

Seeing the Seer

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An important idea in the Gurdjieff oral tradition is “seeing the seer.” There is also much about this in worldwide perennial traditions of inner search, often in symbolic form.

From Ouspensky, *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching*:

The first impression was that attempts to remember myself or to be conscious of myself, to say to myself, I am walking, I am doing, and continually to feel this I, stopped thought. When I was feeling I, I could neither think nor speak; even sensations became dimmed. Also, one could only remember oneself in this way for a very short time.

I had previously made certain experiments in stopping thought which are mentioned in books on Yoga practices. For example there is such a description in Edward Carpenter’s book *From Adam’s Peak to Elephanta*, although it is a very general one. And my first attempts to self-remember reminded me exactly of these, my first experiments. Actually it was almost the same thing with the one difference that in stopping thoughts attention is wholly directed towards the effort of not admitting thoughts, while in self-remembering attention becomes divided, one part of it is directed towards the same effort, and the other part to the feeling of self.

This last realization enabled me to come to a certain, possibly a very incomplete, definition of “self-remembering,” which nevertheless proved to be very useful in practice.

I am speaking of the division of attention which is the characteristic feature of self-remembering.

I represented it to myself in the following way:

When I observe something, my attention is directed towards what I observe—a line with one arrowhead:

I —————> the observed phenomenon.

When at the same time, I try to remember myself, my attention is directed both towards the object observed and towards myself. A second arrowhead appears on the line:

I <—————> the observed phenomenon.

Having defined this I saw that the problem consisted in directing attention on oneself without weakening or obliterating the attention directed on something else. Moreover this “something else” could as well be within me as outside me.

From *Life is Real, Only Then When “I Am”*:

The general psyche of every man on reaching maturity, which begins on an average in the male sex at twenty years and in the female sex at the beginning of the thirteenth year, consists of three totalities of functioning which have almost nothing in common with each other.

The course of action of all three of these independent totalities of functioning in the common presence of a man who has attained maturity takes place simultaneously and incessantly.

All the factors making up and producing these three totalities of functioning begin, and cease, to form in man at different periods of his life.

The factors producing in man the first totality of functioning, unless special measures are employed, are formed, as has been established long ago, only in childhood—in boys on an average until the age of eleven years, and in girls until the age of seven.

The factors producing the second totality of functioning begin to form in boys from the age of nine years, and in girls even from the age of four years, lasting in different cases a different length of time, approximately until the attainment of maturity.

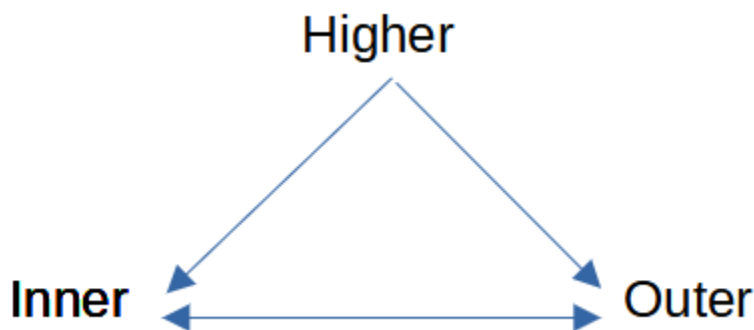
And factors producing the third totality begin to form from the attainment of maturity, continuing in the average man at present only until the age of sixty, and in woman only until the age of forty-five.

From *Views from the Real World*:

There are moments when you become aware not only of what you are doing but also of yourself doing it. You see both “I” and the “here” of “I am here” — both the anger and the “I” that is angry. Call this self-remembering if you like.

My questions for pondering:

Is the “I” that is the seer, or the “I” that is (for example) angry, *conscious*? Or are they both parts of the *unconscious* mind? Is *consciousness* something different, a “real I,” a higher part of the mind (so to speak) that takes in both the seer and what it sees? Am “I” the seer *and* the seen, or that which is seen from above? Or somehow all three? A process, perhaps, not just a static “triple arrow” diagram?



Do we have any actual experience of this? Or is it an abstraction, a mental explanation of something that is not directly experienced? Something that is inferred by reason but, as in Kant, cannot be directly known?

What is the relation of this to the practice of attention to sensation of the body?