

I AM ASLEEP



1. *A nostalgia for Being*

Man remains a mystery to himself. He has a nostalgia for Being, a longing for duration, for permanence, for absoluteness—a longing *to be*. Yet everything that constitutes his life is temporary, ephemeral, limited. He aspires to another order, another life, a world that is beyond him. He senses that he is meant to participate in it.

He searches for an idea, an inspiration, that could move him in this direction. It arises as a question: “Who am I—who am I in this world?” If this question becomes sufficiently alive, it could direct the course of his life. He cannot answer. He has nothing with which to answer—no knowledge of himself to face this question, no knowledge of his own. But he feels he must welcome it. He asks himself what he is. This is the first step on the way. He wants to open his eyes. He wants to wake up, to awaken.



2. *The life force*

We wish to live, to be in life. From the moment we are born, something in us seeks to affirm itself in the outside world. I want to be heard and seen, to devour the world. At the same time, I do not want to be

devoured. I want to be first, always. But all too soon I encounter the resistance of the world, and the basic impulse of self-affirmation has to take others into account. My affirming often assumes curious, even though common, forms such as self-pity or a refusal to express oneself.

I wish to live, I agree with life. I do everything to live, and this same force maintains the life of my body. I wish for something or to do something, and when the wish appears, this force is here. It impels me toward manifestation. Throughout my life, in everything I do, I seek to affirm this force. There is no act, however small, that is not an affirmation. If I speak to someone or write a letter, I affirm this force, I affirm my intelligence. Even if I merely look at someone, it is this force. If I hang up my coat, it is this force. Behind this unbridled affirmation, there is surely something true. This force in me is irrepressible. At the same time, I do not know what the affirmation is based on. I believe I am affirming myself. I identify with this force. Yet even though it is in me, this force is not mine. And in affirming it as my own, I do not see that I separate myself from it. In wanting to attribute its power to myself, I cut off its action. I create an inner world that is deprived of the action of this life force. My sense of "I," of myself, is heavy and inert.

We need to see our childishness in relating to the life force, always wishing to have more. The child wants *to have*, the adult wants *to be*. The constant desire for "having" creates fear and a need to be reassured. We need to develop an attention in us that would relate the whole of ourselves to a higher force.

There is only one source of energy. As soon as my energy is called in one direction or another, a force appears. Force is energy in movement. There are different directions, but the source is the same. The life force, the force of manifestation, is always in movement. It has to flow. And I am entirely taken by it, I am swept along. I begin to suspect that I will always be taken if I do not also turn toward another, unknown part of myself.



3. *I do not know myself*

Who am I? I need to know. If I do not know, what meaning does my life have? And what in me responds to life? So, I must try to answer, to see who I am. First, my thought steps back and brings suggestions about myself: I am a man or woman who can do this, who has done that, who possesses this and that. My thinking volunteers possible answers from all that it knows. But it does not know what I am, does not really know me in this moment. Then I turn to my feeling. It is among the centers most capable of knowing. Can it answer? My feeling is not free. It has to obey the “me” who wants to be the greatest, the most powerful and who suffers all the time from not being first. So, my feeling does not dare. It is afraid, or doubts. How can it know? Then, of course, there is my body, the capacity to sense my body. But am I my body?

In fact, I do not know myself. I do not know what I am. I know neither my possibilities nor my limitations. I exist, yet I do not know how I am existing. I believe my actions are affirming my own existence. Yet I am always responding to life with only one part of myself. I react either emotionally or intellectually or physically. And it is never really “I” who responds. I also believe I am moving in the direction I want to go and that I can “do.” But in fact I am acted upon, moved by forces that I know nothing about. Everything in me takes place, everything happens. The strings are pulled without my knowing. I do not see that I am like a puppet, a machine set in motion by influences from outside.

