

The Distinction Between Sensing and Feeling

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There is one thing I advise you all to work on persistently until you have mastered it, and that is the distinction between sensing and feeling. This is one of the foundations of the practical method which Mr. Gurdjieff is now giving people to help them in their work, and there are many things which cannot be done until you are able to make this distinction in your own immediate experience; he calls this the distinction between “*je*” and “*moi*”, between “me” and “myself”. By “*je*” we mean that experience of ourselves which comes from our feelings; by “*moi*” we mean that experience of ourselves which comes through our bodily sensation. Ordinarily, both of these are outside or below the threshold of our conscious experience, they both belong to our sub-conscious, and only affect what we call our conscious state indirectly through associations, or directly when there is a process of particular intensity, such as physical pain or strong, powerful feeling, and even then, we fail to realize that these things belong to kinds of “self” feeling which we do not ordinarily experience.

You cannot expect to catch on to the idea of sensing and feeling at once; you have to work on it persistently. You have to begin by making yourself aware of sensations that you ordinarily do not notice, such as the sensation of touch when your body is in contact with something without movement. It is easy enough to have the sensation, for example, of a rubbing movement of the hand over something, but if your hand remains quietly resting on something, you very quickly lose any sensation of touch; we can easily make this experiment. It is difficult to say what posture or what position a limb is in without either moving it, or looking at it, or something of this kind, therefore you should start by working on simple things like this – that is, learning how to sense the stationary contact of your body with external objects, then learning to sense the posture of your body, the position of your various limbs without moving them and without looking at them, without thinking about them, and so on.

Then you can work on inner sensing, on feeling, or experiencing, the whole activity of the nervous system, which runs all through the body and which is, the whole time, sending messages back to your spinal column. You have to work at this until you can, at any time, experience the inner sensation of your own limbs and various parts of your body, and then, from time to time, and as you go on with increasing intensity, try to experience the whole of your body in this way through sensing, try to see how you can be aware of the whole of the life of your body, without thinking about it, without looking at it, without being dependent upon any movement or change of posture, without a feeling of pain or discomfort; just sense

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your body by learning to bring awareness into the whole of this nervous system which pervades the whole body.

Then work also on feeling; try to see how your feeling state is something that is independent of your mind and independent of this process of sensing that goes on in the body. Try to see how the results of your experience are all expressed in terms of a feeling state, a state of elation or depression, excitement, wonder, pleasure and sadness, desire, aversion, and try to see how all this succession of feelings comes from one part of you which you can easily experience as quite separate from what goes on in your brain and what goes on in your sensing part, and for most people is immediately and unmistakably connected with the region in the chest that we call the Solar Plexus.

Try, above all, to see how from this there comes a certain kind of “self” feeling; this is what Mr. Gurdjieff calls “*je*.” Try to see if you can bring together into your experience both “*moi*” and “*je*” – in other words, try to see if you can sense the whole of the life of your body, and then also have the experience of feeling yourself present in it; have the experience directly and not merely as something which colours your thoughts – have the experience directly of the succession of emotional states which is present in you.

Most of you are not easy to help over whatever difficulties you may be faced with in the work because you work too much with your thinking part; I have been noticing this very much recently with people I have spoken to at various meetings. Or else there are people whose feeling part reacts very violently to various stimuli but who are quite unable to experience this “*je*,” because when they have a wave of feeling passing over them it seems to swamp everything and nothing else remains. So, that for everyone, whatever their particular lack of balance may be, this work is necessary, and in any case, it is necessary because without it, it is not possible to follow certain practical suggestions which people may expect to receive if they work hard and earn the opportunity.