

## SEEING INTO ONE'S OWN NATURE

It is important clearly to understand the immensity of what we have to abandon, in our actual way of looking at things, and at the same time the perfectly painless character of this abandonment. This plane of imagery that I am going to lose is more than immense for me to-day, it is everything; it is the salt of my life, it gives it all its meaning. It may be the scene of my terrors, but it is also the scene of my delights, fervours, compassion, and of my hopes. The natural man can only imagine the disappearance of sentiment from his life, the disappearance of the dualistic sensibility of his 'soul', as the death of his being; this illusory Heaven, with its tempests as with its sunshine, seems to him to be more precious than anything, in particular more precious than his Earth, than his body. But the dissolution of life-on-the-plane-of-imagery represents the definite renunciation of this illusory Heaven, of all that we see as 'sacred', 'super-natural', in our actual condition.

However, this renunciation is perfectly painless; the agony of the 'old' man is laborious (that is the bitter fight with our personality), but it is not painful. This renunciation indeed only takes place according to the degree in which, without snatching from me anything regarded as precious on the plane on which I see it as such, I obtain, in procuring a displacement of my attention which encourages in me the plane of sensation, the dissipation of the mirages which caused me to see value where there is none. The plane of imagery is not taken away from me—which would be horrible—it is I who leave it; no regret is possible to me for what I thus leave, since the plane of imagery only exists illusorily for me when I am on it. An inner task that is painful is badly done; it directly attacks the emotions; the correct inner task, the effort 'to see into my own nature', acts in us at the point from which the emotions spring. How could I be painfully moved in escaping from emotion? We have nothing to fear from forms in the course of efforts correctly carried out towards the in-formal; in dissipating this shadow the light dissipates all the shadows.

## Chapter Twelve

### HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK ACCORDING TO ZEN

IT is difficult to understand wherein consists practically the inner task according to Zen, this work which should one day bring us to satori. In fact the Zen masters, when they speak of it in a positive manner, utter generalities which are liable to seem to us somewhat ironical: 'It is enough for you to see into your own nature'; or again: 'Be entirely detached from everything'; or again: 'You are Buddhas and, in consequence, it is not a question of becoming, but of acting as Buddha. . . . Man, then, has only to fulfil his active rôle of Buddha', etc. Very good, the disciple thinks, but that hardly helps me forward in the practice of my inner life. Then he imagines, as best he may, such and such a practice which may effectively bring him nearer to satori; and he goes to the master in order to submit his idea to him. There he receives nothing but snubs. If he were proposing to perform some good deeds the master assures him that that would not help him at all. If he were proposing to meditate on some sacred texts, the master says to him: 'Don't let yourself be upset by the Sutra, rather upset the Sutra yourself.' If he were proposing to exercise himself in the mental void the master shows him that therein lies only gradual suicide. If he were proposing an intellectual task, patient and profound, the master says to him: 'Reflection and discursive thought lead to nothing; they are like a lamp in full daylight; no light comes out of them.' When the unfortunate disciple asks at last, with humility, to be given a ray of light on the mystery of Zen, the master replies to him: 'To imagine that Zen is mysterious is the gravest error, into which many fall. . . . We have not to avoid contradiction, but to live it.'

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

Doubtless the Zen masters are right not to try to express the inexpressible, while declaring at the same time that this inexpressible is in no wise mysterious; doubtless they are right only to reply to the suggestions of their pupils by negations, to hound them thus from error to error right on to a kind of despair, accepted and so without sadness, in which the whole being decontracts and opens itself to Reality. Nevertheless we will try to do that which the Zen masters do not, that is to say speak positively of the inner task, conceived in the spirit of Zen, without remaining on that account in abstract generalities.

