

CHAPTER VI

Understanding as the chief requirement in this system – Relativity of understanding – How to increase understanding – A new language – Right and wrong attitudes – Attitudes and understanding – Necessity of aim and direction – Difficulty of finding out what one wants – Our aims are too remote – Good and evil – Morality and necessity of moral sense – Necessity of finding a permanent standard of right and wrong – Development of conscience as aim of the system – Seeing contradictions – Buffers as the chief obstacle to development of conscience – Preparation for breaking down buffers – Inner disharmony and happiness – Need to establish an inner balance – Standards of conduct in life – Consciousness and conscience – How to recognise truth – Need for sincerity with oneself – Mechanicalness

I WISH TO REMIND YOU that this system is based on understanding. Understanding must occupy the first place in this system. The more you understand, the better the result of your work will be.

Understanding is a relative term. Everyone understands something at every moment in his own way. But understanding may be larger, and larger, and still larger. In this system we call understanding a certain possible maximum on a certain level of knowledge and being. As a rule this maximum is too low; people's understanding is usually limited to only one room, and they never get out of that room. But the understanding of these ideas is very much beyond this one room.

What I wish you to think about refers to the whole thing. People do not ask 'why' sufficiently often, and if they do, this 'why' is generally very small. You should think of why you come here, what you want from this system and why, what you can learn from it, why this system exists, why I talk of this system, what I wish to achieve by talking about it. One has to have a certain point of view about it all; it may be a wrong one, but still one must have some idea.

As it is, almost every idea given remains unopened, unexplored. There are boxes and boxes that may be opened, the contents read and many new things added. But mostly we deal with unopened boxes. One box – knowledge, another – being, a third – understanding, and so on. We do not even open the boxes. First we have to learn the contents of the boxes. No need to limit yourself to a definite question in this respect. This is an organic system: in it you can start with anything. Start where you like, only do something with the ideas you hear. It is not enough simply to sit on those boxes of books.

Open the box with knowledge and the box with being. It is the relation between knowledge and being that is important.

There are many things that you can understand now, although, of course, they will be surrounded by things you cannot understand yet; but if you begin with those you can understand, you will understand many other things. Every moment of understanding, every realization, sheds light not only on the thing we are thinking about but on many other things as well.

Q. Is a moment of understanding a moment of self-remembering?

A. It depends. It may be connected with it or not.

Q. Could there be real understanding not connected with self-remembering?

A. There is no 'real' understanding. Understanding is relative. It is like temperature, it may be five degrees, ten degrees, fifteen degrees. You see why ordinary language is no good and why we have to study a different language? Because in ordinary language all words are taken as absolutes. In reality there are different degrees of understanding. As I said, we can understand better, and still better. Then, if we want to understand still better, we must change our being. If we can bring higher emotional centre into play we can understand much better. To understand still more needs higher mental centre.

You see, definitions can seldom help and, as a matter of fact, we can have very few definitions. This conviction that in order to understand something it is necessary to define it is quite wrong, because most things we cannot define, and the few that we can, we can define only relatively with the help of other things. So, among an enormous quantity of things we cannot define at all there are small islands of things we can define.

Q. Is self-remembering less relative than understanding?

A. Even if we take it as an absolute term, the question is, for how long? Whether you remember yourself in the best possible way for half an hour or for five minutes makes a very big difference.

Q. How is one to bridge the gap between self-remembering and merely thinking about it? Is it a question of understanding?

A. You have to break a certain wall, and you do not know how to do it. Learning to do something means acquiring a certain skill. For a long time you cannot do it well, you do it clumsily; then one day you find that you can do it properly. It is the same with self-remembering; not quite, but near enough.

Q. Is there any way to increase one's understanding?

A. Not one way; there are thousands of ways. All that we have spoken about from the first day is about ways to increase understanding. But the first way is by observing and studying ourselves, because this increases our capacity to understand. That is the first step. If you could understand the ideas that have been given, your knowledge would increase. But you only understand on the surface and apart from desire. Or you may have quite a strong desire, but the machine does not work. Yet inside our machine we have better parts which at present we do not use. We can use them only by increasing consciousness. This is the only way.

Q. Can memory of what we heard help?

A. Memory, the best memory we may have, is not sufficient, because in this system we remember not by memory but by understanding. On the contrary, memory may be a hindrance. You hear something which has a right place in the system, and if you can put it where it belongs, you cannot forget it and it will remain there; but if you just remember what was said without putting it into its right place, it is quite useless. Each small thing you hear you must try to understand, and to understand means to find the place where it belongs among other ideas. You must have a general idea of the system and everything new must have its place in it – then you will not forget, and every new observation you make will find its place. It is as though you have a drawing without details and observation fills in the details. If you have no drawing, the observation is lost.

But chiefly you must struggle with obstacles which prevent you from understanding. Only by removing these obstacles can you begin to understand more. But obstacles, with the exception of the general description of identification and so on, are individual. You must find your own; you must see what stands in your way, what keeps you from understanding. When you find it, you must struggle with it. It needs time, for it cannot be found at once, although in some cases it may be very clear almost from the beginning. For a long time all the work must be concentrated on understanding, for it is the only thing by which one can be guided. Our chief difficulty is that we want to 'do' before we even know what it is all about. But in this system one must understand first. When you understand things better, many other things will become possible, but not before.

Q. You said that in order to understand this system one has to increase one's being to the same extent as one's knowledge, and, of the two, the most difficult is increase of being?

A. Both are equally difficult.

Q. But it seems to me easy to increase one's knowledge?

A. Not as easy as you think, because knowledge without understanding will be useless, it will merely be more words.

We must work on change of being, but if we work on that as we do everything in ordinary life, life will not be long enough. It is possible to get a durable change of being only if we use the perfected methods of school work, otherwise our attempts will be too scattered. The first condition of such work is not to believe anything, to verify everything one learns; and the second condition is not to do anything unless one understands why and for what purpose one is doing something. So it depends on understanding; all short-cuts depend on understanding.

Q. I did not understand the difference between being and understanding.

A. You see, they are two different things. Understanding is a combination of knowledge and being. What is the limiting factor in ourselves? It is definitely our being, which means our capacity for understanding. What is understanding? It is connecting one bit of knowledge with another bit of knowledge. For instance, you will see that understanding depends on being if you take the elementary idea of being. Man is divided into different 'I's or groups of 'I's which are unconnected with one another. Then if one 'I' knows one thing, a second 'I' another thing, a third 'I' yet another, and they never meet, what kind of understanding is possible? From one point of view it may look as though a man has enough knowledge, but since these 'I's never meet, this knowledge can never be brought together. This is the state of an ordinary man's being, and it proves that as he is, he cannot have understanding. Understanding always means connecting things with the whole, and if one does not know the whole, how can one connect?

In this system you must try to understand; only what you understand gives positive results. If you do something without understanding it will not give much, for only what you understand is valuable.

Q. I find it difficult to understand the idea that one does not need faith. Do you not have to have faith in the system ideas?

