent is of people in day-to-day matters who become unaware of some things of importance going on because they are thinking of something else. (24)

o A Sufi teaching story, 'Seeing and Understanding' describes the condition of people who in ordinary life are unable to perceive things which are obvious because their awareness and attention are directed elsewhere.

A King was once becoming impatient with a lecture by a Sufi, and made up his mind to score a point or two off him. Thus it was that, as soon as the Sufi had said, for – it seemed to the King – the thousandth time that 'hundreds were blind and even those who were not blind could not understand what they saw', he held up his hand.

'As the King of this country I insist that you match allegation with demonstration. On pain of death, *show me* these people who are blind, and those who are not, but will still not understand,' he said.

'Certainly, your Majesty' said the Sufi. 'And I will give even you, a mere king, the honour of taking part in my demonstration.'

'What do I have to do?' asked the King.

'You will sit for one day in the bazaar, the local market, in your robes and wear-

ing your crown, hammering upon a brass tray.’

And so the King sat there all day with the Sufi beside him. Every few minutes someone stopped and asked, ‘What are you doing?’ and the Sufi, sitting nearby, took down his or her name.

At the end of the day the Sufi said: ‘Your Majesty – here is the list of all the people who stopped and were so blind that they could not see what you were doing, hammering a brass tray, and had to ask.’

The King was quite impressed; but then a thought struck him. ‘Yes, but what about a list of the people who are *not* blind but still cannot understand what they see?’

‘That’s easy’ said the Sufi, ‘all you have to do is to make a copy of the same list and it will do just as well. (25)

- o A common human mistake is to confuse the secondary for the primary and vice versa. People generally have no sense of the relative importance and significance of people and events. They believe that important things are unimportant, and trivial ones are vital. “It is almost entirely because the human being’s every interest is ordinarily stabilized on secondary matters that people have virtually no prepared ground in which to observe and experience something more subtle.”
- o Human beings tend to see only diversity and differences, while ignoring the underlying unity. “People are all the time interposing different filters, colours and meshes between themselves and reality, in order to allow less and less or more and more through.”
- o The concept of ‘identification’ helps explain a number of human manifestations of heedlessness and mechanicalness such as lying, imagination, unnecessary talking and the expression of negative emotions.

‘Identifying’ or ‘identification’ is a curious state in which man passes more than half his life. He ‘identifies’ with everything: with what he says, what he feels, what he believes, what he does not believe, what he wishes, what he does not wish, what attracts him, what repels him. Everything absorbs him, and he cannot separate himself from the idea, the feeling, or the object that absorbed him. This means that in the state of identification man is incapable of looking impartially on the object of his identification. It is difficult to find the smallest thing with which man is unable to ‘identify’. At the same time, in a state of identification, man has even less control over his mechanical reactions than at any other time. Such manifestations as lying, imagination, the expression of negative emotions, and constant talking *need identification*. They cannot exist without identification. If man *could* get rid of identification, he could get rid of many useless and foolish manifestations.

The second sleep-producing state, akin to identification, is *considering*. Actually, ‘considering’ is identification with people. It is a state in which man constantly worries what other people think of him; whether they give him his due, whether they admire him enough, and so on. ‘Considering’ plays a very important part in everyone’s life, but in some people it becomes an obsession. All their lives are filled with considering – that is, worry, doubt and suspicion – and there remains no place for anything else.

Both 'identifying' and 'considering' must be observed most seriously. Only full knowledge of them can diminish them. If one cannot see them in oneself, one can easily see them in other people. But one must remember that one in no way differs from others. In this sense all people are equal. (26)

- o Ignorance and not conscious malevolence is one of the root causes of negative and destructive human behaviour.

Some of the greatest damage to man is done through ignorance.

As soon as you know this, you cannot hate.

When the 'worst' people are ignorant, not malicious, how can you dislike them, or hate them, or hate the lesser malefactors, those who are deliberately destructive?