Zen instructs us that the real inner task does not consist in any 'doing', but in a 'not-doing'. But this would only lead us into discouragement if we did not understand that that which is not-doing on a certain plane corresponds to doing on another plane, and that we have, in that way, the possibility of looking for and finding this other plane on which the inner task will appear to us under a positive aspect. In order to understand what we have just said we will make use of a comparison taken from the working of our body. In the course of our movements the contraction of each of our muscular fibres is controlled by the activity of a nerve-cell situated in the spinal marrow or medullary cell. The function of this cell is to cause the muscles to contract, and, if nothing intervened to interfere with its action, the muscle would be in a constant state of contraction. But the medullary cell is not free to act all the time. Another nerve-cell, seated in the brain, sends out a long fibre which joins the medullary cell, and, by means of this fibre, the cerebral cell, when it is active, inhibits the activity of the medullary cell. Thus, therefore, when my muscle is relaxed, at rest, this rest corresponds, at the level of the medullary cell, to not-doing (for as soon as this cell acts the muscle contracts); but this not-doing of the medullary cell corresponds to doing of the cerebral cell, since the activity of this superior cell consists in suspending the activity of the inferior cell. The muscular decontraction which is not-doing on an inferior plane is at the same time doing on a superior plane.

Let us see now how the vital energy operates in us, in the totality of our being, and how we can find here again two planes of such a kind that non-activity on the inferior corresponds with activity on the superior. Only thus can we understand why Zen assures us

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

that we have nothing to 'do', and proclaims elsewhere that the inner task requires an activity, faultlessly attentive, 'as if we had our head in the fire'.

Our organism conceals energy; that is evident, since we see unceasingly well-up in us forces which move us, which make us think and act. We have no direct perception of the source of these forces, but observation of our phenomena leads us to infer, by induction, the existence in us of a source of energy. We can only conceive of this source as a sort of reservoir, without defined limits, where lies, latent, immobile, invisible, untouchable, potential vital energy. This source, whose activity is going to manifest in my individual person, should not, however, be regarded as individual. This reservoir of energy which is still potential, un-manifested, ought to be regarded as universal since the particular individuality only begins with the manifestation. This source is then the Principle of the Universe at the same time that it is my Principle; it corresponds with that which Zen calls Cosmic Mind or Unconscious.

From this source forces will surge-up in me under the influence of impulses from the outer world. These impulses can come to me by way of the psyche or by way of the physique. In any event the impulse consists in a bi-polar tension existing between the outside world and me. For example, if I drink some alcohol, or eat some bread there is, between what I absorb and my own substance, bi-polar tension. Or again, if I see myself in danger of death, there is between this outer image and an imagination of immortality, claimed by me and existing in me, bi-polar tension, etc. . . .

The gushing-up in me of vital force in response to the excitation of the outside world represents, with regard to the potential energy of my source, a first disintegration (we will see that there will be a second), comparable with atomic disintegration. Bergson has clearly shown the existence in us of these 'explosive' phenomena; his mistake was only in localising this explosion in the psychic domain, whereas it takes place up-stream of the two domains, psychic and physical, at the exit of the common central source.

At the moment at which this force wells-up from its source it is constituted by a certain quantity of raw vital energy, pure, not yet differentiated, in-formal. More exactly, it is intermediary between the in-formal and form. It is between the source and my phenomena, as the positive and negative principles of creation are between

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

the Supreme Principle and the world of phenomena; the microcosm is constructed like the macrocosm. In consequence this vital force springing from the source can present two aspects, one positive and the other negative. If the excitation of the outer world is felt by me as an affirmation of myself, the force springing up is positive; I feel it as a surplus of life to expend, as a pressure, with an urge towards the Not-Self (desire and benevolence). If the excitation of the outer world is felt by me as a negation of myself, the vital force springing up is negative; I feel it as a waste of life, a void, a deficit, a de-pression, which aversion from the Not-Self (flight, disgust, or aggressivity).

Although this vital energy, welling-up, primitive, has thus two aspects according to which it takes the sign + or the sign - ; although it may be thus coloured by the confines of the formal world, it is nevertheless still up-stream of this formal world, and we should call it in-formal. Thus the two principles, positive and negative, of creation, although at the confines of the temporal world, ought to be called in-temporal.

This vital force at its birth, in-formal force, we should perceive by a direct inner intuition. We cannot describe it, since it is in-formal, but we can perceive it. If I have just heard some good news I can chase from my mind all ideas concerning the fortunate circumstance, and can feel directly in myself a kind of bubbling of life in excess; when a misfortune happens to me I can chase away every idea on the subject, and can feel directly in myself a sort of void, a suction which draws me towards annihilation. Consequently it is possible for me to fix my attention on my central source, at the very point whence issues its manifestation. It is possible for me to lift my attention up to the in-formal plane, concerning which we shall see that its activity, its 'doing', corresponds to a non-activity, to a 'not-doing', on the formal plane of my psycho-somatic phenomena.

