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Principles of Reversed Effort

Location Unknown — Late 1970s

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OybXIYl4fV0&app=desktop>

Ladies and gentlemen, these titles of talks for the series of lectures on human awareness organized by the Institute for the Study of Human Awareness have been set by the Institute without consultation with me and without reference, so some of these titles may mean something else to the Institute than what I am going to present to you. It does happen that they have some anticipation on what I could say on a particular subject to reflect the title. When I say something different on that, next day it will be the same title with different words expecting that now he will say what we want him to say. Sometimes I disappoint them even on the second occasion.

The title set for today on “The Principle of Reversed Effort” is of course a very interesting one. It is interesting because effort seems to be the keystone for any achievement or realization. People are always exhorted, “Put in your best effort, do your best, do whatever you can to get the results.” Therefore, it seems that effort would be a necessary thing for any kind of achievement. Then we find that effort can achieve everything except controlling the ego which makes the effort then one gets during back to the wall—and one does not know what else one has to do. We can make effort only with our ego. If we did not have an ego, we wouldn’t be able to make any effort. If somebody says the problem to be solved is how to take care of your ego, effort could not be the solution. And yet there is no way that we know of in which we can tackle a problem without making effort.

To make an effort it is necessary for us to assume that we are separate from the object of our goal. That means if we have set our goal on a particular object and we want to achieve that, we are separate from it. We have to reach there, therefore we make an effort. If we are the goal, we cannot make an effort. When we talk of self-realization, finding oneself, knowing oneself, can we then make an effort to know oneself? We can make an effort to know somebody else,

because effort involves going from yourself to something you want to achieve. Would it be correct for me to say that whereas every other thing in this world you can achieve by effort, when you want to achieve or realize your own self, it is not making of effort but giving up of effort that will lead you where you are. We don't have to run after something to get ourselves. We have to stop running. People are trying to find themselves by running far outside, everywhere. People try to find themselves everywhere except in themselves. I have not seen anybody stopping to run, stopping to make effort, stopping to try in order to find himself or herself. They all want to try, make an effort. Put in your best effort. You might get the results. That seems to be the belief and inaccurate assumption that we all make.

If we cannot make effort, what can we do? Some people say you can relax. If you decide to relax, it is an effort. If you run, it's an effort. If you decide not to run, it's an effort. If you say, "I will do this," it's ego. If you say, "I will not do this," this is ego. The fact that we are deciding to do the opposite of action does not mean that we are not deciding, and the ego has disappeared. The ego is equally involved whether you want to do a thing or not do a thing. How do we get over this stuff? We have been trying to find some principle by which this contradiction between ego/effort on the one side and overcoming ego and finding oneself on the other side can be resolved.

Some people try to beat their ego down. They say, "I am nothing. I am nobody. It is all the Lord's power. It is his game. It is he who is doing things. It is all he. I am nobody. I am nothing." When a person says I am nobody, it is also ego, because there is a premium on being nobody. It is known that humility is a great quality. Therefore, when a person says, "I am very humble," he knows he is only being egotistical. In fact, it is more difficult to take care of the ego of humility than to take care of the ego of pride. If a person says, "I am the greatest in this world," it is easy to take care of that ego because people can tell him, "You are not." But when a person says, "I am nobody," nobody can tell him anything. Therefore, nobody will correct his ego. That is a big problem of dealing with our ego. Then can we find some principle by which we reverse this law of ego, reverse this tendency to make effort and yet achieve the results we like. What is the principle of reversed effort that is applicable to self-realization, to finding one's own self, to finding the truth within one's self? That is the question set before me.

In dealing with ego there is a good principle which we can discover and that is instead of making your ego so small that it ceases to have effort and therefore can do nothing to get the results, make your ego big. I am suggesting an unconventional answer. The ego does not bother us because we say, "I am so and so, that's mine." The ego bothers us when we say, "This is mine, that is not mine." When you separate yourself from some part of existence or reality, that is where the problem starts. You will notice that the problem of ego does not arise when you say, "This belongs to me." The problem arises when you say, "This belongs to me and that does not."

