

The Upper Triad Material

Articles I

Edited by Peter Hamilton

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Articles I

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The Upper Triad Association is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit educational organization established in 1974 and devoted to the study and practice of various principles leading to personal and spiritual growth.

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The Full List of Upper Triad Books:

December 2008

The Upper Triad Material 3rd Edition

Articles	3 volumes
Commentaries	15 volumes
Miscellany	2 volumes

The Upper Triad Material 4th Edition

Introduction
1 Purpose
2 Consciousness
3 Truth and Reality
4 Karma
5 Knowledge
6 Religion
7 Manifestation

A Personal Journey 4th Edition

Through the Grace of God 1st Edition

Preface

The Upper Triad Association is a non-profit educational organization, formed in 1973 and formally organized in 1974 by a small group of Christian students dedicated to spiritual growth through the study and practice of various ethical, metaphysical, spiritual, and theosophical principles.

The Upper Triad Material is a collection of over 1,500 articles and commentaries, plus various prayers, mantras, meditation outlines, quotations, synthetic triangles, and keywords relating to various aspects of metaphysics, religion, philosophy, psychology, and theosophy.

Since 1974, the Upper Triad Material has been published and distributed incrementally through the sometimes monthly, sometimes bi-monthly Upper Triad Journal, and has been reprinted as needed in various forms, most recently in a series of topical issues that cover the entire range of material and through the Association's website.

The Upper Triad Material is written by members of the Upper Triad Association. There is generally no author attribution, as most of the material is evoked through prayer and meditation, and the writers have no need of recognition. The material is augmented by a number of articles written by and attributed to associate members, e.g., two series of articles by K.M.P. Mohamed Cassim and an article by Robert L. Moore.

The various articles are relatively easy to read. The various commentaries are relatively more technical and not as easy to read due to the style of writing and the numerous correlations suggested via parentheses. This style of writing is not contrived. Commentaries are simply written according to the flow of consciousness of the writer.

The commentaries are not intended for the casual reader, but for the more serious student who is willing to invest the time and attention to understand both the semantic context and meditative import. Neither articles nor commentaries are intended to be read in any intellectual sense. Many of the

commentaries are incidentally intended to discourage casual reading and to encourage a more deliberate-but-non-linear approach that allows and stimulates a more intuitive reading.

The Upper Triad Material is not prescriptive, but it is suggestive. It is what we understand, at the moment it is written. It is intended to stimulate constructive thinking and foster spiritual growth. Each thought may be accepted, deferred, or rejected, in whole or in part, according to the framework, perspective, values, and consciousness of the reader. The challenge is for the student to read the material meditatively and intuitively rather than intellectually. We believe that self-realization occurs not through any rational or intellectual process, but rather through grace and through the meditative quality of higher consciousness. In the final analysis, it is up to the reader to discern the truth, according to his or her own consciousness.

Third Edition

This third edition is organized functionally and chronologically, in three titles, namely *Articles*, *Commentaries*, and *Miscellany*. The articles are written without much regard for format or length. Commentaries are naturally constrained to one page as originally published. The miscellaneous material is fairly diverse, but complements the various articles and commentaries.

In this third edition, the material is presented with articles and commentaries numbered according to their original sequence, except in the case of some series, where there are intervening articles or commentaries that would disrupt the series, in which case the series of articles and commentaries are presented in their more natural order.

Notes

Article Nos. 1 through 8 and 35 through 37 were also published as commentaries.

Psychology and Sufism. Two series of articles written and originally published by K.M.P. Mohamed Cassim of Sri Lanka, and were reprinted in the Upper Triad Journal by permission of the author, and are widely available in other forms. The first series consists of Article Nos. 9 through 24 and the second series consists of Article Nos. 44, 46, 48, 51 through 53, and 60. The first series appears here in Articles I and the second series appears in Articles II.

Introductory Material. Two series of articles serve as an introduction to theosophy. Article Nos. 26 through 32 are a series entitled "The Spiritual Path" while Article Nos. 39 through 43 and Nos. 45, 47, 49, 50, and 54, are a series entitled "The Purpose of Life."

Article No. 38 was written and originally published by Robert L. Moore, and was reprinted in the Upper Triad Journal by permission of the author.

The forms associated with Article Nos. 33 and 34 are included in Miscellany I.

More information on the Upper Triad Association and a complete index of the Upper Triad Material are also provided in Miscellany II and in the Introductory volume of the fourth edition.

Additional Caveat

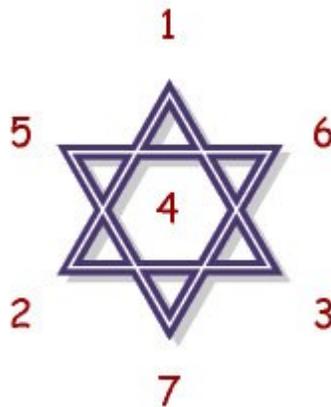
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There is a place, deep within the heart, where we touch God, and where God touches us, where human hearts achieve communion, with God, and with one another, there being no difference, no space between us.

The challenge, for human beings, is to find our way to that place. There are signs along the way, left by those who have passed this way and found that place.

In that place, there is no having, no doing, there is only being. What we have, thus has no hold upon us. And what we do, likewise. As stewards we have things. As servants we do things. But in God we are simply being.



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Harmlessness

The adjustment of inner teachings to outward manifestation is a challenge to the person (student) on the spiritual path. There comes a time when a person realizes that he or she has outgrown the attitudes and habits of another time. The student finds that working out one's destiny and karmic obligations requires a sense of inner direction and much intelligently applied diligent work.

It is what a person thinks and feels that makes one what one is. Therefore, by the adjustment of one's thoughts and feelings one can powerfully affect the working out of daily life experiences. By the proper use of determination and will, a person can train the mind to think only those thoughts that are worthy of the spiritually directed person. The student can purposely rid the mind of all unkind and critical thoughts, and at the same time cultivate the qualities of harmlessness, kindness, and loving understanding in all areas of endeavor.

When these qualities are practiced and automatically made part of a person's daily life expression, then glamour will end. The student will then see all people and occurrences in the light of love and understanding, allowing them to be free to live their own lives and handle their own responsibilities. The student will think only constructive and positive thoughts about himself (herself) and others and will conduct himself (herself) in a good and positive manner. The student will be so much in control of himself (herself) that no mood or emotional reaction will affect those with whom he (she) comes in contact. Therefore the student will demonstrate harmlessness in thought and word and deed. The student will also find that by eliminating glamour and illusion in his (her) own life and living in the light of the inner teachings and intuition, and by demonstrating harmlessness, the student will aid his (her) own personal awakening as well as the awakening of these same qualities in humanity.

It is believed that the practice of harmlessness alone will do more to produce harmonious conditions in a person's daily life than work along any other line, because it is the expression of the life of the person who realizes that he (she) is

a soul whose nature is love, and it is this soul that eventually controls the personality and leads to the expression in everyday life of the God within.

† Article No. 2

Esoteric Astrology

Exoteric astrology refers to that part of astrology which is generally known or understood, that which is readily available and generally accepted as true, though it may be frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted. Exoteric astrology deals primarily with the astrology of personality and personality-centeredness, without recourse to the soul or the influence of the soul. Esoteric astrology refers that part of astrology which is occult or hidden, that which deals with the soul and the influence of the soul upon a responsive personality. That which is esoteric becomes exoteric as humanity evolves, growing both in consciousness and in spirit, as people are able to incorporate and apply the new level of understanding.

This is so in regard to all truths. This is so in regard to astrology, the ancient science based on the interaction of cyclic energies within the cosmos. In the solar system, the planets act as focalizing agents for these energies, and it is the reaction or response to this process which astrologers attempt to analyze. As people move upward and onward along the spiral path, it becomes both necessary and possible in the very natural order of the evolution of the soul, for the mind and personality to rise above mundane (personality) astrological aspects in a process referred to by Jesus as "overcoming" and by others, in this age, as "living above it."

While exoteric astrology is the astrology of the (energies and forces that apply to the) personality (and subject to the abuses of the interpreting mind and emotions), esoteric astrology is the astrology of the soul (i.e., the energies and forces of soul qualification). Esoteric astrology might be said to be exoteric astrology in evolution, or the astrology of those upon the path (but not for the respective personality influences). Just as there are many perspectives on the better-known (exoteric, mundane, widely-abused, greatly misunderstood)

astrology, there are also different perspectives or levels of understanding of the more occult or esoteric astrology. Each can provide much material which assists in the understanding of an individual.