What I have just said is absolutely concrete. If, for example, I have just lost some money and I leave my attention where it is habitually (on the formal, phenomenal plane), I experience a lively imaginative activity in which I chew over my worries present and future. If at this moment I fix my attention, as I have just said, on this intuitive perception of vital wastage (which I am obliged to name in my text but which is in reality without form),

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

then I find that my imaginative agitation ceases. That is a fact of experience that anyone can test. So my activity on the in-formal plane controls my inaction on the formal plane. The in-formal plane, when my attention is on it, is the break, the inhibitor, of the formal plane.

The manner in which the attention is fixed, either naturally on the formal or voluntarily on the in-formal, controls the destiny of the vital energy welling-up. Naturally, in his ordinary ignorant condition man always leaves, in practice, his attention fixed on the inferior formal plane; he is fascinated by the phenomena which occur outside himself and within. When attention is there the vital energy, emerging from its source, will necessarily complete its disintegration by setting in motion the human machine, that is to say by taking upon itself *form* as energy-phenomena, somatic and psychic. At the moment at which the in-formal welling-up of energy begins to take form and to flow, dissipating itself as it does so, on the slope of phenomena, it becomes emotion. Emotion is thus a primary inner phenomenon, which is not yet either somatic or psychic, but which will engender physico-chemical movements and imaginations.

When attention is thus fixed a vicious circle is necessarily established; the imaginations which result from the process at once act as stimulants which cause new forces to spring up whose fate is identical with that of the preceding force etc. . . .

On the contrary, if my attention, at first fixed on the exciting outer world, turns back thereafter internally towards the in-formal force at the point of its initial springing-forth, and remains there for a moment, during that moment the vital energy escapes from the disintegrating mechanism of form, and it does not produce any movement of my machine, either actions or thoughts. On the other hand it does not return to its source, for the first disintegration which has given it birth is irreversible. What becomes of it? Certain doctrines, insufficiently freed from the fascination of form, teach that this force accumulates in the total form of the organism, but different from that which we know, more subtle, and that it constitutes thus little by little a second body, which is subtle, within the first body, which is gross (illusory theory of an 'astral body'). Zen, which anyhow does not 'believe' in anything, does not believe in that. How can we then conceive the destiny of

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

this pure vital energy, saved from phenomenal disintegration, in the light of Zen thought? We can suppose that this energy accumulates in us indeed, but not within a form, however subtle one may wish to imagine it; it accumulates without form on the plane of the two inferior creative principles, positive and negative, principles which although giving birth to all forms are themselves in-formal. It accumulates there and could be qualified as potential, actualised energy; as potential energy, it no more acts, phenomenally, than potential energy acts when at its source; but, actualised, it accumulates for ulterior action. This ulterior action is satori. Vital energy is comparable with an explosive powder which, without co-ordinating action from within, burns packet by packet in simple fireworks, powerless to change the structure of the being (these fireworks are our emotions and their psycho-somatic effects). The inner work from time to time saves a certain quantity of this powder and stores up these little packets, manufacturing thus a kind of delayed-action bomb. This bomb will only burst when a sufficient quantity of the powder has thus been accumulated. But this delayed explosion will have nothing in common with the emotional fireworks; while the emotions used the human organism because these little explosions occurred within the form of this organism, the formidable explosion of satori will not touch a single cell of the human organism. It will occur in the in-formal, and its action on the formal plane, on phenomena, will be comparable with a catalysis which allows the conciliated combination of temporal duality, in consequence suppressing definitively all inner tension of anxiety.

During the period of accumulation of the in-formal energy, without satori yet being possible, this accumulation is revealed by the appearance in the man of a relative wisdom, or, more exactly, of a relative diminution of his habitual folly. If certain men, as they grow older, become wiser, that is in the measure in which, losing their illusory beliefs by contact with experience, they accord less of their attention to forms, outer or inner, and thus bring about to some extent, without knowing it, this displacement of the attention of which we are speaking from the formal on to the in-formal. These men work inwardly without knowing it. But, because they do not know it, they do it too little for the production within them of the great accumulation of in-formal energy which satori requires.