When you say the second half of the sentence, “and that does not,” then you separate yourself from “that” and therefore the problem starts. Therefore, one solution could be that everything belongs to me. There is nothing that doesn’t belong to me. Everything that has ever been created belongs to me. Instead of denying that anything belongs to me, one can assume that everything belongs to me. The Lord himself belongs to me. We are part of him, and he is us and we are all one. When this expanded ego is used, there is no problem of ego. Therefore, one way of tackling the problem of individualized effort which negates ownership and rights over part of the creation can be to assume rights and ownership over everything that is created by the Lord. Therefore, become one with the Lord.

The second principle is that you can make an offering, do some service for people rather than make an effort for yourself. In Indian spiritual practices we talk of two things: *Sadhana* and *Seva*. *Sadhana* means meditation or meditational practices, and *seva* means service. *Sadhana* or meditation consists of various practices which lead to the concentration of one’s attention within oneself behind the eyes from where one can see the light and gain insight into reality. *Seva* means offering something for your master, your guru, your teacher or for the people whom he teaches. One is an offering, sometimes called a sacrifice, and the other is an effort. In the balance between these two, the masters in the East have been saying that service and offering is more useful than effort and meditation. The reason is that when you do meditation with effort, you have not solved the problem of the ego. When you make an offering to somebody and give up any desire for reward, you have reduced your ego. Service is of three kinds: Service with wealth, service with body, and service with the mind. Service with wealth is done when you write out a check for a charity organization and send it or give the money to somebody who you think deserves the money. Even if he doesn’t deserve, you give it out, give it away. This is the lowest kind of service and the least compensation. It’s the easiest to perform this service.

The next higher in classification is service with the body. If you have a master, a guru, a teacher whom you want to serve, you can bodily serve him. You can carry his bag, do cooking for him, do some other work for him, perhaps some laundry for him, or do some personal work where your body does service for a guru, a master. If the master and guru is not there, you can do these services for his disciples and students who represent him for the sake of service. When you do this, your bodily *seva* or service ensures that your ego becomes less because you do not do it with any sense of reward. You do it only as an offering, as a service. This is a better service than service with money or wealth.

But the highest kind of service is service with the mind. Service with the mind means withdrawing attention from the body, from the extremities, right up to the eye center, third eye center where the mind resides and making an offering of this concentrated attention to the

Lord with it or to the master with it. In this service, you are collecting your own attention and offering it to the Lord. But isn't that the same thing as sadhana or meditation? When we talk of meditation, we say the same thing, that you withdraw your attention to the eye center. Now when we talk of service with the mind, we are talking again of withdrawing our attention to the eye center. What's the difference between the two? This is the difference. In the case of sadhana or meditation, we have put in effort to do so in order to get some results. In the case of service, we have made an offering irrespective of whether we get results or not.

Therefore, when you want to do meditation, it should be done as an offering, as a service. Then you will get results. Then there is no ego involved. So, the problem of ego can be solved by not expecting rewards but making an offering with the mind which means collecting, gathering the scattered attention from this world, from the body, onto the third eye center behind the two eyes. When you are doing sadhana or withdrawal of attention in this method, it is called the effortless meditation. Therefore, the principle of reversed effort is that where no ego is involved and yet you can do something.

