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EVOLUTION'S FOUR STAGES: AUTOMATIC REFLEXES, AWARENESS, UNDERSTANDING, KNOWING

Greetings, my dearest friends. Blessings for everyone of you. Blessed be this hour. This first lecture of the year, as always, will indicate the phase into which the path is going to enter during the coming working season, the general work, and the part to be emphasized.

The best way to begin this lecture is by discussing certain general phases of evolution in the human consciousness. There are four distinct phases. They interact and overlap, with each having many subdivisions, degrees of intensity, and variations. At this point, we need not go into the details; rather, we seek to gain an overview.

The lowest phase of human consciousness is automatism. In this phase people respond according to automatic reflexes -- emotional reactions based on deeply imprinted wrong conclusions and generalizations. Everything we have discussed in the lectures on images shows how people respond blindly and automatically.

The more you are liberated in some areas of your personality, the more you try to rationalize and explain such blind reactions, to make yourself believe that they are based on freedom of choice, rather than on compulsion; on reason, rather than emotionalism. When the overall development is more primitive, such self-deception is less necessary.

Blind automatism is always the result of unwillingness to face certain material. This applies to everyone, to some much more than to others. Even comparatively evolved people, who are actively concerned with their development, have areas in which their consciousness is blurred. There they are unfree and respond unconsciously, never knowing why they act, react, think, feel, and hold opinions the way they do. Such lack of consciousness creates self-alienation, cripples creativity, and prohibits love. It stifles the ability to give and receive pleasure and joy. It limits the

marvelous potentials of the human spirit and life. It does all this to the degree that one lacks self-awareness.

On any real path of development, regardless of the approach, the areas in which you are unfree and automatic must be revealed.

The next phase on this scale of evolution is awareness, but awareness is by no means the highest stage. There are two that are farther advanced. But let us first look into the meaning of awareness. Awareness must be, in this context, concerned with uncovering blind reflexes. All subterfuges, rationalizations, explanations, justifications, self-deceptions, serving to deny automatism, must be ruthlessly exposed, investigated and given up, until you are face to face with the blind reflex itself. When this takes place you are aware of the automatism -- hence the

automatism no longer exists. Needless to say, you succeed first in specific areas, retaining blind automatism in others until much later phases of your personal development. It never happens that an individual passes with one step from one state into the next in every respect.

The transition from automatism to awareness is one of the most difficult passages you must make. It is so difficult to admit that you are driven by unreasonable fears, superstitions, generalizations, obsolete situations that have no bearing on the present. It goes against your vanity, for you like to see yourself more evolved and freer than you are. The longer you deny what is, the more you suffer. Often it is this needless suffering that finally brings you to self-honesty. The suffering could have been avoided if your vanity were not so strong.

Awareness means acknowledgement of one's limitations, facing wrong conclusions, destructive emotions, self-defeating devices, lack of integrity in the widest possible sense. This is difficult only because you coddle your resistances and fears, and because you are so reluctant to give up appearing to be more than you think you are.

The stage of awareness essentially means becoming conscious of error, of deviation from truth. The moment you know you are driven by false ideas, you are no longer operating with blind automatism. Such a realization requires courage and cultivation of the inner will.

In proportion to how much awareness you gain, blind reflexes cease, and you reach understanding. Offhand, you may wonder what the difference is. There is a great deal of difference. Let us take the example of hostility. First, in the stage of blind automatism, it rages in the person's soul. According to character formation, the type of the individual's image, and various other factors, one will either impulsively express such hostility and lash out at others, often without even realizing it, or find "good reasons" to do so. Or one will suppress and repress the hostility and turn it against oneself. In neither alternative is there any awareness of the hostility, because the person does not wish to admit to it. Such people therefore are driven by it into a blind automatism that they choose to explain away. The moment they face the hostility fully, by becoming aware of it, they stop the automatism. But this stage does not yet mean that they understand the hostility they now know they have, though they might see what it makes them do, how they react because of it.

Understanding the hostility means understanding why it exists, what first brought it into your life; what conditions created it and what conditions exist now, whenever the hostility flares up. What are the apparent and real similarities between the original and the current conditions? How are these related in your psyche? How, if at all, are they related in reality? On what false assumptions is the hostility based? Understanding what one has previously become aware of means deeply experiencing the answers to all these questions. These answers should not be given in an intellectual way, like learning a lesson by rote, however. They must yield a deeply felt reality. Once understanding has been reached, the individual is ready to approach the next phase.

Many of my friends on the path will recognize that our work in the past has brought us to the phase of understanding. Each person's work must vary, for in certain areas you may have reached understanding -- or even inklings of the following stage -- while in others you are still battling against the resistance to face what lies behind blind reflexes. The awareness that blind reflexes are still governing you in certain respects is still lacking. It cannot ever be said that a person has, on the

whole, reached one of the four stages mentioned here, or is still entirely in the lowest stage. It is always a mixture, a combination, for my friends here on the path.