In a mundane chart, correctly done, a person (personality) (or more properly, the forces that qualify or influence a personality) can be read in several layers, depending very much upon the intuition of the delineator. In an esoteric chart or reading, this delineation is stepped up and it is possible to recognize the influence of a soul from a rather deep (high) level. It is a better key to understanding the purpose of a present incarnation and holds the secrets of the previous life on earth, plus the accumulated talents that the soul has acquired. It pinpoints much of the karma and also the many relationships which might otherwise remain a mystery within the framework of the usual astrological chart.

On one hand, the exoteric chart applies to the personality of one who is not on the path and who is reactive or responsive to the personality qualifying energies and forces and which is relatively meaningless for one who is on the path and responsive to higher (soul) qualification. On the other hand, the esoteric chart has no meaning for one who is not on the path and pertains primarily to the fully-integrated, spiritually responsive individual who is in some measure in touch with the soul and the energies and forces of the soul. For the properly trained astrologer this distinction is crucial. Applying exoteric interpretations to someone who is living above the personality-centeredness of ordinary humanity is pointless. Likewise, applying esoteric techniques to someone who is living at the personality level.

† Article No. 3

The Cultivation of Bias

Bias is ultimately a factor that the spiritual student must transcend in order to realistically embrace truth. This is because bias is a distortion of perception that leads to limitation in understanding. But as that factor is gradually overcome, one must first overcome the negative bias, and one method that is

particularly effective in qualifying the mass consciousness is the cultivation of a more positive bias. Then, eventually, one must overcome positive bias.

The atmosphere is substantially influenced by the character and quality of behavior, feeling, and thinking. And lives are as affected by the atmosphere created through thinking and feeling as much as by behavior. The student is encouraged to consciously cultivate positive-but-realistic thinking. Many of the events taking place in the world influence individual and group thinking. People and the media tend to focus on the unusual and particularly on the negative side of reported experience. This negative focus fosters additional negative focus and compounds the process of restoration of balance. Focusing on positive experiences, instead, encourages more positive experience. The various negative and positive thought-forms that linger on subtle levels are all stimulated and sustained by mass thinking and feeling. People who are passive (conditioned) (as most people are) are generally affected by these thought-forms. Thus considerable motive exists for cultivation and expression of generally positive (but honest and realistic) bias.

Despite the attention being given to some of the more negative aspects of current events, there is some growing publicity for the more positive side. Economic interdependence among groups and nations is leading toward world goodwill and brotherhood. Cultural activities are flourishing, being available to more and larger segments of the world population. Organizations for the alleviation of human suffering abound. Governments are showing concern for their disadvantaged populations and in some instances for those of other nations. Organizations that provide assistance in times of trouble, from the personal to the international level, are plentiful. At all levels it is apparent that man's humanity to man exceeds man's inhumanity to man. Many heads of state and general populations are becoming more sensitive to the enormity of war. In many cases, nationalism is gradually being transformed into humanitarianism and world brotherhood.

Many metaphysical groups encourage the realization that thoughts are really quite significant factors in human behavior. Even though thoughts eventually disseminate and dissolve, they can have appreciable lifetimes. One's mental outlook upon the events in one's life has a great deal to do with one's health, peace, and happiness. It would seem just as easy to be biased towards a we've-

never-had-it-so-good frame of mind as it is towards a civilization-is-going-to-pieces bias. The habit of positive thinking is a most simple deed that one can do for oneself and for the world with very little effort. As one looks for the good in everyone one meets and in the events of this life, one finds that good; and as one finds the good one is also strengthening that quality and reinforcing the positive side of life.

Thus one is encouraged to cultivate a positive bias. And eventually, that bias results in considerable and constructive (progressive) (evolutionary) changes in civilization (culture) (human attitudes and behavior). Eventually, in order to embrace truth and reality, one must transcend bias altogether, and in so doing, one contributes even more, albeit more subjectively.

† Article No. 4

Mysticism and Occultism

Mysticism is the art, science, and philosophy of spiritual meaning (consideration of truth and reality) based upon devotion, aspiration, and heart-centered meditation, including communion with God, self, or reality (the unconscious application or qualification of force and energy), and in the highest sense, is centered in the spiritual intuition (buddhi). Occultism is the art, science, and philosophy of spiritual meaning (consideration of truth and reality) based upon intellectual, mental, head-centered meditation, including the study and conscious application of force and energy, and in the highest sense, is centered in the spiritual intuition. Mysticism and occultism are complementary, and when the approaches and techniques and talents of both are merged together, it constitutes esotericism.

In ignorance and with lack of understanding, and through reactive association, many people have labeled occultism with unpleasant and irreverent connotations, yet both mysticism and occultism carry no sense of good or evil in themselves. It is only the motives and purposes that mystical quality and occult talents are applied to that bring in the illusion or appearance of good or evil. Each can be applied intelligently, wisely, spiritually, constructively, unselfishly, and for the good of mankind. Or each can be applied in ignorance,

foolishly, selfishly, and/or destructively. But as the student progresses there is a growing maturity, a growing sense of balance and appropriateness, a growing sense of propriety (without judging). Karmic force urges the student toward harmlessness, harmony, honesty, and humility, and in so doing the darker side of human nature is transformed and selfishness and self-centeredness is gradually replaced with selflessness.

For the spiritual student, the spiritual path generally includes both mystical and occult development. In general, the spiritual path is first heart-centered and the approach is mystical (although some reverse the order). Later on, the heart is combined with the head and one achieves the balance that is necessary for liberation and greater service. Many lives may be devoted to the development of the heart center, lives with the emphasis on the mystical path. And many lives may be devoted to the development of the head centers, lives with emphasis upon the occult (spiritual) path. Either path can be taken to an unhealthy extreme. Though our fundamental vibration may be either mystical or occult, both sides of our nature must be developed and perfected. We must have attained a basic core of experience and development in both sides of our being, before we can stand in that relative perfection that is liberation and (relative) mastery.

The keynote is balance, for the spiritual student eventually must have a very comfortable balance between head and heart, between qualified emotions and tempered mind, between love, wisdom, and will. The esotericist is the developed spiritual student and disciple who stands balanced between the mystical and occult sides, who can function constructively in either or both perspectives, as needed and without having to think about it.

Occultism is important in the sense that it is the (head-centered) realm in which needed abilities and talent are developed and produced. Mysticism is important in the sense that it is the (heart-centered) realm in which the needed quality of consciousness is developed and unfolded. Without talent one has no means to proceed toward union. Without quality one has nothing that can resonate with the higher. Thus one must have the tempered form, the requisite abilities and training, and a qualified heart.

The Power of Love

Man must eventually learn that within his being is a spark of divinity, a God or Christ within, and that spark is characterized by love. Only through the application of that inner love-wisdom can the human being evolve that divine spark into Christhood, as the power of love is invoked and allowed to flow freely throughout the daily life and consciousness. The essence of love is the common denominator, weaving all lives and forms together.

Love is the key, for God is love (God is a second ray logos, characterized by love-wisdom), and all manifested forms and lives within the immanent and transcendent God are qualified by love. The warmth within every form originates from the sun, the outward sign of the solar logos; yet behind every physical form is the spiritual and super-physical force which brings that form into existence. Obscured or masked by the physical sun is the spiritual sun (son), the light and love and power of God, without which there could be no light or warmth from the physical sun to provide sustenance in the physical world. The spirit that lives through the solar system is that spirit of love which is the keynote of the solar logos, the essence of God, love in the highest sense.

That highest love is the attractive quality that is the bond holding all of local manifestation together. Without that presence (power) of love, the cohesive forces would be naught, and the created worlds would dissolve. The power of love is also instrumental in holding together the human form; for the soul is the Christ or love aspect that sustains the personality. And it is as that love energy flows through the mind and emotions that the human life on earth becomes more meaningful, as the individual finds his place within the coherent plan or purpose of life. The mature and spiritual (impersonal) form of love is demonstrated through many active qualities, including kindness, compassion, humility, goodwill, aspiration, helpfulness, and forgiveness.

Love to all creatures is a powerful beacon of light from the soul that fills the darkness with its rays and draws into itself greater light and love, a finer peace, the power of enlightenment and encouragement. Through the power of love are

made the sons of God from the sons of men, creators of worlds as yet uncreated. Love creates beauty. That which endures in art, music, literature, and religion, has been infused with both human and divine love. Other works tend more readily to disintegrate and disappear because they lack this essential quality, a bond called love.