In this life we are moving round and round in cycles of birth and rebirth because of our effort, our ego, our so-called choices that we make, the free will that we use. These things create karma and create a new pattern of another life. Therefore, how can we stop this cycle of birth and rebirth? If we make an effort to stop it, we will come again because of that effort. There are three kinds of karma which make us come here again and again. The first is the karma of action or effort. When you use your ego and you use your decision making, you use your free will, and decide, after due contemplation and thinking, "I want to do this." When you take a decision like that, you have used your free will and created karma because you have done an action for which you are responsible. You have taken the decision, you have made a choice, therefore you are responsible, so you have created karma. The other karma—this is referred to as *Kriyaman*. In our distinction in the Indian language we call this kind of karma or action as *Kriyaman* karma or new action for which we have to come back to get the punishment or reward for the action. The second kind of action is *Pralabdha* or fate or destiny karma. Destiny or fate means we did this action in the past and we have now come back for the reward or punishment of it. We did something and now we have to get the consequences of that. The consequence concept leads us to the *Pralabdha* karma or the destiny or fate. People do not distinguish between these two. Way back in 1962 I made a first appearance in this country with a small talk, Veterans Memorial Hall, and I remember a lady from the back at the end of the talk came up to me and said, "Sir, may I shake your hand?" I said, "Why not?" She said, "I was afraid I might transfer my karma to you." So, I said, "Ma'am, how...who knows I have come all the way from India just to shake hands because I couldn't do it in the past life? If you don't shake hands I'll have to be reborn again to come. Why are you so hesitant?"

How do you know whether you are paying off karma or creating new karma? How do you know its Pralabdha—that means paying off past karma—or Kriyaman, creating new karma? The answer is very simple, but we forget it. When we use freewill and deliberate upon opportunities, options, possibilities, alternatives open to us, it is new karma. Otherwise it is old karma. Wherever we have to use our mind and decide should I or should I not. Should I do this or that? When these options come up clearly before us and we have to take a decision, that is the creation of new karma. Where things happen and we have no option, that is the past karma.

Therefore, one should never bother about the past karma. We are paying off our own debts. They are clearing our own accounts. One should never bother about it. It is not creating any new karma. When things happen involuntarily, when things happen over which we have no control, when things come so fast that we don't even have time to think about them, when the only thought we can apply to events is after the event—all these are previous karma and we should get rid of them cheerfully. We are paying off our own accounts, our old accounts. We are not creating any karma. In fact, if we resist at that time, we are holding back the repayment of karma. Therefore, we should be very happy that these events are taking place without our free will and we are paying off our karma. We are clearing an account. We are having a blank sheet over which we can write what we like after we clear this karma. But when new options open up and we say should we do this or not, when people have to think for a long time—"should I marry this person or not," "is it right or not," "should I buy this house or not," "go and make several trips," "is that person right or wrong," "should I enter into a partnership with that person or not"—when you think over long periods and then decide about these things, you create new karma. Then you have to come back to pay for it.

But can we avoid it? If we have to live in this world and lead the life according to the norms of society, how do we deal with new problems, new options? How do we decide which way to go? How do we decide when we come to the crossroads? And we come to the crossroads every day in our life. There are two ways of deciding. One is called deciding by your free will which means that your ego comes in, your effort comes in, your deliberation comes in and new karma comes in. The second is called deciding by the Lord's will. There is no karma in that because no ego is involved. When you are standing at the crossroads, when two opportunities, two alternatives open before you and you can't decide which one to take, you can either take it by your own so-called free will, experience of using choice, or you can leave it to the Lord's will. Let me explain these two terms.

Free will first. Do we have free will? Do we have some free will? Limited free will? Do we have full free will? Is it illusion or reality? These questions are asked every day. A friend of mine came one day with great joy on his face because he found out the truth that we have absolutely no free will. He came running to me. He said, "At last I have found out we have no free will at all." I

said, "Calm down and be seated." I asked a girl over there, "Would you get on a tray a cup of tea, a cup of coffee and bring it over for this gentleman?" So, a cup of tea and a cup of coffee were placed on a tray and brought there, and I said, "Now, my friend, tell me, would you like to have tea or coffee or neither? And don't use free will because you don't have any." I said, "If you now say tea, coffee, are you exercising free will? If you say neither, try to withdraw, then also you're using free will." I said, "You said you have found out finally that we have no free will at all but just with a cup of coffee and a cup of tea I have not only demonstrated that you have free will, I'll go further and demonstrate to you, you cannot avoid free will. You are a prisoner of free will. Even if you don't want to use free will, you have to use it. You are put under a crossroads, an option in life, you can't get out of it. How do you say you have no free will? Just now it has been demonstrated."