At the same time, I sense my life passing as if it were the life of another person. I vaguely see myself being agitated, hoping, regretting, afraid, bored . . . all without feeling that I am taking part. Most of the time I act without knowing it and realize only afterward that I said this or did that. It is as though my life unfolds without my conscious participation. It unfolds while I sleep. From time to time jolts or shocks awaken me for an instant. In the middle of an angry outburst, or grief or danger, I suddenly open my eyes—“What ? . . . It’s *me*, here, in this

situation, living this." But after the shock, I go back to sleep, and a long time can pass before a new shock awakens me.

As my life passes, I may begin to suspect that I am not what I believe. I am a being who is asleep, a being with no consciousness of himself. In this sleep I confuse intellect—the thought functioning independently from feeling—with intelligence, which includes the capacity to feel what is being reasoned. My functions—my thoughts, feelings and movements—work without direction, subject to random shocks and habits. It is the lowest state of being for man. I live in my own narrow, limited world commanded by associations from all my subjective impressions. This is a prison to which I always return—my prison.

The search for myself begins with questioning where "I" am. I have to feel the absence, the habitual absence, of "I." I must know the feeling of emptiness and see the lie in always affirming an image of myself, the false "I." We are all the time saying "I," though we do not really believe in it. In fact, we have nothing else in which we can believe. It is the wish *to be* that pushes me to say "I." It is behind all my manifestations. But this is not a conscious impulse. Usually I look to the attitude of others in order to be convinced of my being. If they reject or ignore me, I doubt myself. If they accept me, I believe in myself.

Am I only this image that I affirm? Is there really no "I" who could be present? In order to respond, I need to know myself, to have a direct experience of knowing myself. First, I have to see the obstacles that stand in the way. I must see that I believe in my mind, my thinking—I believe it is I. "I" wish to know, "I" have read, "I" have understood. All this is the expression of the false "I," my ordinary "I." It is my ego that prevents me from opening to consciousness, from seeing "*what is*" and what "*I am.*"

My effort to awaken cannot be forced. We are afraid of emptiness, afraid to be nothing, and so we make an effort to be otherwise. But who makes this effort? I must see that this too comes from my ordinary "I." All forcing comes from the ego. I must no longer be fooled by an image or an ideal that is imposed by the mind. I need to accept emp-

teness, accept to be nothing, accept “what is.” In this state, the possibility of a new perception of myself appears.



4. “I” am not here

Real “I” comes from essence. Its development depends on the wish of essence—a wish *to be* and then a wish to become *able to be*. Essence is formed from impressions that are assimilated in early childhood, usually up to the age of five or six when a fissure appears between essence and personality. In order to develop further, essence must become active in spite of resistance from the pressure of personality. We need to “remember ourselves” for our essence to receive impressions. Only in a conscious state can we see the difference between essence and personality.

Ordinarily impressions are received in a mechanical way. They are received by our personality, which reacts with automatic thoughts and feelings that depend on its conditioning. We do not assimilate impressions because personality itself cannot be alive—it is dead. In order to be assimilated and transformed, impressions have to be received by essence. This requires a conscious effort at the moment of the impression. And it requires a definite feeling, a feeling of love for being, for being present. We must respond to impressions no longer from the vantage point of personality but from love for being present. This will transform our whole way of thinking and feeling.

The first necessity is to have an impression of myself. This begins with a shock when the question “Who am I?” arises. For an instant there is a stop, an interval that allows my energy, my attention, to change direction. It turns back toward me, and the question now touches me. This energy brings a vibration, a note that did not sound until now. It is subtle, very fine, but nevertheless communicates. I feel it. It is an impression I receive, an impression of a life in me. All my possibilities are here. What follows—whether I will open to the experience of Presence—depends on the way I receive this impression.

We do not understand the moment of receiving an impression and why it is so important. We need to be present because it is the shock of the impression that drives us. If there is nobody here at the moment an impression is received, I react automatically, blindly, passively, and I am lost in the reaction. I refuse the impression of myself as I am. In thinking, in reacting, in interposing my ordinary "I" in the reception of this impression, I close myself. I am imagining what "I" am. I do not know the reality. I am the prisoner of this imagination, the lie of my false "I." Usually I try to awake by forcing, but it does not work. I can and must learn to awake by opening consciously to the impression of myself and seeing what I am at the very moment. This will be a shock that awakens me, a shock brought by an impression that I receive. It requires a freedom to be in movement, not to stop the movement.