The only thing that should be hated is hatred. (27)

- o The cure for heedlessness and forgetfulness of our true nature is a choiceless awareness which reveals our mechanical physical, emotional and mental functioning.

*Q: Why should I image myself so wretched?*

A: You do it by habit only. Change your ways of feeling and thinking, take stock of them and examine them closely. You are in bondage by inadvertence. Attention liberates. You are taking so many things for granted. Begin to question. You have put so much energy into building a prison for yourself. Now spend as much on demolishing it. In fact, demolition is easy, for the false dissolves when it is discovered. (28)

- o Our fascination with the phenomenal world obscures the perception of our fundamental unconditioned nature as pure awareness and being.

*Q: What is the origin of this ignorance of our real nature?*

A: It is simply a forgetting. When a child is in a market at Christmas he is completely absorbed in the toys and forgets his mother, but there comes a moment when he remembers her. The objective world is very attractive and as long as you are not interested in reality, it hides behind name and form. When you take away form and name what remains? The *Upanishads* say the divine is shy like a gazelle, and of course the Tao that can be named is not the Tao. (29)

### **Human Beings as 'Machines'**

- o Human behaviour, to an objective observer, appears hopelessly standardized and mechanically reactive.

The human being is so intensely standardized that an outside observer, noting his reaction to various stimuli, need not infer an individual controlling brain in each person. He would be more likely to infer the existence of a separate, outside brain, and the people as mere manifestations of its will. (30)

- o People react mechanically like a machine to external influences and impressions. Everything ‘happens’ without the person’s conscious participation and control. “It happens in exactly the same way as rain falls as a result of a change in the temperature in the higher regions of the atmosphere or the surrounding clouds, as snow melts under the rays of the sun, as dust rises with the wind.”

Man is a machine. All his deeds, actions, words, thoughts, feelings, convictions, opinions, and habits are the results of external influences, external impressions. Out of himself a man cannot produce a single thought, a single action. Everything he says, does, thinks, feels – all this happens. Man cannot discover anything, invent anything. It all happens.

To establish this fact for oneself, to understand it, to be convinced of its truth, means getting rid of a thousand illusions about man, about his being creative and consciously organizing his own life, and so on. There is nothing of this kind. Everything happens – popular movements, wars, revolutions, changes of government, all this happens. And it happens in exactly the same way as everything happens in the life of individual man. Man is born, lives, dies, builds houses, writes books, not as he wants to, but as it happens. Everything happens. Man does not love, hate, desire – all this happens. (31)

- o In many ways the structure, influence and belief systems of contemporary cultural institutions resemble a vast machine which enslave individual human beings through imitations and conditioning.

Contemporary man is dragged along in a producing and consuming cog-wheeled system to the point where he begins to become a part of the machine and loses mastery of himself. Daily life dissipates our spirit, eats up our time and thus does not leave the opportunity to become aware of ourselves and to return to our deeper self. Accustomed as we are to being constantly “occupied,” if these occupations should happen to be taken from us, we find ourselves empty and abandoned. We then refuse to confront ourselves and instead go off in search of friends, to mix in with the crowd, to listen to the radio or to the television, to get rid of this impression of emptiness. (32)

- o The consequences of automatic and reactive behaviour are very serious for humanity, both individually and collectively. “Man is becoming a willing slave. He no longer needs chains. He begins to grow fond of his slavery, to be proud of it.”

Are we able to say that life is governed by a group of conscious people? Where are they? Who are they? We see exactly the opposite: that life is governed by those who are the least conscious, by those who are most asleep.

Are we able to say that we observe in life a preponderance of the best, the strongest, and the most courageous elements? Nothing of the sort. On the contrary we see a preponderance of vulgarity and stupidity of all kinds.

Are we able to say that aspirations towards unity, towards unification, can be observed in life? Nothing of the kind of course. We only see new divisions, new hostility, new misunderstandings.

So that in the actual situation of humanity there is nothing that points to evo-

lution proceeding. On the contrary when we compare humanity with a man we quite clearly see a growth of personality at the cost of essence, that is, a growth of the artificial, the unreal, and what is foreign, at the cost of the natural, the real, and what is one's own.