So obviously, this thing quite upset him, and he wanted to know how come he had found out the great truth that he has no free will and just a little cup of coffee and tea had undone the whole philosophy?" But then I had to assuage his feelings and tell him, "Now look I was being too clever with you. The real fact is that you have no free will. When you freely, out of your free choice, told me that "I want tea," you thought it was free. How do you decide?" I said, "Tell me freely with your free choice what do you want? You have freely chosen your mind what do you want, what do I want, freely with all freedom to choose and you chose tea. Why? What is the meaning of free choice? How does the mind operate when it makes a free choice?" I said, "When we chose tea it could be for a variety of reasons for several principles of preference, factors of choice built into your brain which led you to choose tea. There could be a large number of factors which influence you to have tea, to prefer tea over coffee. But all these factors of choice or principles of preferences could be placed into two categories. Either they could be hereditary, in your genes, your father, grandfather grand uncle, grand aunt, somebody must be fond of tea and it's come in your genes—therefore you asked for tea. Or they could be environmental, which means you lived in company where tea was taken, you cultivated a taste, so you've become a tea drinker. All these factors of choice can be grouped into either environmental or genetic/hereditary. That is not important. The important thing is when I produced the cup of tea and the cup of coffee before you, all your factors of choice and preference both hereditary and environmental at that point of choice were fixed. You could neither change your genetics nor could you change the environment you are part of.

"Therefore although it may look to you that you had freedom to choose tea or coffee, in fact what made you choose tea was so fixed that every time you tried to choose freely with that set of preferences, with that set of genetic and environmental factors, you will choose tea. Had I fed a computer with your factors of choice before you could have decided on tea, the computer would have whispered in my ear—after saying which one shall I take—you will take tea. Is it free will or pre-determined? If the factors of choice are pre-determined, how do you have free will?"

“Therefore, my friend, you did not have free will. You only had the *experience* of free will, illusion of freewill, the feeling that you had free will. How did you get that feeling? Because you were ignorant of the factors of choice. Had you known what are those genetic factors, the environmental factors, had you good memory about the environment and good knowledge about the genes, you would have known beforehand that freely you would take tea only and you would have had no free choice.

“Therefore, my friend, even your illusory experience of free will arose from the ignorance of the factors of choice. Who sets those factors? Environment started by your birth. Birth brought the genetic factors. Your time, place, moment of birth determines your genetics as well as your environment. Every other exposure to a new frame of environment arose from the frame when you were born. Therefore that point of birth, the date of birth, the stars at the time of birth, the position that obtained around you throughout the universe at the time of birth determined all your genetic factors as well as your environmental factors, and you had no control over them. Who had control? Who brought you at that point to give you this life?

The Lord alone. The Lord knew all the factors of choice. Therefore God, the total consciousness, absolute consciousness knew what is to be done. The free will of God which was real arose out of knowledge. The free will of man which looks like free will is not really free, rises out of ignorance. Therefore, my friend, you indeed were right when you came and said that you have no free will. But when you said this to me, “I have no free will,” you said it out of the illusion of free will. You could’ve said, “I have free will.” Even this choice you made, whether you had free will or no free will, you made it out of the experience of free will. Therefore, let us distinguish between real free will and the experience of free will, illusion of free will. Man has no free will but has always got illusion of free will.

The karma I was talking of arises from the illusion of free will. The effort we make is from the illusion of free will. Therefore, even effort is illusion. Karma is illusion. There is no such thing as real karma. When the illusion of free will disappears by rising above the mental state of consciousness, karma also disappears, effort also disappears, ego disappears. All these are illusions created by the use of our mind. When we use the mind, we get the feeling we are free to choose. When we get the feeling [that] we are free to choose, we get the feeling that we must choose between right and wrong [and] we invent a morality. When we invent morality, then we invent a system of reward and punishment for good actions and bad actions. It is all based upon the illusion created by the mind. The whole set of ethics, the whole set of choices, the whole set of effort, punishment and reward, law of karma is all one package of illusion at the mental level. If you can transcend your mind by meditational practices, you transcend the entire package of these illusions. Therefore, the true state when you are free from effort is when you reach the knowledge above the mind.