Bonds of love, like bonds of karma, transcend the boundaries of physical plane life and death. Bonds of karma between persons and experiences are usually dissolved upon fulfillment, when the needed lessons are learned; but bonds of love endure beyond ordinary karma. In fact, bonds of love are strengthened by the karma of love itself. The attractive power of love is the cohesive force par excellence. The love of the great ones for humanity will often draw them back into the world of human experience, long after their karma and need to incarnate have been fulfilled.

Human love begins with the personal form, but gradually transcends the personal as it becomes a selfless, impersonal love for God and for all lives within the consciousness of God (as all lives are). The impersonal love is greater simply because it is more inclusive and less selfish, and therefore closer to the love of God. The evolving love which embraces the aspiration of humanity is the love through which divine union is achieved. With each upliftment of love comes an increasing sense of unity, brotherhood, and oneness with all life. Such is the power of love; as love, and love alone, gives life.

† Article No. 6

Atmosphere

The human aura is an energy field that reflects or exhibits all of the various emotional and mental activity of the person and which relates a person's etheric, emotional, and concrete mental condition to everyone in the immediate environment. The aura is potentially affected very much by the surrounding atmosphere, particularly on non-physical levels. And the surrounding atmosphere is potentially affected substantially by the character and quality of the aura.

Some people are more affected than others, due to their openness, passivity, receptivity, or vulnerability, but that also depends on their relative character (quality) and temperament. And similarly, some people are more effective in projecting “force” into the atmosphere, due to their head-centered nature or due to their emotional temperament, consciously or otherwise. Thus the spiritual student is encouraged both to maintain a healthy aura and maintain a healthy relationship with the surrounding atmosphere (immediate environment).

One of the most important attitudes for the spiritual student to cultivate is that of a joyful, cheerful, and constructive way of living, by continually creating and sustaining a pleasant surrounding atmosphere. All deeds done in this positive, vital manner are then enhanced by that atmosphere and relationship. And since all things, all forms, are spiritually alive and magnetic, the spiritual student can contribute positively to that atmosphere through the various forms that are engendered or encountered. Conversely, demons (artificial entities) created through careless thinking and feeling also impact the atmosphere (adversely) and so the student should be particularly careful in thinking and feeling.

Food, for example, is made of living spiritual substance, and the atmosphere in which a person cooks and prepares food not only vitalizes that substance but that substance carries with it an induced atmosphere and magnetic quality. That quality can then be transferred or conveyed to others. Food prepared in an uplifting atmosphere carries enhanced vital energies. Food prepared in an unpleasant or indifferent atmosphere loses much of its vitality (and/or conveys that negative influence). Flesh foods have a noticeably negative factor and convey a measure of coarseness even without an otherwise negative atmosphere, while vegetable foods are inherently more refined (more positive) albeit dulled somewhat by cooking.

Letters and publications are opportunities to share a vital, positive, healthy atmosphere (and attitude), and also to establish spiritual bonds to strengthen the light workers around the world and to strengthen the network of light and love through which spiritual forces may flow (the more so where personal and mundane energies do not intrude). Every contact on every level carries with it some magnetic or psychic quality. This includes conversation, correspondence, gifts, materials conveyed, etc. Much depends upon the atmosphere through

which a person works and how a person influences the objects in his or her environment.

Thus the spiritual student is encouraged to do all things in a healthy, cheerful, positive manner. Work performed cheerfully can never be a burden. Critical, defensive (egoistic), judging, separative (self-centered) thoughts and similarly unfortunate feelings have a decidedly negative effect, while unselfish and uncontrived expression of goodwill (kindness) (consideration) (appreciation) (acceptance) (respect) has a wonderful effect on people and surroundings. The atmosphere is a living realm, filled with various energies and forces. The student should remain focused in love and light.

† Article No. 7

The Noble Eight-Fold Path

One of the most important of Buddhist disciplines is the living of the Noble Eight-Fold Path. Though traditionally Buddhist, this discipline transcends particular religion, for it is quite applicable to the lives of serious students of all religions and spiritual philosophies.

1. **Right Belief.** The holding of right attitude, at all times free from prejudice, illusion, superstition, doubts, fears, and animosities.
2. **Right Thought.** The living of the highest standard of conduct which the mind can conceive; living the truth one knows.
3. **Right Speech.** The control of speech so that it is always true, simple, gentle, and entirely honest.
4. **Right Action.** Right Conduct. Honest, just, and enlightened relationship with other living things.
5. **Right Livelihood.** The practice of harmlessness. To live without hurting, either by killing or injuring physically, or the causing of sorrow, either mental or emotional.

6. **Right Exertion.** Perseverance in noble action. The overcoming of all of the illusional life.
7. **Right Mindfulness.** Right Thinking. The directing of the mind toward the understanding of the supreme wisdom.
8. **Right Concentration.** Right Meditation. The practice of the inner experience.

† Article No. 8

The Great Invocation

Throughout the history of humanity there have been prayers or invocations of great potency. One of the most potent prayers for humanity that has been translated into the English language while retaining its potency is the Great Invocation.

The Great Invocation is a world prayer, pertaining to all of humanity (directly), and having been translated into many languages and dialects it is utilized worldwide on objective and subjective levels. The Great Invocation is an instrument of power, properly and inherently safeguarded (through mantric design), to aid in bringing about the full expression on Earth of the (evolutionary) plan of God. To use the Great Invocation is an act of service to humanity and to the spiritual hierarchy of our planet (which (hierarchy) is responsible for the manifestation of the plan (the proper externalization of forces associated with the plan)). The Great Invocation is not exclusive to any particular religion, group, or philosophy. Although Christ is acknowledged in the prayer itself, Christ is recognized as the God-self within all human beings and as a non-religious instrument of the logos and hierarchy. Thus disciples and spiritual students of all faiths throughout the world utilize the Great Invocation daily in their prayers and meditations.

By means of invocation, prayer, and meditation, divine energies can be released and brought into sensible activity. Men and women of goodwill of all religions

and spiritual faiths and all nations and cultures can join together in world service, bringing spiritual value and strength to a troubled world, by utilizing common prayers and invocations of which the Great Invocation is particularly (highly) effective. A highly effective common invocation is one of common mantric value; thus it matters not less that the prayer (Great Invocation) is sounded audibly or mentally in many different languages, because each proper translation retains the mantric potency of the original (this of course is not true of prayers or invocations not designed as mantras).

People have the power, through focused, united invocation to effect world events in a positive, constructive (general, qualified) fashion. The Great Invocation has quite a potent effect, enhancing and strengthening the (already existent) planetary network of (impersonal) light and love. The Great Invocation is especially recommended for daily use in personal and group meditations, in beginning or closing a meditation, class, etc. It can (and should) be sounded forth verbally or mentally as often as practicable.

Part of the potency of the Great Invocation is derived by correlation with the three major rays (and the three departments of the spiritual hierarchy) and the fourth ray of human synthesis. The first stanza deals with (invokes) (evokes) light, the third ray, and the department of the Mahachohan. The second stanza deals with (invokes) (evokes) love-wisdom, the second ray, and the department of the Bodhisattva. The third stanza deals with (invokes) (evokes) power (will), the first ray, and the department of the Manu. The sounding forth of the first three stanzas is a progression, building in subtle (gathering) potency. The fourth stanza relates the first three more directly to humanity as a means, and stabilizes the gathered potency. The final line is a mantra of final qualification and release of energy. As a closing mantra, the final line of the Great Invocation should be accomplished by a visual or correlative release of energy beyond the individual or group, energizing the entire planetary network. As an opening mantra, the Great Invocation can be used to link the entire meditation to that planetary network and associated endeavor.

The Great Invocation

From the point of Light within the Mind of God

Let Light stream forth into the minds of men.

Let Light descend on Earth.

From the point of Love within the Heart of God

Let Love stream forth into the hearts of men.

May Christ return to Earth.

From the centre where the Will of God is known

Let purpose guide the little wills of men,

The purpose which the masters know and serve.

From the centre which we call the race of men

Let the Plan of Love and Light work out,

And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let Light and Love and Power restore the Plan on Earth.

The Sufi Way of Life 1

Sufism is interpreted in various ways according to the mental maturity of the person, but on a broad philosophical basis Sufism represents spiritual liberation, serenity, purity, and divine ecstasy.

