

Conversations with Madame Ouspensky

1939-40 *at Lyne*

FROM NOTES OF *Robert S. de Ropp*

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CONVERSATIONS

June 1939

All work is based on watchfulness. The man who works realizes he is a machine and fears his machine. Therefore he watches. While there is a guardian at the door those who go in and out can be scrutinized. Acceptance, rejection; yes, no; this is the basis of true work. A healthy cell does this work by itself.

A man who knows what is profitable will not steal from himself but saves his energy, knowing that nothing can come without energy. All things have their own materiality and, according to their materiality, there they belong.

To be collected in oneself is essential, but it is necessary to be collected in the right place. This is X's difficulty. He collects himself in the wrong place and thinks this is work. One must be relaxed to be properly collected. One must hold on nowhere. X cannot do this since, if he did, he would cease to exist.

It makes no difference whether one says this is so or this is not so. The fact remains.

Laymen, novices, saints or perfect men, they can all be known by their reactions. His reactions show where a man stands.

Whom do we want at Lyne? Firstly, those with strong desire, and of these, better the educated than the not-educated. Secondly, those who can help, can bring others, money, etc.

We have not yet worked with any intensity. Intense work requires special conditions. Sleep, meals, etc., all irregular, that those who wish to see may see.

In small groups it is necessary for those taking them to share their experiences with others.

Often children are aware all is not well with the world. They lose the sensation because, by degrees, one gets used to anything. If one lives with a wolf one must howl like a wolf.

X knows his enemy but does not struggle with him, the reason being he has not made decision to work. Decision to work a big thing, not something that changes from day to day. Decision depends on realization.

Realize differences in materiality. Mr. Y. belongs to different cosmos. Forty-eight. Personality may not be all bad, but mixed, like tar with honey. We must separate the two.

One or other, we cannot have both. We ourselves are process and part of another process. On us and on our realization depends whether we add a drop here or a drop there. We are responsible to the world. We become instruments in the hands of one force or the other.

All depends on whether we wish to help ourselves. We may wish to help Madame, but if we do not also help ourselves we will not help her.

There are two planes of existence. However far you go on the one you will not reach the other. The center of the life plane is the sense of "I." Though we speak of being without I, we are all convinced we have it. We cannot conceive what it would be like to be without I. Possibility of escape lies in the moment. One moment only when an impression may be caught. Watch reactions. This is the beginning of great Doing.

A stone falling in a still pool disturbs the water. The bigger the stone the bigger the disturbance.

In others try to see both best and worst.

July 1939

Men think they can do as they like and arrange things as they like. Actually they will always act as is most convenient, but that for which one pays most is most valuable. A man can approach the big world only by the realization of his nothingness. In so far as he is aware of his own smallness he is also aware of the bigness of the world. Immersed in his own affairs his world is limited to their extent. A drop of water is nothing. Man is a drop of water. While men are lost in the world or activity they move always in the same circle. Self-remembering means to emerge from the small world into the large.

We do not see the connection between things but live under the illusion that things are separate. In the same way we exist only in a moment. Actually things interact continuously. Interchange goes on without ceasing. Because we fail to see this we see the world as dead. For the same reason we fail to realize that we ourselves are a process.

Study yourself as a machine in which different processes are taking place.

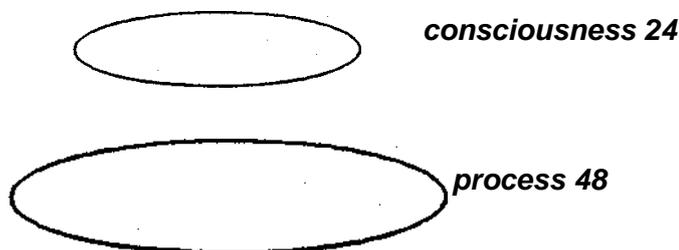
The person who works blames himself. He realizes that he is responsible. Every action has consequences we cannot tell how serious. We are part of a big process and have it in our power to add a drop on this side or that.

Discrimination is the first necessity for work. A man must know his right hand from his left. Only the study of reactions can lead to results. The fear of that which happens will give power.

Recurrence depends on sameness of reactions. Where reactions are the same life will be same.

The power of the devil lies in that he shows us things as being small and insignificant, then blinds us to the results.

What does it mean, "I wish to remember myself"? It means observer and process.



What is the value of experience? What is marriage, for example? Is it better to be married or not married? One thing we must realize, that there is no plus without minus. If one can keep oneself separate and give all energy to work this is good. But marriage gives experience. It is useful to feel one is only half a thing. And from children also one learns much.