A. No, faith will not help. You have to accept or not accept the ideas on the basis of your preparation. You come to these ideas with certain material, and with the help of this material you decide whether to accept them or not, according to whether you understand them or not. For yourself you can use the word 'accept', but we use the word 'understand'; and if you can understand, you do not need faith. There is absolutely nothing in the preliminary ideas that needs faith, because in some cases, as on the psychological side, you can verify everything, and in some other cases, as in studying the universe, there is the idea of scale. I do not see a single idea in this system which requires faith and where faith would help. On the contrary, I think faith would make things more difficult and stop you instead of helping you.

Q. If for a moment I see mechanicalness and go against it, I sometimes see and understand something new. What gives that understanding?

A. It is a matter for observation. You will get an answer to your question only if you observe facts and see the internal and external conditions which accompany understanding and the conditions which accompany lack of understanding.

Q. Is there anything else one can do, except self-observation, to further one's understanding?

A. Yes, one must understand what one is doing and why one is doing it. The more one understands, the more one can get from the same efforts.

But the chief thing is to remember oneself. The more you remember yourself, the better you will think, for you will find new machines. If you are conscious of yourself, you will find you will not need this mind. This mind will serve you for thinking about tables and chairs, but if you want to think about greater things you will be able to use better machines.

Q. Why cannot I understand the least thing when I think about it, but sometimes understanding suddenly comes?

A. Understanding always comes that way – you understand, and then you cease to understand. But if all attempts to understand something go wrong, try not to think about it but try to remember yourself, that is, to be emotional, and in time you will understand. Understanding

does not become permanent at once; as in everything else there are many steps and you can understand something one day and not understand it the next day, for you may be more conscious in the same circumstances one day and more asleep the next. So many days may pass before it becomes your own.

Q. Does one understand through the emotional centre?

A. Understanding is a combined function of all centres. Each centre separately can only know; when they combine all their knowledge, this gives understanding. To understand something one needs at least three centres.

Q. Did you mean that one must understand every side of a thing?

A. No, I meant that first you must have an idea on which line, on which scale, of which whole you are thinking. And then, if you speak or think about some separate thing, you must understand this separate thing in relation to the whole. Only this is understanding: finding the place of this thing, the meaning of this thing, the relation of this thing to yourself and to other things. Try it, but you will find that it is not as easy as it seems.

Q. Do we understand nothing, however limited?

A. Yes, simple things, sometimes, we understand; but if something is a little more complicated, we lose ourselves and do not understand. We want to understand big things without realizing that in actual fact we cannot understand the simplest things. If we begin with them, then gradually we will begin to understand more. But if we begin with big things and refuse to think of or observe small things, we shall never understand anything properly.

Q. Isn't it ever possible to understand emotionally, without understanding intellectually? You sometimes feel a thing that you cannot understand.

A. Then it is feeling, not understanding. Emotional understanding is very good sometimes, only you cannot verify it. But if you can look at a thing from the point of view of one centre, another centre and a third centre, then you really understand. And even the direction of centres is not sufficient by itself, for knowledge is necessary. Only when knowledge is connected with the direction of centres is it understanding

Q. How can an intellectual understanding pass into emotional understanding?

A. As I have just said, understanding very seldom works with one centre. The work of one centre can be information or feeling, but not understanding, which is the function of several centres – two, three, four, maybe more.

Q. Is there a way in which I can test my understanding of a thing?

A. You ask without indicating the thing you mean, and this shows that you do not yourself understand what you are asking, because for every separate understanding there is a definite test. Suppose you say that you understand how to get here from where you live: then, if you take your car (if you have a car) and arrive here, this would mean that you have a test for your understanding. In everything else only practical application will show whether you understand or not.

Q. If we reach a certain stage of understanding, shall we be of more use to the world?

A. First we must be of use to ourselves. When we reach the first stage we can think about the second stage. If we are asleep, we cannot be of use to anyone, not even to ourselves. How can we understand other people when we do not understand ourselves? Men 1, 2 and 3 cannot understand one another, on this level understanding is simply accidental. If we move in the direction of man No. 4, we begin to understand one another.

Q. What do you mean by understanding one another?

A. When people speak, try to explain their views, they cannot. They cannot even repeat correctly what they have heard, they change things. And misunderstanding grows and grows. One invents a theory, immediately five others are invented to contradict it. Thousands of years have passed from the beginning of creation, and in all this time people never understood one another. How can we expect that they will now?

So first we must understand ourselves. We do not see our situation and realize our mechanicalness. We do not see that this not understanding is a law.

Q. How can I understand better my mechanicalness and see that I am a machine?

A. We can do nothing without trying. If you want to make sure whether you are a machine or not, try to do something that a machine cannot do. Try to remember yourself, for a machine cannot remember itself. If you find that you can, it will mean that you are not a machine; if you find that you cannot, it will prove that you are a machine. And then, if you realize that you are a machine and want to find out whether you can cease being a machine, again the only method is to try.

Q. Did you say that only people of equal being can understand one another?

A. This is not understood quite rightly, because if two people have an equally wrong being, they will not understand one another. It is not equality which brings understanding between people, but a certain level, not only of being but also of knowledge. Different levels, such as men No. 5, No. 6 and No. 7, presuppose levels of both knowledge and being. Men No. 5 are supposed to understand one another; men No. 6 understand better and men No. 7 understand fully. Even men No. 4 understand one another as compared with us, but *we* cannot understand one another, or understand only occasionally for a moment and at another moment cease to understand. We cannot rely on such understanding. People who know one another very well may work together for years and at certain moments not understand one another. This is why the place or the conditions where we are is called the place of confusion of tongues, because we all speak different languages. For this reason in a right school you first of all learn the language in which you can speak with other people in the school and then, using this language – if you use it in the right way – you will understand one another. That is why a new language is necessary. If you do not learn this language, or if the language is wrong, you will never understand one another.

Q. Can the same word have a different quality of meaning according to the level of people who use it?

A. Yes, it may have. Words begin to acquire objective meaning starting from the level of man No. 4. Men 1, 2 and 3 are purely subjective and everyone understands every word in his own way. But if people know *this* language, or even a few words of it, they can use it in the same meaning.

Q. If you understand one word completely, would that mean you had got to the stage of man No. 7?

A. No, you cannot understand one word completely and another incompletely. You have to know them all on a certain level, and then your being changes and you find many more divisions. So your language will become more and more complicated. And at a certain level perhaps you will need new words, new forms, because old forms will no longer be sufficient.

Q. Does understanding of a term or word vary in relation to the degree of being? Would the word 'love', for instance, mean one thing to man No. 1 and another to man No. 4 or 5?

A. Certainly. We can see already how the same word means one thing for man No. 1, another thing for man No. 2 and yet another for man No. 3. But on the level of man 1, 2 and 3 this is mechanical, in the sense that people cannot help it. They understand according to their level, their capacity, not according to the meaning of things.