In order to wish to be present, I must see that I am asleep. "I" am not here. I am enclosed in a circle of petty interests and avidity in which my "I" is lost. And it will remain lost unless I can relate to something higher. The first condition is to know in myself a different quality, higher than what I ordinarily am. Then my life will take on new meaning. Without this condition there can be no work. I must remember there is another life and at the same time experience the life that I am leading. This is awakening. I awake to these two realities.

I need to understand that by myself, without a relation with something higher, I am nothing, I can do nothing. By myself alone, I can only remain lost in this circle of interests, I have no quality that allows me to escape. I can escape only if I feel my absolute nothingness and begin to feel the need for help. I must feel the need to relate myself to something higher, to open to another quality.

TO REMEMBER ONESELF



5. *Where our attention is*

I wish to be conscious of myself. Yet, as I am at this moment, can I know myself, can I be conscious of myself? I cannot. I am too scattered. I feel nothing. But I see that I am asleep, and I see the symptoms of this sleep. I have forgotten the sense of my existence, I have forgotten myself. And at this moment I receive a shock: I am awaking, I want to wake up. Then, having scarcely felt the shock, I feel myself taken again, held back by the elements of my sleep—associations that turn around, emotions that take me, unconscious sensations. I feel myself fall back into forgetfulness.

We do not realize how passive we are, always pulled along by events, people and things. We begin an activity with great interest, fully aware of our aim. But after a certain time the impulse weakens, overcome by inertia. Our understanding diminishes, and we feel the need for something new that will restore the interest, the life. Our inner work progresses like this in stages, and always depends on new forces. It is determined by laws. We must get rid of the idea that progress is continuous in a straight line. There are stages where the intensity diminishes and, if we wish not to fall back, a force must appear that is more active.

The passive “man” in us, the only one we know, is the one we trust. But as long as we remain passive, nothing new can appear. We

must become active in relation to our inertia, the passive work of our functions. If we wish to change, we must look for the new “man” in ourselves, the one who is hidden. This is the one who remembers, who has a force that can only be brought by our wish, our will, and must grow degree by degree. It is necessary to see that a more active state, a greater intensity, is possible.

I need to recognize that in my usual state my attention is undivided. When I open to the outside, I am naturally interested in it. My attention goes there. I cannot prevent myself. If my force of attention is entirely taken, I am lost in life, identified, asleep. All my capacity to be present is lost. I lose myself, the feeling of myself. My existence loses its meaning. So, the first step is a separation in which my attention is divided.

Our effort must always be clear—to be present, that is, to begin to remember myself. With the attention divided, I am present in two directions, as present as I can be. My attention is engaged in two opposite directions, and I am at the center. This is the act of self-remembering. I wish to keep part of my attention on the awareness of belonging to a higher level and, under this influence, try to open to the outer world. I must make an effort to remain related, an effort of attention. I try to know truly what I am. I struggle to stay present, at the same time with a feeling of “I” turned toward a better quality and with an ordinary feeling tied to my self, my person. I wish to see and not forget that I belong to these two levels.

We must see where our attention is. Where is our attention when we remember ourselves? Where is our attention in life? Order can be born in us only if we enter into direct contact with disorder. We are not in the disorder. *We are* the state of disorder. If I look at what I really am, I see the disorder. And where there is a direct contact, there is an immediate action. I begin to realize that my Presence is where my attention is.



6. *The first initiation*

Behind all my manifestations, there is a wish to know myself, to know that I exist and how I exist. But in my contacts with the world, an image

of "I" is formed at the same time as the contact. I am attached to this image because I take it as being me. I try to affirm and protect it. I am the slave of this image. Being so attached and taken in these reactions, I have no attention left to know that I am also something else.