Man cannot be considered as a bundle of psychological complexes or as a biological entity. The mystery of man is his inter-relation with the divine principle which is eternal and transcendental. Sufism emphasizes the importance of mental purification and the spiritual integration of man so as to function in the universe in tune with the infinite. Man's progress lies in the direction of attaining that state of blessedness which is divine in essence.

We all search for happiness, but can we achieve happiness in the physical world? Happiness is a state of mind in which we are free from emotional disturbances and psychological conflicts. Freedom from sensational attraction and repulsion is the deciding factor for the correct understanding of spiritual liberation which Sufism represents. Allah, the supreme reality, alone exists and all other creations are mere shadows of that divinity to which we must surrender and contact by the process of negating the mind.

Basic Concepts

According to the teaching of Sufism, one has to annihilate and empty the mind before one enters into the secret path of God-realization. This state is known as Fana. Constant meditation and deep contemplation with purification of the physical body and mind are strongly recommended for those who wish to progress towards the path of Tauhid (divine unification). To attune one's heart to that level of divine consciousness is the object of Sufi prayer. The highest achievement one can aim at is to awaken and absorb the divine consciousness by surrendering oneself completely to Allah and this realization is called Baqa.

The mystical quintessence of Sufism or Tasawwuf consists in realizing the highest stage (Maqam) known as Fana-Fit-Tauhid, which means the

attainment of true wisdom, enlightenment, and passing away from all that is other than reality. Worldly temptations cannot disturb a Sufi who is well established in the oneness of Allah, and to a Sufi the world is not a "thing" to be negated, but a spiritual training ground to be utilized for the development of various divine attributes and intuitive faculties. A Sufi enjoys the beauties of divine manifestation on the material plane, although he knows that Haq (reality) alone exists without the clash of duality. The world is not an illusion to be renounced, but the creation of Allah to be inwardly discovered in silent contemplation. The sweetness of unity in the midst of diversity is the main theme of Sufism. A Sufi functions in the world in a manner not to be entangled in it, because of inner detachment and divine understanding. A Sufi lives in a higher plane in which psychological confusions and mental complications cannot enter, as the bliss of super-consciousness gives him the nectar of Masth or the delight of divine intoxication.

A Diagnosis of Modern Man

Many people have mental troubles such as disquiet, distraction, and emotional disturbances, because they look upon pleasures and possessions as the primary objectives of life. Whoever is attached to pleasures must have the fear of losing them and the consequent cares and worries. The senses are insatiable and the means of their fulfillment are inadequate. Since the objects of desire are transitory, they cannot be acquired easily.

Modern man is a sick man because to him progress means radio, television, cinema, the invention of new ways of enjoyment, more and better cars and aeroplanes, and a ceaseless craving for outer stimulation to escape from meaningless trivial activities. Since there is no richness of inner life, he seeks compensation in outer wealth. He lacks inner strength and spiritual forces and hence his life urges him into a false excitement.

Further, the physical body and the organs, the instruments of sense enjoyment, give way before the mind is satisfied. As long as a person clamors for maximum pleasure, power, and material prosperity, he cannot escape the baneful effects of modern living -- constant tension, discontent, clash, and competition. The contributing factors for mental and functional disorders are due to fear, anxiety, frustration, internal conflict, and suppressed desire.

In the esoteric path of Sufism, self-realization is the only reality to which one's attention is directed, because our spiritual malady has one basis, and there is only one treatment for it. Its cause is the illusory self, and the treatment consists of realizing that the illusory self does not exist. However, mere intellectual recognition of the fact is not enough. After all, the "me" is our own creation. It is not imposed upon us from without. It is created by our reactions to everything that happens to us. We only exist in the eternal present and we do not exist as a continuity. We ourselves are not an illusory part of reality. Rather, we are reality itself.

A Prescription for Egocentricity

Sufism does not condemn the search for pleasure and possessions, but it strongly advises the seekers not to look upon them as ends in themselves. It also urges aspirants to divert their attention to the higher values and then they invariably become detached from the lower. Human desires and emotions are not wrong in themselves, but they have to be given higher and higher direction until they turn to Allah the highest. The task of Sufism is to develop man morally and spiritually so as to prevent his deterioration. Sufism is a divine art, the finest of all arts, and should be practiced in everyday life, in good cheer, just for the sheer joy of it, because it is a life of never-ending sweetness and ever present inspiration.

Sufism teaches us not to run away from duty or activity. We must act without the sense of ego. We must become instruments in the hands of the divine and cheerfully do actions without being affected by them. Sufism is particularly relevant to the present time as it points to the wholeness of individual consciousness and the unity of life. It does not separate man's spiritual life from his everyday life, but rather links his realization of truth, beauty, and goodness, with his action in thought and feeling. Sufism is not a way of escape from life and its problems, but enables an individual to face himself, his problems, and his relationships with the world around him.

According to Sufism, life is intended for attaining the supreme goal of self-realization. If we choose to remain in our lower nature, we will be a victim of life held in bondage and misery. At a time when the world is passing through a

period of great travail and agony, it is up to us to make our lives either harmonious or chaotic. If we attune our mind with meditation, then we will fill it with true beauty and peace. On the other hand, if our lives are ruled and controlled by egotism, then all the dark forces within us will create a state of discord and confusion. Therefore, it is very essential that we make every effort to reveal our divinity and make our lives blessed.

† Article No. 10

The Sufi Way of Life 2

Freedom Through Discipline

There is a good deal of discussion among modern people about freedom. Sufism points out that freedom comes to those who have a deep reverence for spiritual life, who are sincere in their quest for truth. As long as our thinking is conditioned by psychological time we cannot have real freedom, as absolute freedom is attained by transcending mental limitations. It is fear more than anything else that enslaves our thinking. Casting off fear and gaining real freedom for the mind is a matter of self-discipline and self-discovery. Without self-discipline the mind would not know what to do with its freedom. By freedom we do not mean the sense of freedom of a profligate who foolishly throws all established values to the winds and lives a whimsical and irresponsible life. The divine freedom within is not attained (merely) by learning or by extensive study. Spiritual liberation is revealed to those who have embraced truth in all sincerity.

Our experiences in life amply prove that we are not free, because we are conditioned by our emotions and desires which prevent us from realizing the supreme. Silent meditation is emphasized in Sufism because purity of heart and clarity of thought are essential prerequisites to self-realization. The dynamic energy of divine grace cannot be utilized by a weak and impure mind. The mysterious realm of divine power is so subtle that it cannot be grasped by intellectual ability. We have to open the intuitive faculty by practicing regular meditation.

Silence and Spontaneity

When we become completely absorbed in whatever we may be doing, then only the significance of the present moment becomes enormous. In all kinds of situations we must become aware of our thoughts, our feelings, and sensations. The functioning of our minds must be without identification or justification, without conclusion or preconceived ideas, without the screens of explanation or prejudice, without the expectation of reward, results, or satisfaction. Then only is spiritual experience possible. Truth has to be discovered from moment to moment by meditative silence.

Sufism indicates that freshness arises from living in the present, unspoiled by the conditioning and distortions of psychological memory. It requires the renunciation of everything to which we cling. It is only from the point of the present that both past and future can be observed. The touch of living truth can be experienced only in the present. The attitude of a seeker consists in examining every fact in its true perspective. Then only can he undertake the spiritual journey or search for truth without identification and resistance.

Sufism declares that there exists a kind of silence so intense, so immensely powerful. This silence is so profound that it makes any noise utterly insignificant. This silence is not non-talking or non-acting, because it does not lie in anything we do or do not do. It lies in what we are, and it is the complete absence of ego or I-ness. According to Sufism, this silence constitutes a mystical experience of a high order. The silence within is what is aimed at in meditation, and when we are able to stay in that state of meditation then only is there a possibility of negating the sense of "I" or the egocentric attitude. When we are able to keep our minds still, we develop a fresh understanding of the process of thinking, which means that thoughts may appear in our silent mind, but they do not disturb our inner serenity.

To a Sufi meditation implies that state of mystical experience in which the mind is not distracted by psychological impacts, because in the profound stillness one feels only the bliss of a witness-like state which cannot be attributed as void or emptiness. Meditation is not to get attached to the mind. Meditation is not to have any thought stirred up by outside conditions of life, good or bad. Meditation is an act of one instant and each moment is eternal,

free and sufficient unto itself. Meditation is a divine science one has to practice by examining closely the working of one's mind constantly in the mirror of daily relationship. This cannot be demonstrated, but has to be discovered in the depth of one's Qalb (heart). If one can wipe out all ideas from one's mind, give up all desires, and discard all mental impressions, then one will experience the state of meditation, and this state is spiritual illumination.