Q. What are the indications of a change from one level to another – say from No. 3 to No. 4 or 5?

A. Man No. 5 is one, he has unity. He does not live in this constant conflict of egos that we have. He has self-consciousness. He has control of higher emotional centre. So he will know himself what the change is. Other people will know only what he shows them, because he can control himself. Man No. 4 knows his aim and how his aim can be attained. He goes with his eyes open, while we go with our eyes shut.

Q. What did you mean by saying in one of your lectures that understanding cannot be different?

A. If people reach the highest level, they cannot understand things differently. This refers to the highest level, but since we aspire to reach it, we must take it as a principle. If people understand things differently, it means that they are all wrong. In a small way you can find examples of it even now. If two people really understand something, for instance if they can do something equally well, they will understand one another. But we lost the habit of judging things from the practical side, we judge them theoretically, by words.

Q. Cannot you have some understanding before you have complete understanding?

A. We cannot speak in absolutes when we speak about ourselves. We can only speak of relative values. Complete understanding is very far, but we can speak of less understanding and more understanding. If you continue trying to remember yourself and not to identify, understanding will grow.

Q. Could you explain more what you mean when you say that understanding means understanding a part in relation to the whole?

A. If you understand only a part, it is not understanding. It would be like blind men trying to explain the elephant, one by its tail, another by its trunk, and so on. Understanding means connecting parts with the whole. One can begin from parts, or one can begin from the whole. But whatever one begins from, the more connected things are, the better one understands – if the connections are made rightly and are not merely an illusion.

Q. If you understand something in the system, do you use higher centres?

A. No, only higher parts of centres. Higher centres mean higher consciousness. But there are many different states of understanding, and one can make very interesting investigations of understanding. For instance, there are things one does not understand one moment and another moment one does, and then again one loses it. Then there are things, such as many sentences in the New Testament, which have many meanings. For instance, the sentence about little children has about forty different meanings, but one can never keep them all in mind. I could never understand more than three meanings at once. I wrote down about twenty, but then they became just words. It is necessary to know our limitations.

Right understanding requires a right attitude. We must understand that we have no control, that we are machines, that everything happens to us. But simply speaking about it does not change these facts. To cease being mechanical requires something else, and, first of all, it requires a change of attitude. One thing over which we have a certain control is our attitudes – attitudes towards knowledge, towards the system, towards work, towards self-study, towards friends and so on. We must understand that we cannot ‘do’, but we can change our attitudes.

Attitudes can be very different. For the moment we will take only two – positive and negative, not in the sense of positive and negative emotions, but referring to the positive and negative parts of intellectual centre; the part which says yes and the part which says no, that is, approval and disapproval. These are the two chief attitudes. It is very important to think about attitudes because very often we take a negative attitude towards things we can understand only with a positive attitude. For instance, it may happen that people take a negative attitude towards something connected with the work. Then their understanding stops and they cannot understand anything until they change their attitude. We must have positive attitudes in some cases and negative attitudes in others, because often lack of understanding is caused by a wrong attitude. There are many many things in life that you cannot understand unless you have a sufficiently good negative attitude towards them, for if you look at them positively you will never understand anything. If a man studies life, he must come to negative conclusions, for there are too many things wrong in life. Trying to create only positive attitudes is as wrong as having only negative attitudes. Yet some people can have a negative attitude towards anything and everything, and some others try to cultivate a positive attitude towards

things that need a negative attitude. On the other hand, as I said, the moment you have a negative attitude towards things that refer to the work, to the ideas, methods and rules of the work, you cease to understand. You can understand, according to your capacity, only as long as you are positive.

But this refers only to intellectual attitudes. In emotional centre, negative emotional attitudes mean identifying.

Q. I am not sure I understand what a negative attitude is.

A. It means a suspicious or unsympathetic attitude – there are many variations, an attitude of fear sometimes. Take it in the ordinary sense of accepting or not accepting.

Q. Isn't an attitude the same as identification?

A. Certainly not. Attitude means point of view. You can have a point of view without being identified. Very often, identifying is the result of a wrong attitude.

Q. How can one change one's attitude?

A. First, by studying oneself and life on the lines of this system. This changes the attitude. This system is a system of different thinking, or rather of different attitudes, not merely of knowledge. Then, a certain valuation is necessary; you must understand the relative value of things. We do not speak about doing yet – we speak about study. We must study and come to understand things which are only words for us now, and often words used in a wrong sense and in a wrong place. It is necessary to understand and remember certain fundamental principles. If you do this, you will start in the right way. If you do not understand or remember them, things will go wrong. Generally there are three or four chief stumbling-blocks, and unless you understand and remember the fundamental principles you will fall over one or another of them.

Q. I find that I greatly value the system with my mind, but how am I to increase my emotional valuation so as to make greater efforts?

A. By better understanding and by trying to remember yourself. Understanding cannot be only in the mind; I explained that it means the working of several centres at the same time, and the part that the emotional centre plays in it is very important because there can be no deep understanding without emotional energy.

Q. Can you explain more why a certain attitude is necessary in order to understand a thing?

A. Try to think about it; try to see for yourself why it is necessary and try to find what an attitude or point of view means. It is a process of thinking, putting things together – all the things we already know, all the ideas and principles we have learnt, and being able to see facts from a new point of view. To think in a new way is a very difficult thing, for the old way of thinking is kept up by old habits of thinking, old associations, attitudes and the influence of things themselves. Suppose you have a certain attitude towards something, and this thing itself is trying to keep this attitude in you by all possible means. Then, if you change it, if you direct it, you will make a big step.

Q. We have been told that real work on being requires a realization of how to get right understanding. You also said that we must understand what we want?

A. There are several reasons for that. Understanding is the strongest force we have which can change us. The more understanding we have, the better the results of our efforts. As to knowing what you want – just imagine yourself going to a big shop with many different departments. You must know what you want to buy. How can you get something if you do not know what you want? But first of all you must know what is in the shop, otherwise you may ask for things they do not sell. This is the way to approach this problem.

It is necessary always to remember why you started. Do you want to get things you can get from ordinary life or different things? Is it worthwhile trying? Our capacity for imagination, generally used so wrongly, can help in this case. But you must control it all the time and not let it run away with you. We call it imagination if it runs away with us, but if you control it,

you can use it to see what a thing means, what it implies. So if you use it, it may help you to see whether you really want what you say you want or not, because very often we want something different, or we do not realize that one thing brings another thing with it. You cannot want one thing by itself; if you want one thing, you get many other things with it. Only when you know what you want will you know where you are going, and know it rightly. It is necessary to know. It may be quite fantastic, quite impossible from the ordinary point of view, and yet it may be right. Or it may look very simple and right and yet be impossible.