As I am, I recognize nothing above me, either outside or inside myself. Theoretically perhaps, but not actually. So I have no reference with which to measure myself, and live exclusively according to "I like" or "I don't like." I value only myself and live passively according to what pleases me. This valuing of my ordinary "I" blinds me. It is the biggest obstacle to a new life. The first requirement for self-knowledge is a change in my opinion of myself, which can only come from actually seeing things in myself that I have not seen before. And in order to see, I must *learn to see*. This is the first initiation into self-knowledge.

I try to see how I am in a state of identification, to experience how I am when I am identified. I need to know the enormous power of the force behind identification and its irresistible movement. This force, which sustains us in life, does not want self-remembering. It drives us toward manifestation and refuses the movement inward.

To see myself in identification is to see what I am in life. But each time I remember my higher possibilities, I go away, I refuse what I am in life. And this refusal prevents me from knowing it. I must be clever in order to catch myself without changing anything, without changing my wish to manifest. I need to see myself as a machine driven by the processes that appear—thoughts, desires, movements. I need to know myself as a machine—to be present while I function as a machine. Who am I in life? I must experience it, have a more conscious impression of it.

In order to face the force of identification, there must be something present that attends—an attention that is stable, free and related to another level. I wish to be present to what is taking place, to remain conscious of myself and not lose myself. My effort is made with something that does not belong to my ordinary means. I need a certain will and desire unknown to my ordinary self. My ordinary "I" must give up its place. Through maintaining the attention and not forgetting to

look, perhaps one day I will be able to see. If I see one time, I can see a second time, and if this repeats I will no longer be able not to see.

In order to observe, I have to struggle. My ordinary nature refuses self-observation. I need to prepare, to organize a struggle against the obstacle, to withdraw a little from my identification—speaking, imagining, expressing negative emotions. Conscious struggle requires choice and acceptance. It must not be my state that dictates the choice. I must choose the struggle to be present and accept that suffering will appear. There is no struggle without suffering. Struggle is unacceptable to our lower nature; struggle upsets it. This is why it is so important always to remember what we wish—the meaning of our work and our Presence. In going against a habit, for example, like eating or sitting in a certain way, we are not struggling to change the habit. Or in trying not to express negative emotions, we are not struggling against the emotions themselves or struggling to do away with their expression. It is a struggle with our identification, to allow the energy otherwise wasted to serve the work. We struggle not *against* something, we struggle *for* something.



7. *Can we become conscious?*

The work to be present is in the direction of consciousness—that is, a special kind of perception independent of the activity of the intellectual mind, a perception of oneself: who one is, where one is and then what one knows and does not know. In the moment of consciousness there is the immediate impression of a direct perception. This is quite different from what we usually call “consciousness,” which operates more like a reflection faithfully accompanying what I experience and representing it in my mind. When this consciousness reflects the fact that I think or feel something, this is a second action that, like a shadow, follows the first. Without this shadow I am unconscious of and ignore the original thought or feeling. If, for example, I am angry and beside myself, I only see it as long as I am aware of the reflection which, like a witness, tells me in a whisper that I am angry. The whisper follows

so closely upon the preceding feeling that I believe they are one and the same. But it is not really like that.

Can we become conscious? It is all a question of energies and their relation, with each energy always controlled by a finer one that is more active, more animating, like a magnet. The energy used in our functions—our thoughts, our emotions, our sensations—is passive, inert. Spent in movements toward the outside, this energy suffices in quality for our life as higher animals, but is not fine enough for an inner act of perception, of consciousness. Nevertheless, we do have some power of attention, at least on the surface, some capacity to point the attention in a desired direction and hold it there. Although it is fragile, this seed or bud of attention is consciousness emerging from deep within us. For it to grow, we need to learn to concentrate, to develop this capacity indispensable for preparing the ground. This is the first thing that we do ourselves, not dependent on anyone else.