It is very important that all of you see where you are in each of these phases. Are you aware where you are still governed by an automatism despite your having discovered the image that causes it? For it is indeed possible to discover the image, yet go on reacting blindly, without knowing it. The fleeting insight of the moment the image was found has faded and lingers only as memory. In other words, it has become theoretical knowledge; it is no longer alive. It will come to life again only when you observe, acknowledge, and admit that automatism still exists.

Once awareness has been gained, it must not remain just that. Are you cultivating the understanding of what you have become aware of? The more you do, the less you feel compelled to react blindly and the less likely are you to relapse.

The highest phase on this particular scale is knowing. There is a great difference between understanding and knowing. Understanding means ascertaining the causes and effects of negative patterns, destructive emotions, and false ideas. It means understanding that these elements are damaging because one is somehow immersed in illusion and misconception. But this understanding is not the same as knowing. I advisedly use the term "knowing," rather than "knowledge." For knowledge is something much more vague, general, and dry. It is not knowledge I am talking about. I am talking about knowing the truth. When you know the truth, you more than understand the cause and effect of images and misconceptions. You know what the right conclusions are behind the wrong ones. And it is always, and exclusively, the misconceptions that create havoc, disharmony, unhappiness. Nothing else can ever do that.

When you deeply know the truthful concept, the particular truth behind the particular error you are beginning to understand, something starts to happen within and around you. Knowing is not theoretical understanding. It is experiencing the truth. Knowing the truth behind the untruth must connect the knower with the great spiritual principles and laws. Knowing them opens up the world.

Knowing divine principles can come about only through a highly personal experience of the untruth that has so far blurred the way to that particular truth. By studying theories, or reading even the greatest literature on earth -- even spiritual literature -- you cannot possibly know the truth. Knowing the truth means personally following through the stages of evolution I have just discussed.

It means becoming aware of blind reflexes; understanding why they exist and what they cause; knowing the truth behind the automatism caused by specific misconceptions. When the personal path is taken this way, leading you deep inside, the inner, personal universe reveals the principles and spiritual laws of creation, of the universe as a whole.

Knowing the truth in the way of personal experience has a healing effect on you and your entire environment. When you finally know the truth, you have the key to the entire universe. If you know one truth, you know all truth.

At the beginning of this phase, you come to know the truth just in isolated instances, only to lose it again, until you regain it and eventually lose it less often. The spiral movement experienced in

other phases of the path happens here too. Understanding brings a relief from tension, fear, and anxiety. It infuses hope: not wishful thinking, not escape or daydreaming of a vaguely hoped for miracle bringing salvation, but realistic hope, justified because a clear way presents itself, a concrete possibility, for choosing liberation.

Knowing the truth means already being in possession of the key. It means mastery. In the evolution of one single point of knowing there comes a moment when it becomes all-knowing; for all creation converges into one point. It makes no difference where you begin. The manifold ends in unity, comprising all the many parts. Hence, really and fully knowing one truth is knowing all truth, be it only for an instant.

Some of my friends have made first steps toward the threshold of knowing; they can now cross it. Others will follow later. It does not matter when. You must not measure who is ahead. You cannot ever measure yourself against another. You must find your own inner measurements; forget comparisons.

Knowing the truth means mastery over the universe. It is healing and it brings order. When you know the truth, something begins to happen to the cosmic forces surrounding you. When you cling to false ideas your personal world falls into disorder. Our common efforts to uncover the untruth that caused the disorder and destruction have made this fact familiar to you. Balance is upset; conflict and confusion perpetuate the chain reaction. Illusion and misconception create a duality which appears as an arbitrary split of concepts. Further confusion, conflict, destructive emotions, thoughts, and actions follow. All this is familiar territory -- at least in theory, if not always, as yet, in inner experience. The moment you know the truth behind the illusion, split concepts begin to mend; psychic upsets begin to balance; confusion, disorder, conflict, make way for order and unity. This creates realistic, benign, constructive feelings, concepts, opinions, and corresponding actions. Change has taken place, because it is no longer resisted. It is now welcome instead of frightening.

Understanding the truth means a great deal, but it does not yet lead to more constructive changes. Knowing the truth makes the change organic, inevitable, so natural that it just could not be any other way. Really knowing the truth clears the fog; it unifies apparent contradictions and proves that there is nothing to fear. Dissensions are reconciled, sickness healed, and growth overcomes stagnation; calm prevails where frantic unrest created excessive movement.