Q. Can you tell me what one should aim at? I mean, what it is possible to acquire through the work?

A. As a general answer – the only aim is change of being. The aim is to reach higher states of consciousness and to be able to work with higher centres. All the rest is for that, in order to achieve that. It is necessary to do a thousand things that seem to have no relation to it, but they are all necessary, because we live below the normal level. First we must reach the normal level, and second, we must try to develop new things and possibilities. No one can help you in this, only your own work and your own understanding. You must begin with understanding. These lectures and this system are to give understanding. The next step depends on your own efforts. Change of being can be achieved only if you remember all that was said and if you do not make exceptions for yourself and leave out things you do not like. If you do this, you will not have a right relation to what was said, and even if you try to remember it, it will change nothing.

Q. What do you mean when you say that we live below our normal level? What is normality?

A. Normality is capacity for development. Usually people are below normal. Only from the level of ordinary man does the possibility of development begin. But there are many states below that of the ordinary man. People who are too identified, or hypnotized by formatory ideas, or who lie too much are more machines than an ordinary man. To be an ordinary man is already a relatively high state, because from this state it is possible to move.

Q. I have often tried to think what I want, but I only find a muddle of many things.

A. That's it. I want you to realize how difficult it is to define what one wants. Suppose you are given full choice to have what you want: you will not know what to say. But it is important that you should understand and know it; you must be able to formulate it. About certain things you can be sure that you cannot get them in any ordinary way, but there is no guarantee that you will get them in this way either. For instance, the order may be wrong. There is a certain order in which one can get things, which we do not know. You can be quite certain that you can get some things, but it may be you will get not what you think you want but something else. And even if you do not get the things you want, you may be quite sure that you could not have got them in any other way.

The strange thing is that as a rule people do not know their aim. Aim can be formulated only if one already knows something about one's position. If a man does not realize his position, all his aims will be imaginary. So I advise you to think about your aim: what you thought about it before and how you would describe what one can get and what one must try to get. It is useless to describe an aim which you know you cannot attain. But if you have an aim that you can hope to attain, your work will be conscious, serious.

In the beginning people usually set before them aims that are too abstract and remote. A person's aim is at first like a light which he sees afar off while walking by night along a dark road. He makes this light his aim and goes towards it. On the way to it he sees another light, between him and the first light, and he understands that first he should go to the nearest light, and he goes towards it. After a certain time, he sees a third light, again between him and the light towards which he is going, and so on. This is repeated several times until, at length, the man sees the light nearest to him, that is, the aim he is able to get to from where he is.

So, do not have too big a view of things; do not look too far; look nearer. You cannot start

working for some remote future; you work for to-morrow. You find something wrong to-day. Why? Because yesterday was wrong. So if you make to-day right, to-morrow will be right. And only with an aim is it possible to remember what you did yesterday and what you do to-day – what corresponds to your aim and what does not.

The motive power in all our actions is of two kinds: something attracts or something repels us. We cannot know what we can attain in the remote future, but we know very well the situation in which we are. If we understand it, it will give us a definite aim. The aim will be to get out of this situation. We can know certain things in us from which we must try to get free.

Aim must be clearly formulated, understood and remembered. Only then is it possible to come to results. If the aim is forgotten every moment, no results are possible. How can a man who realizes his position formulate his aim? He will see that the centre of gravity of his position is sleep; then his aim will be to awake. Or if he sees his mechanicalness, his aim will be to get rid of mechanicalness. Both come to the same thing. You see, it is a simple and practical view.

Q. I see more clearly that what hinders progress is not wanting to escape mechanicalness sufficiently. How can one intensify the desire to escape?

A. This is one of the constantly recurring questions which it is almost impossible to answer. You have to try, and you have to compare things as they are and as they should be. More understanding is necessary, and if you want a complete explanation, self-remembering, because it is the only real answer. If self-remembering increases, all the rest increases.

Q. You mentioned obstacles that have to be got over before attaining one's aim. Since then I saw so many obstacles in myself that I do not see any possibility of getting anything.

A. That means you identify with them. You must see that you are always on the move, you never remain in one place; sometimes you are closer to your aim and sometimes further from it. It is necessary to observe yourself, to catch moments when you are nearer your aim. If you formulate your aim, you will know when you are closer to it and when you are further from it. If your aim is formulated rightly, you cannot be always at the same distance from it.

Q. I find that I work for immediate results. Is it a wrong aim?

A. There is no question of right and wrong: there is only the question of knowing your aim. Aim must always be in the present and refer to the future. No result is possible if there is no aim, no effort and no decision.

Q. How can one see how to make big efforts?

A. By making small efforts. A big effort depends on circumstances, situation, understanding, on many things. You cannot begin with big efforts. You must begin with small efforts, like, for instance, trying to remember yourself, or trying to stop thoughts three times a day. It is quite a small effort, but if you do it regularly, the need or the possibility of a big effort may come and you will be able to make it at the right moment.

Q. When I first came to lectures, I had a very large aim, but now it has got much smaller.

A. Yes, aims shrink very much when you begin to work. They start enormous – like balloons – and then they become quite small, so that you can put them in your pocket.

Q. I suppose, in our present state, we cannot appreciate the difference between right and wrong?

A. Quite the opposite: we can appreciate this difference, and not only can but must. Wrong or evil begins to be comprehensible from the moment we have a direction. If we have no direction, then there is no particular evil, because it is all the same.

Q. By direction you mean aim?

A. Yes. Aim means direction, a certain line. If my aim is to go home from here, it will be right for me to turn to the right and wrong to turn to the left. This is how the principle of good and evil can be established. There can be no definition of good and evil, or right and wrong, without first establishing an aim or direction. When you have an aim, then what is opposed to

your aim or takes you away from it is wrong, and what helps your aim is right. It must be your personal aim. If it corresponds to the possibilities of development, then the system explains these possibilities. And if you understand that what keeps us from reaching our aim is mechanicalness and what helps us is consciousness, it will follow that consciousness represents good and mechanicalness evil. So, instead of 'good' and 'evil' the system uses the words 'conscious' and 'mechanical'. This is quite sufficient for all practical purposes.

If there are any questions we may go further, only you must always remember this practical definition, because it is the only sure ground we can have: what is right *for us* is what helps our development, our awakening and our struggle with mechanicalness; and what is wrong *for us* is what encourages our mechanical tendencies, what prevents our changing, what hinders our development. If we start from that, then later we will find many more criteria for discrimination.

Q. Is everything mechanical evil?

A. It does not necessarily mean that all that is mechanical is evil; but evil cannot be conscious, it can only be mechanical. You must ask yourself: Can evil be conscious in *me*? Everything else is philosophy. If there is something that from your subjective point of view you consider good, and if you try consciously to do what you consider bad, you will find that either you cannot do it, or you will lose all pleasure in it. In exactly the same way you cannot be negative consciously, without identification. Negative emotions are the best conductors of evil, because they are one of the most mechanical things we have.