We fail to see processes and the connections between things. That which happens depends on circumstances. Under one set of circumstances will be one set of happenings. Under another will be another kind. Because all things are a process and all things are connected there is nothing small.

In order to go anywhere one must have a fixed point of reference. Know your left from your right. In life men think they are moving somewhere, but this is illusion. For all their activity they move no more than a squirrel in a wheel. When the impressions octave does not develop, the machine functions as a pig or a sheep fattened for the slaughter. Nature

provides for him some enjoyment, for without enjoyment no man can live. But wherever there is pleasure, there will also be pain. By rushing after the one, a man must suffer the other.

What is the first characteristic of self-remembering? In this state man is not center. He is not separate. Sitting in a room, he is aware of the whole room, of himself as only one of the objects in it. He is likewise aware of others and does not put himself above them or criticize or judge. This is not love, but it is the beginning of love. In this state a man has no self as he is usually aware of it. It is quite impossible for him to consider or become negative, for the moment he does so the state will vanish.

For consciousness, collection of attention is necessary. Attention is as oil in the lamp. Consciousness is the light. Where there is consciousness things are illuminated.

October 26, 1940

Endurance and adaptability are the two qualities men demand of the materials they use. The same are necessary in the work.

It was necessary for her to leave us now. Lyne would gradually melt away. There would be fewer people, less land. Those able to go should do so as the opportunity arises. Those who stay will be responsible for Lyne's continuing.

We must try to realize that time is short. Death is possible at any moment. We show our state in every gesture.

Those who wish to move must decide which place they wish to leave and to which place they wish to go. They must have decided finally that one is bad and the other desirable. Only then can their aim be clear. With aim is associated right attitude towards oneself. Until a man has admitted that all is not well with him, he cannot begin to do anything about it.

All work begins with the control of attention. At first it is sufficient to concentrate on preventing the eyes from straying. Then enters the struggle with wandering thoughts and negative emotions. Always one must give account to oneself and remember that one thing can only be had at the expense of another.

Self-remembering is only possible in so far as one saves energy. This saving is brought about by efforts against automatic happenings. A drop of energy is saved every time some mechanical happening is checked. This slow work resembles drops of water penetrating through stone by falling always on the same place.

In connection with the control of attention, much could be learned from the movements. When attention has been collected in the right place the whole body must be reviewed for wrong tensions. When sufficient energy has been saved it produces a kind of light which pervades the whole body.

The Ray of Creation shows us our place in the Universe and the fact that there is not chaos but order. But man in sleep sees nothing of the connections between things.

When I go things will be difficult for those left behind, and nothing will remain unless people learn to accept all conditions as work. At first I thought we might escape as a group but now it is impossible. Who goes and who stays will depend on individuals. Those who stay will have the responsibility for keeping work going at Lyne. There will be difficulties on both sides.

November 2 1940

A passage was read from St. John's Gospel:

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.

"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold I say unto

you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

"And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gather-eth fruit unto life eternal: that he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.

"And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth.

"I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour: other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours."

In this passage is the idea of the continuity of work and of the handing on from man to man. Ideas are big, individual men are small, so small that their lives are as nothing. If they remember the bigness of the ideas, they can come to realize their own nothingness.

Ordinary men in life are not responsible for anything. They live under the law of accident, like seeds produced by millions and perishing by millions. It is the law that only a few can be saved.

Men in the work are responsible. Nothing is forgiven them. They are responsible to themselves, because everything they do leaves a trace. Not only are they responsible to themselves but to the Work as a whole. God gave men free will and they have the power to choose, but on their choice depends where they go. We must realize that two processes go on in us and in the world, construction and destruction. Only inner construction counts for anything.

Man who feels the presence of big things does not think in terms of I.

Some principles of the work were read:

The more difficult life circumstances become, the more possible it is to work, providing everything is done from the work point of view.

Remember yourself always, everywhere. The highest human achievement is the power to do. Consider everything externally and nothing internally. The teacher can advise and create conditions, not help.

To know that a thing is wrong and to do nothing about it creates a sin very difficult to erase.

The house can help those who know their own nothingness and believe it possible to change.

To be more conscious means to perceive more deeply.

Man is like a crucible receiving many materials. What he makes from them depends on him.

One should be grateful to those who arouse one's negative emotions for providing one with material.

November 9, 1940

Madame spoke of the conditions demanded from those who wish to work. They must give everything and keep nothing back for themselves. They must feel disgust for their own "I" and put no faith in it. The man who wishes to grow must sacrifice his desire to build on the lower plane. To have it both ways is impossible. In so far as you pay, so much you get. The large can only be obtained at the expense of the small. When small becomes big, big disappears.