I was talking of three kinds of karma, but I only described two. The past karma for which you come here which, we call Pralabdha, and the new karma which you are creating to stay on forever in this cycle which we call Kriyaman. But all these actions of one life cannot be transferred into one next life. In fact, the way we are behaving these days it looks like one life's karma will have to be taken care of in several lives we take. So, what has been happening in the past? We have been accumulating lot of karma. We don't have enough lifetimes to take care of it. Therefore, we only dispose of or account for a repay of a part of it in one life. The rest gets held in storage and becomes a reserve stock of karma which we call the Sinchit karma or the reserve karma. The reserve karma is held as impressions at the mental level. Those impressions are again picked up and a new life is created when we come again into the cycle of birth and re-birth. Therefore, this law of karma is operating continuously, and even if you got rid of all the karma here, you would still have to come because of the Sinchit karma, the reserve karma, unless you transcend the mental levels of consciousness.

Now I was saying that your past karma which comes spontaneously over which you have no control should be paid off—illness, happiness, mostly marriages, death, accidents, strange things happening without our control, people coming and hating us, hitting us, things like that happening over which we have no control— these are all paying off old karma. We should pay off gladly. It's good that it's there. Why do I say it's good that this bad karma is there? Because if it were not there we wouldn't be here. If we wouldn't be here, we wouldn't be seekers of the Lord, we would not be able to go back from the cycle. It is the package of karma which enables us to have a human body and be here. If we had no karma, we wouldn't be here. We would be in any other form but not in human form.

This Kriyaman karma, the karma of free will or illusion of free will, is available only in human form, in no other form, neither in the form of animals, trees, plants, angels, gods nor in any other known form except in human form. All animals, plants and those life kingdoms, they live on instincts automatically. They don't make choices. Whatever comes they instinctively go on—they're paying off their karma. Those are called *bhog joonis*, which means lives of repayment of karma. They don't create karma. No animal can create karma. The only living thing in this entire creation of the universe that can create new karma is a human being. No one else can create karma. What about the angels and higher entities living up in the heavens? They can't create karma because they have knowledge of the future. When you already know the future, how can you create karma? Only when you're ignorant and feel you have choice you can create karma. Only human beings are in this unique position that they are ignorant, but they feel they can take action, take decisions, create choices. Therefore, it is a human situation in which you create karma, how it is possible as human beings to be seekers of the Lord. In no other form can you do that.

It's a great opportunity. This opportunity to be able to seek the Lord because you can make an effort, because you can use free will, even in illusions. This is only possible in the human form. Therefore, the mystics have said the human form is higher than the form of God, because God has knowledge—they have just to go through their knowledge. If you have lovely time up in heaven, enjoying yourself day and night for a thousand years knowing fully well the entire program of enjoyment, don't you think you'll get bored with it? Doesn't a bit of shock and surprise and unexpected things add to the spice of existence? I read a thought in the newspaper the other day—they write "thought for the day." I don't know who has been quoted, who said, "If I am given the choice between grief and nothing, I will take grief because without it you are left with nothing except boredom."

We have not come here for boredom. Therefore, the human life which gives the illusion of making our own choices, which gives us surprises of not knowing what is going to happen at the next moment, is the most unique life and perhaps the best after total consciousness or God. In between the total God and ourselves there will be many regions, many higher lives, many beautiful levels of consciousness. They don't match with this level of human existence. Therefore, the human body has been called the top of creation. Although many creations and levels of experience exist above this, still this human body is called the top of creation. This experience of making choices is possessed only by human beings and by total God, no one else. Therefore, this body alone is called—and even made in the image of the Lord, in the image of the creator. No other body, no astral body, no causal body, none of them are considered as made in the image of the Lord. This human form, physical form alone is called as made in the image of the Lord, because it can have the illusion of making an effort. It can have the illusion of becoming a seeker and thereby find the reality of the one where he need not seek. Therefore, when we talk of the karma which gives us the opportunity to make effort, we are talking of the actual situation in life when we feel we are making choices.