Q. There are many things one has to do in life that are against one's aim.

A. Why against aim? You can say that many things do not correspond to your aim, but I do not see that one has to do many things against one's aim. In doing things that one must do in ordinary life, the most one can do is lose time. But there are many things that *one does not have to do* that are much worse than merely wasting time. If something is unavoidable, one can always make work out of any activity. Other things are much worse, such as imagination, negative emotions, and so on. They are not unavoidable. Things we are obliged to do, do not contradict work. But without being in any way obliged we do many things that do contradict work. Actions that go definitely against one's aim can only be mechanical, and many of them interrupt one's advance towards one's aim.

Q. Is the aim of consciousness to be in complete control of the machine, so that, for a conscious man, all that is mechanical could not exist?

A. Leave conscious man. You can understand evil only in relation to yourself – the rest is too general. In yourself you find features and tendencies that go against consciousness, that help resistance. That evil is in yourself. You will see that evil can be manifested only mechanically. A long time is necessary to understand that fully. You may often be mistaken, you may take for evil what is not evil, or take something mechanical for conscious.

Q. Can we easily do something wrong if we just act according to our upbringing, mechanically? Would it be better to act against it?

A. To act against it would be equally mechanical, you will only oppose one mechanicalness to another mechanicalness. If you do something against what you are accustomed to, it will not necessarily be right. Besides, it does not mean that everything you are taught or accustomed to is wrong. That would be too simple. Take some examples of your actions and you will see that when things happen, when you let them happen, they may be right or they may be wrong. But if you were conscious you could choose; that would be quite a different situation.

Q. Must we find ordinary standards of conduct, or find new ones in the work?

A. Very often we excuse ourselves or find excuses for not remembering ordinary standards, because we think that we must have new ones. When we are in the process of acquiring new ones, at a certain moment we have none, so you must understand that you have to follow ordinary standards until you have new ones. If you take the essence of ordinary moral laws,

you will find nothing particularly different from what you can see in the system. For instance, take ordinary rules of relationship with people. They are very simple: do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. It is quite logical and clear, and is fully accepted in the system.

Q. Should we not find out for ourselves what is right and wrong, and not be told?

A. How can you find it out for yourself? People have looked for an answer to this problem from the creation of the world and have not found it yet. If you could find for yourself what is right and wrong, you could find out everything else. No, you have to learn this, like many other things that have to be learned. Only when you appreciate the value of self-remembering, do you begin to have right values and can judge and weigh.

Q. There are many things one does deliberately, knowing that they are wrong, but one is not strong enough to stop it.

A. Certainly, because if you are mechanical in everything, you cannot become conscious in only one thing. Besides, deliberately does not mean consciously; things just happen. If everything happens, one thing cannot *not* happen; it has to happen also.

Q. Is there a moral standard peculiar to this system?

A. Yes, certainly, but, as I have just said, in relation to this system it is very easy to understand. It is the relation of mechanical to conscious. This means that certain things are mechanical and should remain mechanical, but certain other things that are now mechanical must become conscious.

You see, one of the most difficult things is to recognize right and wrong, or good and evil. Our mind is not accustomed to think about it in relation to consciousness. We think that there must be a permanent external definition that can be accepted, remembered and followed, and we do not realize that there can be no external definition. But there are inner qualities of actions which determine things.

This idea of the relation of good and bad to conscious and unconscious is a very useful thing to think about, particularly when you begin to find right analogies; not only because it gives you a certain definite understanding, but also because by keeping your mind on this and similar ideas you hear in the system, you keep it on the highest level possible for us, that is, in the intellectual parts of centres. You cannot profitably think about such things with the lower, mechanical parts of centres, for nothing would come of it. In order to get some understanding, you have to use intellectual parts of centres, and not only one, but two or three at the same time.

What is morality? Understanding of the laws of conduct? It is not sufficient. If we say, like a savage, 'If you steal from me it is bad, but if I steal from you it is good', it is not morality; it is merely savage conduct. Because morality begins when one has a feeling of good and bad in relation to one's own actions, and is capable of renouncing what one considers bad, and doing what one considers good.

What is good? And what is bad? Generally, at this first stage, man borrows moral principles from religious, philosophical or scientific ideas, or simply adopts conventional taboos. He believes that some things are good and some other things are bad. But this is subjective morality, and the understanding of good and evil is purely relative. In all countries and at all epochs certain moral codes were accepted which tried to explain what is good and what is bad. But if we try to compare the existing theories we shall see that they all contradict one another and are full of contradictions in themselves. There is no such thing as general morality; there is no such thing even as Christian morality. For instance, Christianity says you must not kill, but nobody takes this seriously. Many moralities have been built on the basis of killing. For instance, as I said in the first lecture, in some countries it is considered a most immoral thing to refuse blood revenge. And why in one case can a man kill and in another not? All that is known about ordinary morality is full of inconsistencies.

So, if you think about this problem, you will understand that in spite of hundreds of moral systems and teachings man cannot say what is right and what is wrong, for moral values change, there is nothing permanent in them. At the same time, according to their attitude to the idea of right and wrong people can be divided into two categories. There are people who have no feeling of right and wrong at all; all they have instead of moral sense is the idea of pleasant and unpleasant, profitable and unprofitable. And there are other people who have a feeling of right and wrong, without actually knowing *what* is right and what is wrong. People who belong to the first category cannot be interested in the system, it is not for them. People of the second category may be interested.

What must be understood from the beginning is that man must start with a certain sense of right and wrong, otherwise nothing can be done. Then he must be sufficiently sceptical about ordinary morality and must understand that there is nothing general or stable in ordinary moral principles, for they change according to conventions, place and period. And he must understand the necessity of objective right and wrong. If he understands these three things, he will find a basis for distinguishing what is right and what is wrong in relation to each separate thing, because, if he starts rightly, he will find that there are definite standards with the help of which good and bad cease to be relative and become absolute. The whole thing is to start from a right attitude, a right point of view. If he starts from a wrong point of view, he will not find anything.

Q. How can we trust our own sense of right and wrong?

A. You cannot trust or mistrust; it is there. So that is not the question. You can only hesitate and be in doubt in relation to the object. Certainly, without knowledge, without development, without consciousness you cannot say definitely whether something is right or wrong; but you may be on the way to it. Morality is always different, but moral sense is permanent. If people have no moral sense, it is no use speaking to them. But the feeling of right and wrong is one thing, and the definition, the contents, is quite another. Two people may have a very strong feeling of right and wrong, but what is right for one will be wrong for the other. Feeling does not presuppose definition, so a man can have the feeling of right and wrong, and have wrong ideas about it.

Q. Would the standard to apply be whether a particular thing helps or hinders consciousness?

A. The standard must be connected with a system. Without a system (I do not mean *this* system, but one must have *a* system) you cannot judge.

This system begins with the possibility of objective consciousness, and objective consciousness is described as a state in which we can know truth. If, when we reach it, we can know truth, we shall also know what is right and wrong. Consequently, the same way which leads to objective consciousness leads also to the understanding of right and wrong. As we have not got objective consciousness, we consider everything that helps us to develop it as right and good, and everything that hinders us in this as wrong and bad.