Together with this we see a growth of automatism.

Contemporary culture requires automatons. And people are undoubtedly losing their acquired habits of independence and turning into automatons, into parts of machines. (33)

- o The analogy of 'people as machines' suggests that most people react to external circumstances rather than acting consciously and purposefully.

What does it mean that man is a machine?

It means that he has no *independent movements*, inside or outside of himself. He is a machine which is brought into motion by *external influences and external impacts*. All his movements, actions, words, ideas, emotions, moods, and thoughts are produced by external influences. By himself, he is just an automaton with a certain store of memories of previous experiences, and a certain amount of reserve energy.

Man cannot move, think, or speak of his own accord. He is a marionette pulled here and there by invisible strings. If he understands this, he can learn more about himself, and possibly then things may begin to change for him. But if he cannot realize and understand his *utter mechanicalness*, or if he does not wish to accept it as a fact, he can learn nothing more, and things cannot change for him.

*Man is a machine*, but a very peculiar machine. He is a machine which, in right circumstances, and with right treatment, *can know that he is a machine*, and, having fully realized this, he may find the ways to cease to be a machine. (34)

- o Most individuals are unable to recognize the automatic, mechanical nature of much of their behaviour and the incorrect attributions they assign to their perceptions.

People do not like being called machines. And yet most people are not even machines in lacking faculties for evaluating the qualitative nature of experience. Instead of being able to perceive the spectrum of influences in a single experience, they feel it transcendental *if it moves them*. Unlike a machine, too, the human being has no switching gear to turn experience on and off. And man has no means of engendering experience except by the most hazardous trial-and-error ones such as throwing himself into random situations or ingesting drugs.

One of the purposes of a real esoteric training is first to acquire lower control, control such as a machine might have, before higher controls can be attained. (35)

- o The automatism and machine-like behaviour of human beings prevents the development of higher consciousness and access to spiritual energy.

What is the source of this mysterious energy, which animates us and all our manifestations, from birth to death, and even beyond?

In what way does this energy animate us?

The aim of the teaching is to rediscover this source of life through the develop-

ment of consciousness. But consciousness hides behind a “mask”; it is the prisoner of human conditioning. In reality, our perception of this primal energy is veiled and obscured by the vast disorder of our functions.

This disorder is created by a multitude of tensions and complex automatized reactions, which themselves are the result of deeper layers of conditioning.

In spite of all the achievements that we can accomplish at every level, physical as well as intellectual, we remain sensitive to and influenced by only one side of our nature at the expense of the other, more essential side. We remain unaware of a primal energy – even though we sometimes get closer to it by intuition. We are trapped in the straightjacket of our automatism, unable to escape from its confines, from the inextricable relation between the habitual movements of our mind and the automatized functioning of our personality.

The force imprisoned in this sealed labyrinth cannot play the leading role in a body unable to receive it.

It merely feeds a machine.

But this machine creates delusions and it is not possible for us, in the ordinary course of our life, to realize the extent to which we are prisoners of our automatism. Very special conditions are necessary to recognize this, so that another quality of attention and self-awareness may appear. (36)

### **Enlarging the Human Perspective**

- o According to tradition, the human soul is cut off from ‘the parent stem’ and must reclaim harmony with creation through a process of self-examination and inner development.

If there is to be any improvement in the general condition of mankind, two factors seem to me to be of essential importance, and both of these happen to be of a psychological nature. Firstly, there must be a ruthlessly realistic understanding of what man is and what his situation is. Practically all our problems in this world arise out of misconceptions concerning our own and other’s natures. Secondly, there must be a realistic, credible vision of a better state of affairs for mankind, lest the very realization of our grim situation should drive us all to despair. (37)

- o The experiences of ordinary life are only a small portion of the many dimensions of existence. “The whole array of mundane experiences are reflections of an ultimate reality.”