Old karma we can get rid of—Pralabdha—by paying it off. That means living it through. If it is too painful, one can with the Masters' grace make it light. How do the perfect spiritual Masters reduce the pain and agony of past karma? They do it through a simple device of giving us realization that this world is not real. It's a stage upon which we are acting. When we start acting instead of living, the pain goes. It is very easy to reduce the pain of this world. Take it as a big stage on which we are acting. The pain goes. But we can't take it very easily. Therefore the Masters have to work upon us to make us realize yes, this indeed is a big stage on which we are acting. Once we accept that, then the pain goes. But what about the new karma we are creating? Then we can decide whether to use our own ego, effort, free will to make a choice or Lord's will.

How do we use that? When a person thinks and decides, it is the ego and one's own freewill; when one acts otherwise, it is the Lord's will—as simple as that. In India, the mystics have said the entire humanity can be classified into two groups: those who follow their mind and those who follow the Lord—the *manmukhs* and the *gurmukhs*. Those who follow their mind are called manmukhs, “man being mind,” and those who follow their guru, or the Lord, are called gurmukhs or followers of the guru.

What is the distinction? Those who think and decide are following their mind, the thinking of mind. Those who do not think and decide are following the Lord. If you can decide intuitively without thinking, you are following the Lord. If you are taking note of the circumstances around you and deciding, you are following the Lord. If you follow coincidences, you are following the Lord. If you think, you are following the mind. So, when alternatives present before a gurmukh, he does not use his mind to decide what to do. He looks at the circumstances around him, the coincidences and their language that speak around him because he has not created them—those are not his thoughts, those are external to him—and he goes along by the message given by the coincidences.

The Lord speaks to us in many ways. He speaks through another person, not our mind. When we hear a voice in our head, that is always the mind. Make no mistake that there is a voice of God being heard inside our heads. That is only one speaker in our head—that is our mind. Always the mind will speak. There no such thing as conscience, God, etc. speaking. There is a conscience that pulls us away—it does not speak. There is an intuitive knowledge that tells us what to do or not to do. It does not speak. What speaks in the head is a thought. What thinks is the mind. Therefore, if we follow thoughts, speech in the head we are following the mind. When we get that intuitive flash and follow it without speech, we are following the Lord.

The Lord has used one language more often than any other to tell what his will is if you don't want to follow the minds' will—and that is called the principle of coincidence. Strange things happen and by coincidence you get to know what you're supposed to do. Coincidence is not coincidental at all. It is not accidental at all. It's the Lord's plan. If you begin to rely more and more on the Lord's will, you will see more and more of coincidences. Everybody has seen this. When you develop faith and trust in the Lord, more coincidences begin to happen in your life. Why? The Lord speaks to you. Therefore, if you follow the language of coincidence, strange coincidences happening, you are following the will of the Lord. If you follow coincidence and the will of the Lord, you make no effort because you make no choice with your own thoughts thereby following the principle of reversed effort.

Therefore when you want to take into account the various possibilities to human beings in using this principle of reversed effort, you will find it can be used: a) by not suppressing your ego, trying to make it small but enlarging it to take the whole world in and becoming one with the

world. There is no ego left and there is no effort. You have applied the principle of reversed effort. Secondly, by living in the Lords' will, by following the principles of coincidence, you reverse the principle of effort and have the principle of reversed effort. Thirdly, when you make an offering instead of making an effort, when you do seva instead of sadhana, you reverse this principle and you have no effort but the principle of reversed effort. Thus, in these three ways you can actually practice reversed effort and thereby get away from the problems of the ego and reach the higher place of consciousness including the state of God consciousness.

Thank you very much.