In our ordinary understanding objective truth refers more to the intellectual side of life, but a man may want to know it also on the religious side, the moral side, the aesthetic side, and so on. The system explains that men 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 are all in a different position in this respect. There is religion No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4 and so on, and there is morality No. 1, No. 2, No. 3, No. 4, No. 5 and so on. It does not mean that one or another of them is wrong, but that one cannot be explained by another. For instance, Christ did not preach inquisition, and if his teaching is distorted by men 1, 2 and 3 to be used for criminal purposes, this cannot be attributed to Christ.

Since we are men 1, 2 and 3, there are many things about which we can find no visible indications as to whether they help or hinder the development of consciousness. So we must look for other principles, and we can find these other principles only if we think about concrete cases of conduct. In the system one can find many sufficient indications which show

how to look at one or another thing.

Q. Do you think that in the course of time a new belief and morality can spring from this system?

A. From this system, no. That is quite a different thing. These ideas are not for the masses, not for the multitude. You must remember that this is school teaching, and school teaching can exist only for schools. In favourable circumstances perhaps schools can increase, but that is quite a different thing; it is not the same as the appearance and growth of a religion.

The aim of the system is to bring man to conscience. Conscience is a certain faculty that exists in every normal man. It is really a different expression of consciousness, only, consciousness works more on the intellectual side, and conscience more on the moral side: it helps to realize what is good and what is bad in one's conduct. Conscience is a state in which one cannot hide anything from oneself, and it must be developed in man. This development is parallel and simultaneous with the development of consciousness. We cannot say that we do not have it, so it does not mean a special development of something that does not exist in us, only in our life it is behind the scenes, buried very deep down in us and asleep. It may awake for a moment in ordinary life, and when it does, particularly at first, it always brings suffering, for it is very unpleasant to face the truth about oneself.

Conscience in relation to emotions is the same as consciousness in relation to ideas. It may be easier for you to understand what conscience is if you think of the etymological meaning of the words consciousness and conscience. Consciousness means all knowledge connected together. But we cannot speak of all knowledge, because it would be too high; we can only speak of all knowledge we may have relating to the same subject. It must be connected with self-awareness, so consciousness must be yourself, connected with all you know about some particular thing. Conscience is the same thing, only in relation to emotions. To have a moment of conscience is to feel at once all that you feel about somebody or something. If you can feel all that you ever felt in relation to the same person, country, house, book or anything else together, this would be a moment of conscience and you will see how many contradictions there are in your emotions. Unless you have had this experience, you cannot imagine how many different feelings you can have. In a state of conscience we see them all at once. This is why it is such an unpleasant state. Conscience is not very far, only we have many methods of dealing with it to prevent ourselves feeling it, such as imagination, negative emotions, justifying and so on, for it is too uncomfortable.

Q. You said that conscience is feeling all our emotions at the same time. I cannot quite see how we can feel them all together.

A. No, I never said that. I said that in a moment of conscience, whether you wish it or not, you will feel all your emotions on the same subject at once. But it is not a definition of conscience. Conscience can be defined as an emotional feeling of truth on a given subject. As I said, conscience is the same thing as consciousness, only it looks different to us. We are subjective, so we take things from a subjective point of view. When we think about consciousness, we think about a certain force, a certain energy or state in connection with intellectual appreciation. The same energy, the same force can manifest through emotions, and this may happen to quite ordinary men in ordinary conditions. Sometimes people may have an emotional feeling of truth – some more, others less. This is conscience. Lack of consciousness, absence of self-remembering and many other things such as identification and imagination, shut us off from these moments of conscience which otherwise would be more possible. Try to think about it in this way. Seeing contradictions and conscience are connected, but they are not the same thing, and if you take them together you will never get anywhere.

Our consciousness, such as we can have in our state, cannot manifest through the intellectual centre, because the intellectual centre is too slow, since it works mostly only with the formatory part. But it can at times manifest through the emotional centre, and then, as I

said, it is called conscience. Consciousness, to manifest, needs long preparation, intellectual capacities and things like that, but conscience works more often and more easily than full consciousness. Full consciousness needs much knowledge connected with the realization of one's existence, but it must be a constant realization; it is not enough to realize it to-day and forget to-morrow.

At first, when conscience manifests itself in us, it turns against us, and we begin to see all our inner contradictions. Usually we cannot see them because we are always in one or another small compartment, but conscience can see from the top and show us that here we felt one thing, there another thing, and here again quite a different thing, all on the same subject.

For instance, if we take the work, we must realize that at one moment we feel one thing about it, at another moment quite a different thing, at a third moment again a different thing. And we never feel it all together. If we could feel at the same time all that we ever felt about the work, we would have a great shock. That would be conscience. All our life, all our habitual ways of thinking, have only one aim – to avoid shocks, unpleasant feelings, unpleasant realizations about ourselves. And this is the chief thing that keeps us asleep, because in order to awake we must not be afraid; we must be brave enough to see the contradictions.

Even quite apart from the question of conscience, it is important to find in yourself that, when you have strong emotions (it does not refer to small emotions), when you feel strongly about some particular thing, you may be practically certain that at another moment you will have a different emotion about the same thing. If you cannot see it in yourself, see it in other people. When you realize the existence of these contradictory emotions, it will help you to understand your mechanicalness and your lack of understanding of yourself – lack of self-knowledge. So long as we feel different emotions at different times, what are we like? One moment we trust, another moment we are suspicious; one moment we like, another moment we dislike. So the aim is to bring those different emotions together, otherwise we will never know ourselves. If we always feel only one emotion at a time and do not remember other emotions, we are identified with it. When we have another emotion we forget the first; when we have a third, we forget the first and the second. Very early in life, by imitation and in different other ways, we learn to live in a kind of imaginary state to save ourselves from unpleasantness, so people develop in themselves this capacity to see only one emotion at a time.

Remember to work. Remember yourself in one mood, then remember yourself in another mood. Try to connect them together and you will see.

Q. If we have different compartments, do they express themselves?

A. As I just said, one at a time. For instance, we love somebody one moment, and wish them dead the next. Only we do not see it. Yet sometimes moments come when we can feel all our emotions on the same subject together. Only you must wait until you get a taste of such a moment, because without a taste of it you will never get any further in understanding what a moment of conscience means. Conscience can be very strong and definite. But in most cases it is asleep, because, since most people are asleep, everything in them is asleep.

So conscience must be awakened. We must learn to understand truth emotionally in certain cases, and we can do this only by not being afraid to face contradictions in ourselves.

We have special appliances in us that prevent us from seeing these contradictions. These appliances are called buffers. Buffers are special arrangements, or a special growth if you like, which prevent us from seeing the truth about ourselves and about other things. Buffers divide us into sort of thought-proof compartments. We may have many contradictory desires, intentions, aims, and we do not see that they are contradictory because buffers stand between them and prevent us from looking from one compartment into another. When you are in one compartment, you think it is the whole thing, then you pass into another compartment and you think that this is the whole thing. These appliances are called buffers because, as in a railway

carriage, they diminish shocks. But in relation to the human machine they are even more: they make it impossible to see, so they are blinkers as well. People with really strong buffers never see; but if they saw how contradictory they were, they would be unable to move, because they would not trust themselves. That is why buffers are necessary in mechanical life. Such extreme cases mean wrong development, but even in ordinary people, in one or another line there are always deeply hidden buffers.