It is wrong to think that God created man. God created on a large scale. He provided man with material to develop himself if he so wished, Man has in him the machinery for development, but as everything in the Universe is limited as regards the amount of energy allotted to it, so man can only grow if he uses his energy rightly. The whole struggle centers round one point, direction of attention. Air and food are sufficient to keep man's machine functioning. They give him his movements, feelings, thoughts, which he calls "I." Impressions

do not develop in him because there is nothing to receive them.

To live in a state of identification is to live in darkness, i.e., to be unable to see the relations between things or the way in which one must go. By saving energy one obtains oil for the lamps. Energy may be used profitably or allowed to leak away. Only effort in one direction can produce a result, as a plant, by constant pushing, breaks through the hard soil. In this connection there is no sentimentality about work. Those who make efforts grow; those who don't stay where they are. The System is not easy and not for weaklings. It needs no ordinary effort but super-effort.

November 23, 1940

Madame spoke about self-pity. Its effect on all work is deadening, while despair is one of the greatest of sins. No effort, however small, is ever wasted. Work must always be a struggle, but the struggle may be on a higher level or a lower. Through such effort the energy of man is usefully directed, just as the wheels of a clock function through friction with one another. But not all friction is useful.

Work can never proceed constantly at the same level. While we have the reins in our hands we can control the horse. When we lose the reins we must try to regain them.

The choice lies between that which is above and that which is below. Religions speak of Hell; the System speaks of different levels of materiality; Buddhism, of different levels on the round. It is all a question of materiality. Up or down. Construction or destruction.

Madame read a letter written by herself at the most difficult time during the revolution when she was compelled to do heavy work all day and usually unable to get more than three hours sleep. The tone of the letter was significant. It was without any trace of self-pity or lamentation over her hard lot. She spoke of her surprise to discover how little sleep she really needed to replenish her energy. No effort is ever wasted.

She asked us what we had learned from Madame. M. said ability to distinguish. P. that he saw himself more in relation to others. D. that he was more aware of dreams. How to struggle with dreams? Only by putting a stick in the wheel. Definite and deliberate tasks must be set entirely with a view to upsetting the mechanical process.

When she had finished, she asked who had questions and people asked about drains, etc.

December 7, 1940

Madame spoke of the results obtained by our writing down what we had obtained from her. It showed the essential components of false personality, as if one had seven colors and produced, by mixing them, every possible tint. In the ordinary way we see only multiplicity in ourselves, but it was necessary for us to look through this and see the larger divisions, to see categories. As one goes up the scale categories become fewer, just as, in the Absolute, there are only three laws.

Various descriptions were read of what people had got from Madame.

Discussing these, Madame said that one fault in the writings was that they were too psychological. They did not take into account the relations between things. It was not right to take one's own work personally. One must try and see man's connection with the Ray of Creation and the way in which his struggle is connected with this. One must try and feel the materiality of mechanicalness and its quality of sinking downwards. It is also necessary to see the working of the great laws; to realize that, if one takes one false step, one will be crushed. Besides this, one must try and see the trace of time and the way in which every moment has its own consequences.

December 14, 1940

It is desirable to maintain attention as long as one can and to relax as may be necessary. Even the relaxation must be under one's control.

Madame spoke about emotion. It was quite possible to be very emotional, to be stirred up and even to weep without its meaning anything. People revelled in such emotion, but it had no value to the work. To judge emotion rightly in relation to work, one must look for results. Cheap emotion produces no results.

Asked what is the chief characteristic of self-remembering, Madame said a sense of two. You look at an object and see yourself as if looking back from the object. One who remembers himself receives into himself impressions from his surroundings. But man in sleep is constantly dragged here and there and loses the materiality of his attention.

It is necessary to avoid thinking of work in terms of psychology. It should be thought of more in terms of chemistry or mechanics. The world of sleep has its own characteristic materiality, as has also the world of consciousness. They belong to completely different cosmoses.

Work involves giving account to oneself for everything and trying to think always in terms of attention.

December 28, 1940

Madame spoke about naturalness and artificiality. For her, all of us were artificial. Restraints of upbringing and environment had formed a crust about us through which nothing could penetrate. We lived always in thoughts and were unable to feel or to receive impressions direct from the outside world. Her work with us was in the nature of digging hard stony ground or breaking down the hard casing in which we lived.

Man is a world within a world. In the Ray of Creation, higher matters permeate the lower. In the same way, man consists not of one body but of several, the finer enclosed within the coarser. He must make contact with the outside world in order that the inner world may develop.