I should now like to give a simple example of the healing value of knowing the truth, to make my words more practical. When you deal with your fellow humans and are confused about their actions and motives, disharmony is created. Even if you refrain from quarreling, your not knowing what motivates them creates a cloud of unrest, darkness, disharmony, which even the most insensitive can distinctly feel. When you truly know what motivates others, however, you can emanate a calm knowingness, which must have an effect, whether or not you speak about it; whether or not you bring what you know to another person's attention. Your knowing the truth behind the other person's confusing actions will enable you intuitively and spontaneously to judge when to speak and when to be quiet, how to speak and how to be quiet. Merely understanding others' motives -- their truth -- will not give you this faculty. Your merely understanding is certainly better than no understanding, but it does not prevent you from blundering in certain ways. You will

not yet know how to use the fine, sensitive directives one needs to contribute with one's knowing, at the right time and in the right way.

I have often pointed out that those who do not understand themselves cannot possibly understand others. Those who do not love and respect themselves, cannot possibly love and respect others. The same applies to knowing. Those who do not know the truth behind their untruth cannot ever know the truth behind another person's confusions. True knowing and relating removes all havoc.

I am sure that most of my friends have experienced moments like those described in the example, although surely not often. Maybe you have occasionally encountered or observed such knowingness in another person. Perhaps you only vaguely sensed what its significance was, but you may now be more keenly aware of this phenomenon when you meet it. If you remember having encountered it in another person toward you, you will find that such knowingness did not frighten you. Quite the contrary. You felt warm and comfortable in it. Perhaps, at the time, you could not put your finger on it, analyze it in so many words, but when you reconstruct the experience and your reactions to such situations, you will find this to be so.

Such knowingness can come only through attaining it for yourself, from yourself, through yourself, and within yourself. This is the battle that leads from blind reflexes that every single human being is governed by -- even those of my friends who are already on this path -- to awareness, by degrees; to understanding, by degrees; to knowingness -- at first in isolated instances. Knowingness is healing, knowingness is harmony, and knowingness is full mastery over the universe.

Here, my friends, we come to one of the greatest apparent contradictions, which can be resolved only through knowingness. This is the confusion concerning control and letting go. Some of my friends have made their first struggling attempts on this path to comprehend the principle or soul movement which combines control and letting go. Where truth is known, there is no contradiction. But where illusion and false concepts create duality, an imbalance comes into being: control exists where it should be released, and letting go where control is needed.

Misunderstood and misapplied control consists of selfwill, forcing-current, childish greed, the inability to stand frustration, fearful withdrawal, tension, the compulsive need to manipulate, the inability to lose. All these are, of course, not the control I mean when I speak of true selfhood which masters the universe. When the latter exists, the wrong kind of control, that of the little ego, must be entirely relinquished. It must be let go of before true control, in a higher and wider sense, can come. True control comes through letting go of control; through the apparent risk of floating without manipulating anyone or anything. Of course, this sounds like a contradiction, my friends. But all spiritual principles, when clothed in the limitation of the human language, appear as contradictions. For every divine law contains two complementing principles -- the masculine and the feminine principles -- in the widest possible sense. They do not exclude one another but co-exist in every part of life.

But it is not only the limitations of human language that make the unitive principles appear contradictory. It is much more that your fearful withdrawal from life causes a lack of understanding and knowing. As long as you withdraw in fear, not wanting to take the risk of letting go of control,

my words could easily be misunderstood. When I speak about mastery over the universe and giving up control in order to gain it in a higher sense, I am explaining one of the most essential steps toward the destiny of all created beings.

Only on a path leading from blind reflexes to knowingness can one truly understand that control must first be given up in order to gain a relaxed inner control that happens from deep inside -- from the solar plexus, rather than from the upper mind. And control must be exerted where you are lost now; where you grope and clutch tightly because you are driven by blind needs, by uncomprehended compulsions, driven to thoughts, assumptions, reactions, and actions that you must learn to bring under control by knowing truth.

A similar confusion exists concerning self-centeredness versus other-centeredness. Self-centeredness can be childish self-importance in which you expect the whole world to revolve around you. It may be a form of selfishness. You may experience yourself in an essentially different, either higher or lower way, than others, singling yourself out with unrealistic self-appraisal.

This selfish form of distortion automatically brings about a distorted form of other-centeredness. People hinge all their opinions, goals, ideas, ideals, and even feelings on what others proclaim -- or what they think the world expects them to be. This other-centeredness amounts to losing the self. It is self-alienation.

The right kind of self-centeredness is the opposite of self-alienation. It finds the gravity centered deep within the self, deriving values, goals, ideas, and actions from within, assuming responsibility for them, thereby increasing integrity and self-respect. But this requires the labor of consciously taking control in choosing one's views and taking the risk of giving up control by standing alone and risk the disapproval of others. When one ceases to manipulate one's feelings in order to control and manipulate others, one will be self-centered in the sense of living out of the real self. This organically results in the proper balance between self-and other-centeredness. Others deserve the same consideration as the self. Others can be liked, loved, and esteemed as oneself -- but never at the expense of being untrue to the self.