Q. When one recognizes a buffer in oneself, can one do anything to get rid of it?

A. First you must see it; before you see it nothing can be done. And whether you can do anything after you have seen it depends on the size of the buffer and on many other things. Sometimes it is necessary to take a hammer and break it; and sometimes it disappears if you throw light on it, for buffers do not like light. When buffers begin to disappear and become less strong, conscience begins to manifest itself. In ordinary life it is kept down by buffers.

Q. Could you explain a little more what you mean by buffers?

A. Buffers are very difficult to describe or define. As I said, they are a kind of partitions in us that keep us from observing ourselves. You may have different emotional attitudes (they always refer to emotional attitudes) towards the same thing in the morning, at midday, and in the evening, without noticing it. Or in a certain set of circumstances you have one kind of opinions and in other circumstances another kind of opinions, and buffers are walls that stand between them. Generally each buffer is based on some kind of wrong assumption about oneself, one's capacities, one's powers, inclinations, knowledge, being, consciousness and so on. They differ from ordinary wrong ideas because they are permanent; in given circumstances one always feels and sees the same thing; and you must understand that in man 1, 2 and 3 nothing must be permanent. The only chance he has of changing is that there is nothing permanent in him. Opinions, prejudices, preconceived ideas are not buffers yet, but when they become very firm, and always the same, and always have the same trick of shutting things off from our sight, they become buffers. If people have some kind of constant wrong attitude, based on wrong information, wrong work of centres, negative emotion, if they always use the same kind of excuse, they prepare buffers. And when a buffer is established and becomes permanent, it stops all possible progress. If buffers continue to develop, they become fixed ideas, and that is already insanity, or the beginning of insanity.

Buffers can be very different. For instance, I knew a man who had a very interesting buffer. Every time he did something wrong, he said that he did it on purpose, as an experiment. This is a very good example of a buffer. Another man had a buffer that he was never late; so, with this buffer firmly established he was always late but never noticed it, and if his attention was drawn to it, he was always astonished and said, 'How can I be late? I am never late!'

Q. When a buffer has gone down, and you see something that seems unbearable, what is the next step?

A. All the work is preparation for that. If one does not work but only thinks that one works and a buffer suddenly disappears by some accident, one finds oneself in a very unpleasant situation, and one also sees that one only pretended to work. Buffers help us to pretend instead of really working. This is why people in the ordinary state cannot have conscience, because if conscience suddenly came, they would go mad. Buffers are useful in this respect; they help to keep us asleep; for if other sides are not developed, if everything is not brought into a certain balance, one would not be able to bear oneself, as one is. So it is not even advisable to destroy buffers before one is ready. One must be ready first. We can bear ourselves only because we do not know ourselves. If we knew ourselves as we are, it would be unbearable.

Q. Yet one sees oneself intellectually without feeling strongly.

A. Intellectual self-study is only preparation; but when you try to remember yourself and not to identify, you begin to feel emotional.

Q. Do we all have buffers?

A. Yes. We could not live without them; we would have to be sincere all the time, and see everything all the time.

Q. What is the cause of this inner disharmony which one usually has?

A. This disharmony is the normal state of man No. 1, 2 and 3.

A sleeping man cannot be harmonious; if he were harmonious there would be no incentive for development and there would be no possibility.

Q. But if one tries to be more awake, one becomes more aware of one's disharmony; then, having seen this, could one become more harmonious?

A. This is a theoretical question. One ceases to be disharmonious when one ceases to be what one is now. As one is now, one is disharmonious, then aware of one's disharmony, then again disharmonious, again aware of it, and so on.

Q. So one can never be happy?

A. Happiness means balance, and balance in our state is impossible, taking balance in the sense of harmoniousness. We are always balanced in a certain way, but a wrong way. If we were harmonious in our present state, there would be no reason for us to change; so nature arranged it very well that we cannot be harmonious such as we are, in order that we should not be happy in this state. Happiness is harmony between external circumstances and internal manifestations, and for us it is impossible, if by happiness you understand harmony.

Q. Work seems to make one more unhappy.

A. Study of the system, acquiring more control, cannot make one more unhappy. There is no abnegation in it. What one has to lose is imagination. Anything that is real is not an obstacle to awakening. It is the imaginary things that keep us asleep, and those we have to give up.

Q. Are buffers due to education and surroundings?

A. To many things; but the best buffers are created by self-education.

Q. Does the system teach us to get rid of buffers?

A. Yes, the system teaches us first to find them. Then, having found them, you may find methods for getting rid of them. You cannot begin to work on them before you know them.

Q. How can one find buffers?

A. One cannot find them unless one observes oneself in the right way. You must look for contradictions.

Q. Must you find your own buffers or must you be shown?

A. In any case you cannot be shown until you have done all you can for yourself. Otherwise people never believe it; they say, 'Anything but that!'

Q. Is saying to oneself, 'I will do it to-morrow' a buffer?

A. It is not a buffer, but a very good method of keeping the buffers going well.

Q. You say that one must look for inconsistencies. I do see many of these, but I put them down to different 'I's'

A. Yes, that is quite right. But when we are in one of these inconsistencies we are generally identified with one of these views and cannot see the other. When you are in neither, when you stand aside, you can say, 'Sometimes I look at it in this way and sometimes in that way', but when you are identified you cannot do that. You must try to break this identification.

Q. Is to want and not to want at the same time a buffer?

A. It is not a buffer. A buffer often takes the form of a strong conviction. For instance, one man I used to know was convinced that he loved all men. In reality he loved no one, but on the strength of this buffer he was free to be as unpleasant as he liked. It is a very safe and reliable buffer.

Q. Can one learn about buffers by observing others?

A. Yes, because that may help you to see buffers in yourself. But as things are seldom repeated literally, one would always see them only in others and not in oneself. But if one is

prepared for it by finding these things in oneself first, by realizing one's mechanicalness, one could begin to see buffers.

Q. When you see buffers, sometimes you seem to create others to justify yourself.

A. You cannot create buffers so easily. You can create lies and imaginings, but buffers are solid things, and creating them is a long process.

Q. Can conscience only be understood when we experience higher emotion?

A. No, as I said, conscience is a feeling possible for quite ordinary men without any school. It is a kind of inner feeling of truth in connection with one particular thing, or another thing, or a third thing. The connection may be wrong, but the feeling itself will be quite right.

Q. Surely conscience is more than awareness of all one's emotions at a particular time, because it may alter one's resulting action. It seems to strengthen some emotions and weaken others.

A. That is because you see them. This is the biggest of all possibilities, because when you see your different emotions about the same thing, and see them constantly, you will be horrified.