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

Let us come back now to this displacement of the attention. In order to render it understandable we have shown on what intuitive perception our attention must come to be fixed; and we ought to proceed thus in fact, for it is impossible to withdraw our attention from a point without having another point towards which to direct it. But it would be entirely wrong to believe that this in-formal intuitive perception towards which we voluntarily direct our attention positively presents the least interest (illusory conception of spiritual as opposed to temporal 'possessions'). It is only a point of orientation, a simple means of which we avail ourselves to preserve our energy from the meshes of the formal machinery which would seize upon it but for that. Thus to displace attention, that is to work inwardly, is not then to 'do' anything but what one would do ordinarily, it is to 'do nothing', or more exactly actively to inhibit every 'deed' that can be described.

This conception of the two planes, formal and in-formal, of such a kind that 'to do' in the second corresponds with 'to do nothing' in the first, enables us to understand the real positivity of the negative terms which Zen uses so readily, 'no-mind', 'no-form', 'no-birth', 'emptiness', 'void', 'Unconscious', etc. . . .

The practice of the 'koan' is understandable also. The cryptic formula on to which the Zen monk incessantly brings back his attention, has, certainly, a form; but this form is such that it quickly ceases to be perceptible on account of its apparent absurdity. When the Zen monk fixes his attention on his koan it is not this last which possesses the slightest interest; what is interesting and efficacious is by that means to tear the attention from the plane of form.

The displacement of attention which constitutes the inner task should really be a displacement, and so a coming-and-going of the attention between the formal and the in-formal. It would be impossible to fix the attention on the in-formal (as also on any kind of form) with stability. To begin with that would amount to suicide. But, above all, the excitation of the outer world is absolutely necessary for the surging-up of the in-formal energy from its central source. The inner task is then necessarily discontinuous; in that it conforms to the law of alternation which dominates all creation (day-night, summer-winter, systole and diastole of the heart, etc.).

## HOW TO CONCEIVE THE INNER TASK

It is not a question, either, of wishing to save from phenomenal disintegration all our vital energy. To think incessantly of the energy which wastes itself in us would be to fall back into the distressing error of 'salvation' regarded as a 'duty'. There would then be contraction, not relaxation. It is only when I no longer trouble myself to contract that I can relax.

The Zen masters say to us: 'You should not in any event hinder or disturb the course of life.' The inner task is performed in the course of our life, but it does not disturb it because it is done in parallel with it and not in it. That is to say that it is not concerned with forms, with the manner of life, and does not try to modify them; the attention, in leaving the plane of form, is content to ignore form. The man who works according to Zen becomes ever more indifferent to his actions, to his imaginations, to his sentiments; for all that is precisely the formal machinery with which he is obliged to share his energy. This man can work inwardly all day, in the alternating manner of which we have spoken, without this work comprising the slightest spiritual 'exercise', the least intentional discriminative reflection, the slightest rule of moral conduct, the least trouble to do 'good'. Turning his back on the visible and its phantoms, fair or ugly, he accumulates in the invisible the charge of energy which will one day blow up in him all the 'cave of phantoms', and will open to him thus the real plenitude of his daily life.

## Chapter Thirteen

### OBEDIENCE TO THE NATURE OF THINGS

ACCORDING to Zen man is of the nature of Buddha; he is perfect, nothing is lacking in him. But he does not realise this because he is caught in the entanglements of his mental representations. Everything happens as though a screen were woven between himself and Reality by his imaginative activity functioning in the dualistic mode.

Imaginative mental activity is useful at the beginning of man's life, as long as the human machine is not completed, as long as the abstract intellect is not fully developed; it constitutes, during this first period, a compensation without which man could not tolerate his limited condition. Once the human machine is entirely developed the imagination, while still retaining the utility of which we have just spoken, becomes more and more harmful; it brings about in fact a wastage of energy which otherwise would accumulate in the interior of the being until the crystallisation of intuitive non-dualistic knowledge (satori).

The misfortune is that man takes the relief which imagination obtains for him for a real amelioration of his state; he takes the momentary relief of his distress for progress towards its abolition. In reality his momentary relief merely results in a progressive aggravation of the condition from which he wishes to be relieved. But he does not know this, and he cherishes an implicit belief in the utility of his imaginative activity and of his mental ruminations.

Experience should, one would think, contradict sooner or later a belief so mistaken. More often than not, however, it is not so. Why then does man believe so strongly in the utility of his agitation in spite of the experience which proves it to be harmful?