The practice of being present is self-remembering. Instead of being taken outward, the attention of the functions is turned toward the inside for a moment of consciousness. I need to recognize that I can understand nothing if I cannot remember myself. This means remembering my highest possibilities, that is, remembering what I open to when I come back to myself alone. To remember myself also means to be present to my situation—to the place, the conditions, the way I am taken by life. There is no room for dreaming.

Perhaps I will not come to a state that is satisfying. It does not matter. What is important is the effort to be present. We cannot always find a better state that brings a feeling of something new. We feel unable and conclude that there is nothing permanent in us on which we can rely. But it is not true. There is something. In a better state, we can see that we have in us all the elements necessary to come to it. The elements are already here. This means the possibilities are always here in us.

What is too often missing is knowing what I want. And it is this that undermines my will to work. Without knowing what I want, I will not make any effort. I will sleep. Without wishing for a different quality in myself, to turn toward my higher possibilities, I will have

nothing to lean on, nothing to support work. I must always, again and again, come back to this question: What do I wish? It must become the most important question of my life. Yet this wish for a different quality has no force at all if it comes from my ordinary "I." It must be related to something completely different from my ordinary "I" and free from the desire for a result. I must not forget *why* I wish. This must be for me really a question of life or death—I wish *to be*, to live in a certain way.



8. *The watchman*

We do not see our state of sleep. In this state we think of working; we think, "I wish to be present." But the effort to be present is something very different from thinking. It is an effort in the direction of consciousness. We must come to know whether we are conscious at a given moment, and all the degrees of this consciousness. Its presence or absence can thus be proved by an inner act of observing.

I am in front of something I do not know. I am in front of a mystery, the mystery of my Presence. I must recognize that I cannot know this mystery with my ordinary means of knowing. But I must understand, at least intellectually, what it would mean to be present—that is, to be present not only with my head, my sensation or my feeling, but with all these elements of my Presence together. Maybe then I still will not be truly present, but at least I will search for a common direction.

Who is present—who is seeing? And whom? The whole problem is here.

In order to observe ourselves we need an attention that is different from our ordinary attention. We undertake the struggle to be vigilant, to watch—the struggle of the watchman. We seek to have a watchman in us who is stable. The one who watches is the one who is present. Only the watchman is active. The rest of me is passive. The watchman must take an impression of the inner state while trying to see everything at the same time and have a sense of the whole. We must learn to distinguish between the real "I," which is nowhere to be seen, and the personality, which takes over and believes it is the only one who exists.

One has power over the other. The necessity is to reverse the roles. The danger is that we do not see the roles change back again. I believe I need to pay attention when, in fact, I need to see and know my inattention.

Observation of myself shows me how better to concentrate and strengthens the attention. It makes me see that I do not remember myself, that I do not see my state of sleep. I am fragmented, my attention is dispersed, and there is no force that is available to see. When I awaken, I make an effort to disengage enough attention to oppose this dispersion, and to see it. This is a state that is more voluntary. Now there is a watchman, and this watchman is a different state of consciousness. I must always remember that I do not know what I am, that the whole problem is *who* is present. Self-observation by my usual thought, with its separation between the observer and what is observed, will only strengthen the illusion of my ordinary "I."

At a certain moment we come to see two aspects, two natures, in ourselves—a higher nature related to one world and a lower nature related to another, a different world. What are we? We are neither one nor the other—neither God nor animal. We participate in life with both a divine nature and an animal nature. Man is double; he is not one. And as such, he is only a promise of man until he can live with both natures present in himself and not withdraw into one or the other. If he withdraws into the higher part, he is distant from his manifestations and can no longer evaluate them; he no longer knows or experiences his animal nature. If he slides into the other nature, he forgets everything that is not animal, and there is nothing to resist it; he is animal . . . not man. The animal always refuses the angel. The angel turns away from the animal.

A conscious man is one who is always vigilant, always watchful, who remembers himself in both directions and has his two natures always confronted.