Self-Realization

The Sufi endowed with complete enlightenment sees through the eye of wisdom the entire universe as his own self, and regards everything as the self and nothing else. The Sufi does not look at anything external, and to him the tangible universe is verily God. Nothing whatsoever exists that is other than Allah. A Sufi is he who is liberated in life after crossing the ocean of delusion, passion, and aversion. He becomes a center of unity with perfect peace and dwells in the divine bliss derived from the discovery of truth. He is completely merged in Allah and yet he has normal consciousness. Therefore, he is free from all the illusions of duality and he is quite capable of looking after the affairs of the world. He is a source of great spiritual radiance.

The state of a Sufi has no longer the avidities of the "I" process as a motive, but emerges directly from an independent center which is free from all conditioning. We cannot judge the greatness of a self-realized Sufi who has transcended mental limitation because the Sufi plane of liberation is completely new and unique and cannot be compared with the relative plane in which we live.

The realization of the Sufi cannot be defined by words, as that state of reality is to be lived silently rather than trying to verbalize it. The highest perception of spiritual exaltation when analyzed in terms of ordinary language or explained logically will lead only to a paradox.

The Philosophy of Sufism

Many people accept as inevitable the changes which come in the course of material progress, but are reluctant to accept changes that affect them personally, which upset their established way of life, their manner of thinking and their conceptions of things. Few realize that the key to successful living lies in the ability to adapt to changing situations. The physical world is considered as real, but only the physical senses perceive it as such. The aim of Sufism is to bring about certain changes in man's consciousness wherein he transcends the limitation of physical existence. When our state of consciousness rises to the stage where our awareness of ourselves as oneness with the essence of reality (Dhat) is realized, then only will it enable us to claim the attainment of spiritual liberation. According to Sufism, we can never perceive the truth (Haqq) with a conditioned mind. We cannot attain liberation until our ego (Nafs) is dissolved. The way to go beyond the conditioned mind is only through self-knowledge, which means by extensive awareness and stillness of the mind, which will ultimately dissolve all delusions.

Human beings are in search of happiness in some form or another. Our quest for happiness continues unabated, though its entire attraction keeps on shifting. The craving is never satisfied because ego is the personification of our desire and a conglomeration of sense-experience which takes the form of pleasant or unpleasant psychological memory. Man's outlook must change with the acceptance of spiritual values as a guide to behavior. Sense-experiences affect our mental process in a subtle way causing feelings of attraction and repulsion.

Justification or condemnation creates a sort of whirlpool of duality in which our life is caught up. Sense-experiences get crystallized in psychological memory which projects the past into the present and tarnishes it with numerous preconceived notions and prejudices. False ego makes us view the present through the screen of the past and it also projects into the future in the form of hopes and fears, which of their very nature are illusory in character. This assertion of psychological memory with its ego complex is the conditioned mind.

The main point in Sufism is as to how one should live in detachment. Mind alone is the cause of the bondage and freedom of the soul (in the form of the personality). By the attachment of the mind to the world we become bound. We need to give up all ideas of me and mine for thus alone is the heart purified and so freed from lust, greed, and delusion. Detachment will help the unfoldment of devotion and devotion will help confirmation in detachment. When detachment and dispassion are practiced rightly one can rest assured that the discharge of duties in the world will only be helpful to spiritual progress. If one dons the garb of a monk, goes out in the forest, but carries in one's mind attachment for things, then one will see no better things in the forest than the world. Such a one will merely create a new worldly environment in the forest. But if one lives in the world, wears the habit of the common people of the world, and does the usual round of (proper) duties of life, then it is still possible to be detached from all things.

The great practical value of Sufism is that it gives meaning to life and purpose to physical existence. It replaces confusion with knowledge, and doubt and despair with confidence and hope. It bestows mental serenity upon those who actually practice it and makes possible the realization of reality. Sufism offers man not only a philosophy, but a code of conduct and a way of life which can be used as a foundation upon which to build spiritual freedom. When the basic cardinal principles are fully understood and assimilated, it changes the aspects of life so completely, enabling one to enjoy perfect peace and the capacity to distinguish between reality and illusion.

The great task is to discover reality on the basis of one's own inner experience. Further, it is in the process of one's life only that the discovery of divinity must be made as otherwise there can be no realization.

Sufism points out that every religion is a unique contribution to the spiritual life of humanity. It is very essential that a seeker must respect and admire the mystical approach of various religions by honestly accepting the different forms of expression so that one will be able to appreciate the underlying harmony of all religions. After all, religious harmony is not based on sameness, but on cooperation and mutual understanding.

If one is burdened with wrong theories and dogmas, one cannot perceive the truth and hence one must dissolve all prejudices which twist and cloud one's mental vision, so that one can approach many problems without any particular form of conditioning. It is to be realized that nothing impedes man's healthy inner growth like fear and suspicion. Without detachment we can never get rid of fear. We are always afraid of losing the things to which we are attached. The root of all these harmful weaknesses is attachment. Sufism says that through the practice of detachment alone can we regain the true awareness of Fana.

Sufism gives the technique so as to get the best out of life without being enslaved and degraded. Sufism teaches how to live in the world in a way which does not hurt the people and at the same time makes spiritual progress possible. It is absolutely true that all our sufferings and bondage of life have their source in our attachment. Our work for society cannot really do good to others unless it is unselfish, couched in detachment.

The outer world is nothing but a reflection of one's attitude. If the very structure of one's individual life is not free from confusion one cannot establish a harmonious relationship outwardly. Therefore, until and unless one develops a high degree of mental detachment by rigorous discipline and relentless effort one will not be able to progress in releasing self from the imprisonment of illusion.

A small mistake committed in a weak moment is enough to wreck what one has spiritually accomplished with diligence and perseverance. The most stupendous task is to observe everything in its purity, which means to see all without attachment, without identification and distortion. Self-realization or to know reality is to understand oneself, the spiritual depth of one's being. Man need only transcend his suffocating ego to discover his true being in the divine.

Those who have been successful in the discovery of this divine in the beyond are untouched by the vicissitudes of life and become absolutely free of all conditioning. They are at peace with themselves and with the world around them. They become a source of joy, inspiration, and peace.

As the human intellect develops, man's powers of comprehension increase, and in this connection, the study of Sufism assists each one to discover divinity. Man's first move towards attaining the state of supreme consciousness is to dispose of his material outlook and to seek the spiritual truth. The pursuit of truth is purely an inward pilgrimage, and one must finally come to realize that to attain inner tranquility one must be alert and sensitive, not to waste mental energy through any kind of conflicts and tensions. In other words, while one is observing various psychological reactions one must also be in a state of non-identification. A real seeker of Murid is not one who knows all, but he who has come to realize that the utility of knowledge is the ability to live peacefully and happily in the day-to-day affairs. Man seeks happiness in the external world, whereas divinity lies within. It has to be intuitively experienced, inwardly. We cannot think of reality and find it.

The philosophy of Sufism extols meditation (Muraqabah) as a way of self-realization. The blissful state of meditation can be experienced only when the entire thought-process is erased and transcended. Then only is it possible for one to contact that which gives spiritual perfection.

In Fana the mind is fully aware and completely neutral. It sees things as they are without accepting or rejecting, which means our mental functions of justification and condemnation cease to be in this state, and our mind becomes alert, extra active, and yet empty. In Fana our mind is stripped of everything including the false self, and then it is liberated and is in communion with the absolute reality. Actually, in Fana we go on eliminating image after image until we reach a point beyond which there is no going.

The Sufis have revealed the essence of life as the truth, and the truth remains constant. Only one's perception of it varies according to one's capacity to comprehend. It is to be realized that truth stands alone and when it is known one is spiritually free.

Yoga

In a world which is so much entangled and involved with sensate values, the right approach according to yoga is to discover divinity within us by self-observation rather than by pondering over external activities. Mere outward reformation without the inner spiritual transformation is useless and, therefore, what one requires is the tremendous power of concentration to keep one's mind in the profound state of silent meditation and quiet contemplation.

The purpose of yoga is to manifest the divine magnetism and attain spiritual liberation. If we want to progress in yoga we must discipline our minds. The nature of work should be harmonized in accordance with our temperaments. It is not the work that is important, but our attitude towards it, which to a certain extent reflects our inner relations in the shape of likes and dislikes. Bhakti yoga is a pure and spontaneous expression of love to something to which one is dedicated. Without devotion, one could not master efficiency which is the faculty of focusing one's attention wholeheartedly.