Healthy self-centeredness is at one end of the scale; healthy other-centeredness at the other. If you reverse one so that it becomes an unhealthy childish distortion, the other will follow suit. The same holds for control and letting go.

When you cross the threshold from understanding to knowing, you find the deep experience and perception of right, healthy self-centeredness and other-centeredness; as well as right, healthy control and letting go. When these two tendencies are perceived, experienced, inwardly lived, there is no limit to your expansion, your freedom, your experience of the glory of being. When you pass over this threshold, all contradictions become a complementary whole, which you not only understand, but know and live. For example, you must become capable of living in a less than perfect way, until perfect happiness becomes possible. When you desire the utmost self-expression, for the greater happiness of yourself and others, it must occur in an entirely free spirit, not out of a must, in order to avoid what you fear, in order to coddle a weakness. When you no longer desire happiness in order to avoid unhappiness, you have reached the fine point of a proper balance of control, and gain forever greater powers over your own life as an integral part of creation.

Are there any questions now?

QUESTION: I may have caught a glimpse of what it is to come near the threshold between understanding and knowing. Perhaps you could say something about the fear, withdrawal, and reluctance one has, although one knows there is a knowing beyond it and one knows it is a great thing, yet one shrinks from it.

ANSWER: Quite apart from the many psychological factors we find again and again in this work -- and I do not have to enumerate them at this point -- there is a much more fundamental and all-encompassing fear and reluctance that applies to every single individual: fear of being. The fear of being means fear of life, fear of death, fear of love, fear of pleasure, fear of risk, fear of change, fear of loss, fear of the unknown, fear of pain, fear of trust, fear of letting go of control, fear of self. This last fear includes conflicting, and apparently conflicting, rights and wrongs as well as apparently right and wrong emotions, feelings, reactions, drives, needs, expressions. Fear of being comprises all of this. And as long as you do not understand the significance of this fear, you cannot know what is behind it. Therefore you cannot overcome it. For beyond this fear lies the greatest threshold of evolution to which this, or any other truthful path must bring the individual, and that is: floating with the universal forces, not stemming against them, and thereby mastering them. Human conceptions create a duality here, an either/or. You feel that either you are in control, and then you must manipulate life, the world around you, your own most vital, creative forces; or you feel lost and endangered. Thus, you cannot come into being. You will not understand that being and mastery -- or to put it differently, activity and passivity -- are not only not mutually exclusive, but are interconnected and interdependent.

Your fear of yourself becomes all the more difficult to overcome because you often do not fear your real darker side, but what you believe it is. Only too often, you consider unacceptable the best you have to give while the most destructive part may rule you unbeknownst to yourself. Fearing your darker side, you do not dare to look at it and hold on too tightly to yourself. You refuse to let go, to take any chances. And as long as you fear yourself, you will fear life, death, love - - and all the rest of it. You will fear being, because you fear your own being.

This lecture is a very important one. The more you participate and bring out your own confusion, the smoother will be your path in going through these four stages. In the meantime, try to discover where and how you are still immersed in automatism; where you are aware; where you understand; and to what degree you approach the threshold to the fourth state -- knowing. The way to determine this is by the way you feel about it. Automatism makes you feel bleak, hopeless, depressed, anxious, afraid, unalive, bored, disgusted with yourself or others, compelled to do, say, think and feel things you disapprove of. Awareness removes these symptoms and, while awareness remains, it induces relief, thereby liberating certain energies. But there is as yet no question about change. You cannot even see yet where and how change is possible. Understanding gives this outlook. Knowing has accomplished it and is constantly accomplishing it, for true living is never a final end. It is a constant growing into more experience and more self-expression. Therefore constant knowing effects constant growth.

When evaluating where you stand, do not be governed by outer knowledge, or by blind reflexes, which may either make you fearfully overmodest or tempt you into self-glorification.

Listen deeply into yourself, test various aspects of your life by focusing only on certain inner reactions. The different facets of your personality have arrived at different phases.

May your work bring all of you nearer to knowing. May some of you make the first steps in crossing this threshold. You have all the help and guidance you need. The spiritual forces are infinitely more real and powerful than any of you realize. But these helping forces can and must do no more than sustain your own efforts. The initiative toward growth must always come from you, at each stage of your upward journey. There are many means of working toward this goal -- and you should use them all. One of the most constructive tools on this path that none of you can afford to neglect is involving yourself with others and using other people as a mirror. It cannot be emphasized enough how effective it is to work with others. So much valuable material remains to be derived from this approach. No matter how much others are involved with their own blind reflexes, they are often a good mirror for you. Do not shy away from such interactions.

This coming year is bound to be crucial for any of you who persevere in the task of self-finding. Be blessed. Receive the warm strength flowing toward you, enveloping and enfolding you. Be in peace. Be in God.

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