The meditations of Rumi include some remarkable ideas, designed to bring the Seeker into an understanding of the fact that he is temporarily out of contact with complete reality, even though ordinary life seems to be the totality of reality itself. What we see, feel and experience in ordinary, unfulfilled life is only a part of the great whole. There are dimensions which we can reach only through effort. Like the submerged portions of the iceberg, they are there, though unperceived under ordinary conditions. Also like the iceberg, they are far greater than could be suspected by superficial study. (38)

- o The ability to act consciously and with a higher intention separates the developed human being from the ordinary man or woman.

Man is the being who can “do”, says this teaching. To do means to act consciously and according to one’s will. All the differences which strike us among men can be reduced to the differences in the consciousness of their actions. Men seem to us to vary so much just because the actions of some of them are, according to our opinion, deeply conscious, while the actions of others are so unconscious that they even seem to surpass the unconsciousness of stones, which at least react rightly to external phenomena. The question is complicated by the mere fact that often one and the same man shows us, side by side with what appear to us entirely conscious actions of will, other quite unconscious animal-mechanical reactions. In virtue of this, man appears to us to be an extraordinarily complicated being. This teaching denies this complication and puts before us a very difficult task in connection with man. Man is he who can “do” but among ordinary men, as well as among those who are considered extraordinary, there are few who can “do.” (39)

- o Spiritual development brings a perception of the inner aspect of existence that is normally invisible to the majority of people. “Man is cut off from perception of his real potential and of objective Reality because he is full of subjective imaginings and conditioning.”

A recurrent theme among the Sufis is that humanity generally cannot distinguish a hidden trend in events which would alone enable it to make full use of life. Those who can see this trend are termed the Wise, while the ordinary man is said to be ‘asleep’ or called the Idiot. (40)

- o The fully developed human being is awake to the truly important aspects of life while ignoring the transient and secondary. “Humanity is circling around reality. It must enter the circle instead of following its perimeter.”

*Q: What is the right use of mind?*

A: Fear and greed cause the misuse of the mind. The right use of the mind is in the service of love, of life, of truth, of beauty.

*Q: Easier said than done. Love of truth, of man, goodwill – what luxury! We need plenty of it to set the world right, but who will provide?*

A: You can spend an eternity looking elsewhere for truth and love, intelligence and goodwill, imploring God and man – all in vain. You must begin in yourself, with yourself – this is the inexorable law. You cannot change the image without changing the face. First realize that your world is only a reflection of yourself and stop finding fault with the reflection. Attend to yourself, set yourself right – mentally and emotionally. The physical self will follow automatically. You talk so much of reforms: economic, social, political. Leave alone the reforms and mind the reformer. What kind of world can a man create who is stupid, greedy, heartless? (41)

- o Those who can participate in ‘conscious evolution’ are able to perceive the complexity and inter-relationship of all aspects of reality. “Man’s whole view of seeing things must change radically. Only then will he understand what the truth is.”

The Sufis maintain that man, like all living beings, is included in a continual and evolutionary process within the Universe. It is man’s duty to take part harmoniously in this process and to participate in the advancement of this evolution. But because of his way of seeing things, he can only become partially aware of the process. His perceptions are faulty because they are subjective and relative and are conditioned by the outside world; therefore man interprets things according to limited patterns that are not objective and consequently he has little capacity for judging things correctly.

The most complex interrelation of cause and effect that would explain reality cannot be transcribed into the language of the mind in its present state.

‘What we take to be reality is really more primitive short-term rule of thumb. For example, we tend to look at events one-sidedly. We also assume, without any justification, that an event happens as it were in a vacuum. In actual fact, all events are associated with all other events . . . If you look at any action which you do, or which anyone else does, you will find that it was prompted by one of many possible stimuli; and also that it is never an isolated action – it has consequences, many of them ones which you would never expect, certainly which you could not have planned . . . It is only when we are ready to experience our interrelation with the organism of life that we can appreciate mystical experience. That is to say a direct and total perception of truth.’ (*Sufis*, p. 71)

Meanwhile man is in a state that is called ‘a dream.’ (42)

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