Karma yoga is a technique by which one develops the art of performing the allotted job without attachment or distraction. Karma yoga is in no way a hindrance to the practice of meditation, but it is a process of self-purification so as to cultivate the good qualities of humility and compassion.

The most important lesson one has to learn in the field of karma yoga is detachment and dispassion. It is always beneficial spiritually to dissociate ourselves from the clutches of worldly entanglements, although one cannot label the normal function of professional or business responsibility as mundane, because according to karma yoga the deciding factor is not the avoidance of activities, but the mental detachment and the ability to perform one's duty efficiently without worrying about the result of success or failure. Karma yoga does not clash with the path of wisdom or raja yoga, because in the actual practice of karma yoga one has to maintain mental equilibrium, so that one could discharge duty without caring for rewards.

The method of raja yoga is to control the activities of the mind. One should penetrate into the deeper layers of one's mind through self-observation. Then only there is the possibility of stopping the agitation of the mind. We are advised to watch the mind ceaselessly and thereby annihilate the desires in the mind completely. Mind is the major factor in bringing out worldly temptations through various image-making habits. Raja yoga puts an end to this vicious circle of the mind by close and continuous observation.

Jnana yoga predominantly stresses the importance of self-knowledge, which is not mere intellectual thinking or logical analysis, but entirely a different dimension of awareness in which one realizes everything as it is, without deception. Jnana yoga is the intuitive approach for the understanding of the supreme, as the twisted intellect and the deluded senses are not reliable instruments for the direct perception of reality. The darkness of avidya or ignorance comes into play when there is the projection of attraction and repulsion. In silence alone we feel full of blessedness and vision of reality. Wisdom flourishes silently and in deep meditation alone self-knowledge is revealed to us.

The family life is a training ground for one to develop the beneficent qualities such as fortitude, fearlessness, forgiveness, charity, modesty, steadfastness, and self-sacrifice. Family life should aim at transforming the animal propensities in man and enable him to unfold his divinity. In family life one should be in the world, but not of it, so that one can turn away from all the vanities of the world and devote one's energy to the realization of God, which is the fulfillment of life.

Whatever the condition may be, wherever we may go, we must have mental purity to such a degree to regard everyone as Brahman or the absolute reality. It is to be realized that the Atman or the infinite immortal self of man is in essence Brahman. The knowledge of the microcosm leads to the understanding of the macrocosm and in this way the knowledge of the self leads to the discovery of the Brahman. Basically, the Atman and the Brahman are identical and in actual realization they are one, though they appear different in expression. People wrongly postulate that Brahman is an extra cosmic being and think that

the Atman and Brahman are two existences, but, in samadhi or the super-conscious state, we experience oneness with the Brahman.

† Article No. 13

The Significance of Meditation

The technique of meditation provides an integrated scheme of life which aims not only at spiritual emancipation, but also a happy, healthy, and useful life on earth. The significance and the greatness of meditative life is to dwell in the realm of divine consciousness without the conflict of duality. When our minds are purified by regular meditation, then our physical bodies also will become perfect instruments for the manifestation of divine energy. When we are in deep meditation, although we are keenly sensitive to outward vibrations, we are not at all disturbed because of the spiritual ecstasy which gives us the capacity to face all adverse situations easily.

Meditation is purely an action that operates beyond one's sensual plane in perfect harmony with the supreme. Meditation is that which gives us the light of wisdom and the capacity to observe everything in life as it is without deception or distortion. At the time of silent meditation, we feel the oneness of divinity and in which exalted state we experience the bliss of purity and serenity. Between two thoughts there is an interval of silence and to attain this beautiful state of silence one has to observe one's mind quietly with full alertness.

Meditation does not mean the negation of physical comfort, but true meditation is to keep the mind absolutely calm without being disturbed by outward distractions and attractions. If we observe our minds deeply we will find that the very nature of our minds is such that they create problems because our minds cannot exist without projecting imaginations. Generally, the mind is analyzed and called a bundle of thoughts, but when we are in meditation we feel only a witness-like state in which we mentally dissociate ourselves completely without being emotionally disturbed, which means the mind is sensitive-active and yet free from psychological distractions.

Meditation is really a pure and natural state in which the mind is silent. When the mind is calm and still there is the blessing of true happiness, the beauty of divine radiation. Meditation is not the creation of the mind. It is something higher which elevates the mind to the spiritual plane. The beauty of meditation consists in comprehending the complexities of mind and this clarity or illumination is the proper channel for communicating with the spiritual center, and to live in this center of spiritual liberation one must be in meditation. Meditative awareness evokes the richness of divine grace which brings refreshment and renewal of life. To be in the supreme state of super-consciousness is the bliss of meditation.

Why is our mind so distracted? It is obviously, owing to the sensations that the physical world provides. It is excited by pleasure that it derives from its relationship with the physical world. It is attracted toward the resulting sensations because it seeks mechanically the habitual excitements they cause, even though these ultimately produce dissatisfaction. To contact reality, the mind must be still, and only by stilling it can real meditation be attained.

Misery and worries are products of mental reactions. Therefore, since it is the mind itself which produces confusion and misery, it cannot produce peace and happiness. Only when the mind is completely calm, meditation comes naturally, spontaneously, and sweetly, and that is our true state.

When we watch the mind we find that it is filled with discontent and insufficiency. Its guiding motive is to get some sort of pleasure by dwelling on its past sensations, but such indulgence only weakens its power of concentration. Instead of depending on such sensations, it should learn to observe its internal confusion calmly, as that will enable it to transcend the conditioning influence of past impressions.

But it makes every possible attempt to deviate from such self-observation, and thus evade perceiving reality. It does not face the fact of its confusion but tries to escape the suffering caused by it by projecting fictitious distractions.

The best way is for the mind to observe its reactions silently, as this enables it to erase the pollution caused by past impressions on it. It should be alert in watching its thought processes and the impressions made on it by people, ideas,

and things. Left to itself, it reacts by attraction or repulsion in contacting objects owing to its memory of past associations. This automatic process destroys its vigor and capacity for dispassionate observation. Self-observation is, therefore, the way to free it from subjection of past impressions.

What is needed is just to be aware of the state of confusion without identifying oneself with personal reactions or introducing one's emotional coloration. This sets us free from it and enables us to watch everything aloofly without acting on mere impulses. Thus in watching mental conflicts we find that the emotional attachment is dissolved. This capacity to observe calmly but with full attention the problem that occupies our mind is the only solution to psychological complexes. Only by constant observation of our mind can we understand the various layers of our mental makeup.

† Article No. 14

The Key to Self-Knowledge

We are all aspiring for happiness. The question is whether it can at all be attained by the mind. The mind is apt to mistake mere pleasurable sensations for happiness. And yet we find from experience that although gratified desire produces such sensations, they only intensify the desire for further similar sensations. The most important fact that we must understand is that we cannot have real freedom by indulging in emotional excitements.

If we observe our minds we will find that innumerable desires rush in, in confused manner. The best method to eliminate the contradictory emotions is to watch the activities of our minds with meditative awareness. We must also understand our mental reactions and psychological conflicts all the time, by the simple method of self-observation. Further, to watch slowly the inflowing breath brings not only harmonization of mind, but also vitality and strength to our nervous system which keep our physical bodies healthy, pure, and clean.

The process of divine healing is purely a spontaneous act which takes place quietly and sweetly when we are in deep silent meditation, in tune with that cosmic consciousness of divinity. The healing aspect of prayer can be conceived

not by mere intellectual ability, but through the communion with that supreme power which operates full of spiritual magnetism. The physical light that we see through our eyes can be defined, but the divine illumination which we intuitively perceive while we are in deep contemplation could not be described. By turning our minds toward the divine light we can actually transform and spiritualize the material aspects of life. To dwell in the abode of meditation is the only ladder that will lead to liberation and happiness.

The fundamental problem is that we cannot run away from our own mind which is the real culprit. The mind can be understood and unconscious desires can be exposed only when we are confronted with tempting circumstances. At this juncture, an aspirant must understand his reactions by watching the sensational activities of the mind silently. This quiet passive concentrated awareness is meditation, and this detached observation provides the spiritual life to go beyond the mind.

Worldly outward attraction cannot touch our minds if we constantly adopt the method of self-observation. The disturbing elements of distracted thoughts are completely negated by the process of self-knowledge, which means our mind is always magnetized through spiritual divine vibration. It is very important to ask ourselves why our mind is so much distracted. The distraction is due to the contact of sensations that the physical world provides.