Q. Isn't what we call conscience sometimes one 'I' disapproving of another?

A. This is a very good observation of conscience in the ordinary sense of the word. But what I call conscience is a certain state in which we can be later. What is called conscience in ordinary life is simply certain associations. We are accustomed to think and do things in a certain way, and if for some reason we act in a different way, we have an unpleasant feeling which we call conscience. In reality conscience is a much deeper and stronger feeling, and when real conscience appears, you will see that it is not like anything you call conscience now.

Q. Then the feeling we call conscience is wrong?

A. Not necessarily wrong, but it is not the same thing. It can be attached to quite trivial things which have no particular moral value. Morality is always relative, conscience is absolute. Conscience is a special positive emotion. In our present state we have a very small trace of this emotion, sufficient to have a general feeling that something may be right and something else may be wrong, but insufficient to say definitely what is right and what is wrong. This has to be developed. At present the state of conscience we can have does not distinguish the big from the small, but later conscience may become quite a different method of cognition, an instrument of discrimination.

Before conscience can be opened fully, we must have will, we must be able to 'do', to act according to the dictates of our conscience, otherwise, if conscience awoke fully in man in his present state he would be a most miserable being; he would not be able to forget, not able to adapt to things, and not able to change anything. Conscience destroys buffers, so that man finds himself defenceless against himself, and at the same time he has no will, so he cannot change, cannot do what he knows is right. So first he must develop will, otherwise he will find himself in a very unpleasant situation, beyond his control. When he acquires control, he may allow himself the luxury of conscience, but not before that.

Q. What is the feeling of remorse which comes from having committed an action one feels is wrong? Is it conscience?

A. No, conscience is different, more powerful, more all-embracing. But even if one remembers moments of remorse, it is useful. Only it is necessary to know on what the remorse is based.

Q. Is there a connection between essence and conscience?

A. There is a big connection, for both consciousness and conscience come from essence, but not our essence. Our essence is simply mechanical.

Q. I suppose self-remembering does not necessarily bring with it moral uplift?

A. It certainly brings another understanding, because when one becomes conscious, one understands the moral side of things better, for the opposite of morality is mechanicalness. If

one becomes more conscious, one will be able to control one's conduct.

Q. Can one's moral sense be useful or reliable in connection with one's conduct?

A. It is difficult to speak in general, but the more you study the system the more you will see yourself. There are many things that you can think are quite right, but which from the point of view of the system are quite wrong. There are many things we do not know. We can do much harm to ourselves, thinking that we are quite moral – actual harm, and not only in a moral sense. The system, particularly in the later stages, has a much stricter code of rules, and at the same time it is perhaps more free than anything else. But, as I said, you can always begin from the point of view of what is mechanical and what is conscious.

Q. I am still not clear what the function of conscience is?

A. If the question is asked in this way, without adding anything else, all I can say is that if one does not have a definite aim, if one does not work for a certain definite purpose, the function of conscience is only to spoil life for a person who is unlucky enough to have it. But if he works for a definite purpose, then conscience helps him to attain his aim.

Q. Is it not possible that, by acquiring certain knowledge and power through self-remembering and other practices, man can use this power for evil purposes?

A. You see, an inevitable part of the process of self-development is the awakening of conscience, and the awakening of conscience will prevent any possibility of using new powers for any wrong aim or purpose. This must be definitely understood from the very beginning, because conscience, when it awakes, will not allow one to do anything selfish or contrary to other people's interests, or harmful to anybody – nothing, in fact, that we may consider wrong or evil. And conscience has to be awakened, because with unawakened conscience one will always make mistakes and will not see contradictions in oneself.

Q. Does the following of a moral code in a sleeping state help us?

A. We are not always equally asleep, and at moments when we are less asleep we can make certain decisions; and even in our sleeping state we can follow these decisions more or follow them less, or not follow them at all and be absolutely in the power of our sleeping state. Besides, if one follows certain conscious ideas, by this very process one becomes more awake.

Q. When one is conscious, one can realize the contradictions. Does not that, to a certain extent, annihilate them?

A. No, that would be too simple; you can see them and yet they will remain. It is one thing to see and another thing to do something, one thing to know and another to alter.

Q. Is absolute truth only possible with objective consciousness?

A. Truth exists without us, but one can *know* truth only in objective consciousness. Not 'absolute' truth, but simply truth, for truth does not need qualifications. In our state we cannot know truth with the exception of very simple things, and even then we make mistakes.

Q. How can one recognize truth on our level?

A. By coming to simple things. In simple things one can recognize truth; one can recognize what is a door and what is a wall, and one can bring every difficult question to the same thing. It means that you have to recognize a certain quality in quite simple principles and verify other things by these simple principles. This is why philosophy – just discussion of possibilities or the meaning of words – is excluded from this system. You must try to understand simple things, and you must learn to think in this way; then you will be able to bring everything to simple things. Take for instance self-remembering. You are given all the material; if you observe yourself, you will see that you did not remember yourself at that moment; you will notice that at some moments you remember yourself more and at some moments less, and you will decide that it is better to remember yourself. This means that you have found a door, that you see the difference between a door and a wall.

Q. How to prolong states of conscience?

A. First we must think not about how to prolong but how to create, because in our ordinary state we have not got it. When we create or awake it, it is certainly useful to keep it longer, although it is very unpleasant. But there are no direct methods for inducing it, so it is only by doing all that is possible that one can get this taste of conscience. Generally, one of the first conditions is a great sincerity with oneself. We are never sincere with ourselves.

Q. How can one learn to be sincere with oneself?

A. Only by trying to see oneself. Just think about yourself, not in emotional moments, but in quiet moments, and do not justify yourself because generally we justify and explain everything by saying that it was inevitable, or that it was somebody else's fault, and so on.

Q. I have been trying to be sincere, but I see now that I do not really know what to be sincere means.

A. In order to be sincere it is not enough only to wish it. In many cases we do not wish to be sincere; but even if we wished we could not be. This must be understood. Being able to be sincere is a science. And even deciding to be sincere is very difficult, for we have many reservations.

Only sincerity and complete recognition of the fact that we are slaves to mechanicalness and its inevitable results can help us to find and destroy buffers with the help of which we deceive ourselves. We can understand what mechanicalness is and all the horror of mechanicalness only when we do something horrible and fully realize that it was mechanicalness in us that made us do it. It is necessary to be very sincere with oneself to be able to see it. If we try to cover it, to find excuses and explanations, we will never realize it. It may hurt dreadfully, but we must bear it and try to understand that only by fully confessing it to ourselves can we avoid repeating it again and again. We can even change results by full and complete understanding and by not trying to hide it.

We can escape from the tentacles of mechanicalness and break its force by big suffering. If we try to avoid suffering, if we are afraid of it, if we try to persuade ourselves that nothing bad really happened, that, after all, it is unimportant and that things can go on just as they were going before, not only shall we never escape, but we shall become more and more mechanical, and shall very soon come to a state when there will be no possibility for us and no chance.

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