The interaction of matter and mind is the main cause for the conflict, and the mind is much excited by the pleasure that it derives in its relationship with the material world. The mind is always attracted toward outward sensations because the mind is extremely mechanical in following the habitual excitements which produce in the end dissatisfaction. To contact reality, the mind must be still, and in this process of silencing the mind alone we can attain any real happiness.

It is very necessary that we should have the ability to discriminate between the real and the unreal. We must also have the spirit of renunciation which does not mean dissociation from people and things. Asceticism is really an attitude that holds that everything is permeated by the Godhead. When human energy goes out into different directions in the form of thirst for gratifications, it inevitably leads to frustration and sorrow.

When life is viewed merely from biological stance, it is only a story of birth, disease, old age, and death. The biological and conditioned man is the victim of bondage and ignorance when he is not enlightened.

Craving is the failure of the mental state to rest on the absolute reality, owing to the ignorance brought on by psychological impressions due to attachment. Attachment is always the auto-defensive reflex of an unconscious fear. Any attitude of dependence is an obstacle to the attainment of absolute.

Self-contemplation is essentially divergent, by turning inward away from the flux of phenomena, by putting aside all worldly desires. The necessity of observing our mind all the time is strongly stressed because of the fact that by this self-awareness alone can we unfold the entire layers of our mental makeup and thus pave the way for the attainment of a transcendental state which is the key to open the treasure of self-knowledge.

The secret of pure life consists in constantly discovering the inner workings of the mind and this state of self-observation is possible by keeping our minds clean without desires. The main defect in man is his inability to implement his decision of spiritual importance in his day-to-day affairs. The mind is the chief cause for all worries and tribulations as the tendency of the mind is to chase the sensual objects for its satisfaction and then after enjoyment, the very same mind will put contradictory questions and opposite suggestions. Man is leading a mundane life, not due to lack of understanding, but because he is unable to get away from worldly temptations. The possibility and the utter necessity to unfold the life in totality comes only when we are confronted with various problems and sufferings. During this period of spiritual testing, our task is to maintain the stability of mental equilibrium.

The main cause for the contamination of one's heart is not only the utter ignorance of spiritual living, but also the wrong attitude of clinging to carnal pleasures. One should not forget the important point that just as food is indispensable for keeping the body healthy and fit, in a similar manner meditation is also essential for the purity of the mind. The physical body by itself has no validity or utility without the cooperation and coordination of the

soul energy. The nature of the physical body is such that it deteriorates in the course of time, but we must keep our minds absolutely clean and calm.

Through meditation alone we can purify our minds. When our physical bodies and minds are purified by constant meditation, then they become good and useful instruments to express the divine energy. The beauty of mental health consists in liberating our minds from the clutches of emotional complications. To live in the state of higher meditation is really a great service to humanity because this state emanates serenity and spiritual magnetism for the good of all.

By meeting people who are also interested in the pursuit of reality, we can develop and broaden our knowledge in the path of self-realization. The magnetic vibration one feels in the presence of an advanced soul is very inspiring and helpful to merge deeply into meditation. The secrets of inner spiritual mysteries are revealed to us in contemplation and that wisdom will guide us all. When one is in deep meditation, one is extremely sensitive to external influences, but the mind is not distracted by the attraction of sensual pressure because of the spiritual magnetism one draws while one is in meditation. Any movement from outside has not the power to disturb the person who is well attuned in meditation. Life is such that we are unable to predict anything definitely. But every major change in life is for good and one has nothing to worry or bother mentally. A sad state of affairs is that many people give top priority in the matter of providing all their bodily requirements, but neglect completely the needs of the soul and spiritual comforts.

In deep sleep we are aware of some inner urges, but we have no control over them because we have not properly penetrated into the working of our unconscious minds. It is very essential to observe the emotional modes of our minds if we want to master the devil of deception. It is a tedious task to observe our mental activities during sleep because that state of unconsciousness suggests its incomplete impressions as a dream.

The psychological hindrance is to realize the dream, but we normally identify ourselves as actors and thus we are affected by the consequences of the dream. The simple truth is that the stability of mental alertness is lost while we experience the dream and in which state the dreamer is unable to observe his

thoughts correctly, without deception. Alertness of mind with sensitiveness opens the avenue to continue further in the discovery of unconsciousness.

Another problem which we are facing is attraction and repulsion. As we are unable to free ourselves from this dualistic complex which distracts us, we must choicelessly observe our minds in the mirror of relationships. Let us realize that the most useful lesson one can learn by undergoing bitter experiences repeatedly in life is that nothing in the world can produce real happiness except one's own mind, which is purified through meditation.

† Article No. 15

A Path to Perfect Peace

We live in a society which advocates that happiness is the outcome of wealth and material acquisition. But when we analyze the main reason for our failure to achieve happiness, we find that happiness does not dwell in outer or external things. While our minds are scattered and our hearts are cluttered up by various sorts of distractions, we are unable to establish harmony or happiness within us. Happiness comes when the mind and heart are kept in perfect unison. A person burdened with desires and ambition cannot enjoy the beauty of life because the freshness and newness of life can be experienced at every moment only through meditation, as otherwise life remains an essentially mundane existence.

Sufism says that without first creating order in our mind it is impossible to bring happiness in our life. We must realize the fact that our mind is the maker of all mischief and misery. When the mind is utterly quiet and silent, perfect tranquility prevails which is our real state. In other words, in the thought-free state of the mind alone we can attain real happiness. In that perfect stillness of mind, there is pure bliss, a rare sense of joy and sublime feeling.

We are all members of one huge family called humanity with one common purpose, and according to Sufism, that one common goal is to attain God-realization. Today the people in every land are faced with innumerable problems that were unknown to their ancestors because of the modern technological civilization. The modern man is so much involved in sensual

activities that his mental energy is wasted enormously, hence it is very essential one must practice meditation systematically.

In other words, by keeping one's mind in a state of stillness, the quantum of energy that is dissipated through the cerebral-spinal system and the ceaseless cellular activities in the physical body are substantially minimized. In meditation, all the faculties with which the human mind is equipped are brought into full play and capacity. The state of meditation in no way brings about a lethargic condition of the mind or senses, but actually it creates an awareness full of dynamism and the optimum use of the mind and the senses.

Sufism stresses the importance of spiritual training and in this practice what is required is a discipline of the entire being of man of all the diverse faculties and not mere intellectual training, since spiritual illumination is not dependent on scholarship and logical thinking. At the end of a long and sustained spiritual practice, which involves serious control of the senses and the mind, then there is the possibility of purging of all its impurities. So long as there is desire in the mind the true state of Fana cannot be experienced because the craving of the mind for pleasure is always restless and unhappy.

Actually Fana is a pure sublime feeling untouched and uncorrupted by thoughts or desires. Fana means die before we die, as the heaviest burden of life is the ego, and this self of man creates all sorts of tension, misery, mischief, and conflict. Fana is complete only when one dies to every thought, desire, despair, hope, and ambition in life.

It is only by dying that one shall be able to find the joy of living. The Sufis interpret life as a long spiritual journey, someday coming to an end. And when it does come to an end, paradoxically it is there at the point from which it started. Therefore, death in this world is not the end of existence. It is worthy of note that if we want to be without problems we must be thoroughly dead (egoistically) while living, which means spiritual renewal is impossible without dropping mental mechanism. Mystically speaking, both birth and death are unified and transcended if one melts in the blaze of Infinite Truth (Haq).

Sufism is not a cold deliberate shunning of everybody and everything for the sake of one's own salvation, but the ultimate purpose of Sufism is the

crucifixion of the egoistic personality and the rising up into a new consciousness of our eternal oneness with the Supreme Reality (Allah). The state of Baqa implies the death of human ego and the resurrection into the divine consciousness. This spiritual awakening or divine revelation is achieved after passing through the experience of Fana, the silence of the great void.

Today, we find people spiritually hungry in every corner of the globe. It would seem that everyone of us wants happiness or peace of mind. If the world and society is in a chaotic condition, it is because there is no peace in the mind of man. Happiness comes only when our mind is perfectly clear and free from all confusions. We should enquire into the deeper aspects of the mind with ever increasing attention. It is also necessary to observe why the mind craves for sensual pleasures and how the same pleasurable enjoyments lead us to pain. Without such self-observation, it is impossible to have any kind of mastery over our mind. Whatever may be the pressures of problems confronting us, our mind should remain unaffected by circumstances.

When it is necessary, we must use our thinking faculty, but at other times we must be able to remain in our natural state of "perfect peace" without wasting our mental energy on unwanted thoughts and desires. The basic factor behind all human suffering is some sort of frustration, and the reason for such suffering is the interminable nature of desires which can be snapped only by abstention from desire altogether. Detachment in the true sense of the term is an experience which liberates one's mind in overcoming distraction.

The world we live in is a wonderful place because of its perpetually changing nature, a blessing to humanity. The world appears to men in different ways, according to their psychological constitution. To scientists it appears in one way while to ordinary men in another way. It is only to spiritually-realized people (Sufis) that the world appears in its true form. The realm of spiritual liberation has always been a matter of great interest to the seeker or Murid because man as a physically finite being in an imperfect world aspires for immortality. Every man (Insan) in his heart feels an urge for unalloyed joy, absolute freedom, uninterrupted peace, perpetual life, and cessation of misery.

Sufism makes a strong plea that the lasting solution for human problems can be found only when the mind reaches the state of Fana, because it constitutes not

only the cessation of mental activities through choiceless awareness, but also the freedom from the known, which means that our mind has been merged in perfect silence. When we understand all about ourselves there is that emptiness, and in that state there is wisdom, and that wisdom begins when sorrow ends. Sufism emphasizes the importance of leading a pure life and practicing spiritual discipline, so that the whole psycho-physical constitution of the Murid-seeker becomes changed and purified.

This self-discipline gives the seeker not only the necessary strength to bear the impact of mental agitation, but also saves him to stand the strains of the inner struggle. Meditation (Muraqabah) means a state of alertness where no thought interferes, and in that state we not only explore the various aspects of the mind, but also the secret of self, which brings about ever new dimensions of supra-mental state, a level beyond the senses. Normally, we act out of opinion, conclusion, or out of speculative intentions, but we must realize the fact that meditation is the action of silence. Meditation normalizes the nervous system, increases the orderly functioning of the brain, and promotes integrated thinking, regulated action, and appropriate behavior.

Concentration is the preliminary process by which the diversified rays of the mind are brought to a single point. But meditation which is the highest form of contemplation is the divine method by which our mind is ultimately rendered silent.

This state of meditative awareness not only helps us to commune with Allah but also releases the mind from its restlessness. All forms of spiritual discipline aim at tranquillization of the mind, helping to rectify functional impairment, mental disease, and structural alterations. Specialists in psychosomatic medicine and psychiatry have come to show a good deal of interest in meditation as it attempts to eliminate psychological tensions and counteract bad influences that cause disintegration of the personality. Both mental and physical relaxation is becoming more and more essential in the fast-moving, materialistic world in which we live.

Sufism holds the view that it is useless to look for peace or relaxation outside of ourselves. It must come from within by leading a meditative life. In the silent mind alone one can find full spiritual satisfaction. The best way to attain

freedom is by egoless love, egoless work, egoless contemplation, and egoless knowledge, which means one has to surrender and sacrifice everything. In the present world and its crisis of character, it is our sacred duty to liberate the human consciousness from the grip of petty conflict by emphasizing the importance of spiritual life. It is also to be realized that a meditative (spiritual) person alone can perform the right action in which there will be no regrets, confusion, or contradiction.

In meditation we live in this world without the images of pleasure or pain, and in that profound state of meditation (Muraqabah) we actually discover the origin of thinking. Then we enter into a new dimension where the division between the observer and observed does not exist, and there alone the blessing of divine unification (Tawhid) can take place spontaneously and effortlessly. Free and happy indeed is the Sufi who lives in a state of perfect peace and in which state of egolessness he is able to understand and appreciate the unending beauty of life.

† Article No. 16

The Aim of Sufism

It is essential to understand whether happiness can be achieved by the mind. If the mind undertakes to find happiness, then the mind may imagine mere sensation as happiness. Our experience shows that passionate desire produces a sense of momentary pleasure, but the impacts of such emotional excitements intensify the desire for further experience of lower sensations.

The best and the only practical method for the mind is to observe its reactions silently, and this self-observation alone will facilitate the mind to purify the residue of its past (coarse) impressions. The mind must be alert in watching its thought-process, and this awareness should be continued in our relationship with people, ideas, and things. Normally the mind reacts in the presence of an object and this object can be a living person or ideation or thing. The mind works in the form of attraction and repulsion in contacting the object, and this dualistic psychological like and dislike is due to the past association of memory. By following this automatic habitual process, the mind loses its vigor and

strength for dispassionate observation. Self-observation is the right way to free the mind from past impressions.

When we watch the (unrefined) mind, we find that the mind is filled with discontent and insufficiency. The motive of the mind is to get some sort of pleasure by dwelling on its past sensations, and this indulgence weakens its power of concentration. Instead of depending on the lower form of sensation, the mind must watch its internal state calmly so that there is the possibility of transcending the conditioning deteriorating factors of past impressions. The mind naturally attempts to deviate from the path of self-observation and thus evade perceiving Reality. When the mind is confused, it does not face the fact of confusion, but, instead of experiencing acuteness of suffering that comes as a result of confusion, it runs away by projecting fictitious distractions.

We must just be aware of the state of confusion without identifying ourselves with personal reactions. If we experiment with this method of examining the problem of confusion, without introducing our emotional coloration to it, then we will be able to be free from the confusion. Then we will have the freedom to watch everything with concentration without acting on mere impulses. As soon as we observe any mental conflict we will feel that the emotional attachment to the problem is dissociated and dissolved. This dissociation gives us inner freedom to listen to any problem without being influenced by its reactions, and this capacity to watch with full attention is the only practical method of solving our own psychological problems.

Every incident in life is an opportunity for us to purify ourselves and thus maintain mental equilibrium, because everything in life takes place according to the Cosmic Will. If and when our like and dislike interfere in our relationship with people, then only the deteriorating factor sets in. If we wish to reach the supra-mental state of Divinity, we should not overlook the paramount importance of the disciplined life, due to too much preoccupation with worldly entanglement. It is to be learned that sensual enjoyment is not only useless as a means to spiritual liberation, but also potentially harmful, which gives restlessness to the physical body and the mind. Therefore we should put into place or maintain the practice and technique of meditation as a daily activity.

The main obstacles in practicing meditation are the forces of habit which compel us to repeat the old familiar pattern of behavior, the psychological memory of the past, and the anticipation of the future.

According to Sufism, the root causes of all our mundane troubles are greed, hatred, delusion, ego, etc. We must realize the fact that only by detached observation alone can we eradicate these destructive habits.

In other words, permanent cure for psychological illness is through proper meditation. Everything accumulated in life is stored in our subconscious mind and naturally continues to exist unknowingly, since we are normally so occupied with other things that we are unaware of these unconscious conflicts and urges. But when we are quiet in meditation we can observe that these conflicting desires rise to the surface into the conscious mind. Without becoming aware of all the states of mind and its contents both conscious and unconscious, it is not really possible to develop meditative awareness or insight.

It is observable that the mind is subtle matter in a state of vibration, and through the mind alone sense-organs receive impressions of objects and react upon them. If we probe further into the mysteries of mind, we find that it has three substantive forces partaking of the Divine, human, and animal qualities. Therefore, a man is no better or worse than his state of mind at a given point of time.

Sufism teaches that clean living in action, speech, and thought is the basic principle for the purification of the mind. In all our activities there should be awareness and clarity of consciousness. If we meditate effectively, that is, live fully in the present from moment to moment, then there is no confusion, no ignorance, no illusion, and if anything comes up we know it and understand it. As we are spiritually awake, we have the potentiality to tackle whatever the problems are that come to us.

Living with meditative awareness is the aim of Sufism. Some people think of meditation only in terms of sitting in a particular place at a particular time, but in Sufism, meditative awareness is much more, and can be experienced at any moment. The purpose of Sufism is to help to first increase the awareness of what is going on inside the mind, and subsequently reduce the movement of the

mental fluctuations, because the state of Fana cannot be attained by mere mental effort, and hence Sufism advises that the best way to overcome the assertive ego which is a barrier to self-knowledge is completely surrender to God (Allah) and this total surrender of the ego at the Sanctuary of the Infinite is the secret of a truly spiritual life.

In Fana the psychological memory of the past and the anticipation of the future which tend to condition the function of the mind is negated. The term Fana has often been misunderstood. It does not mean absence or extinction, but it is unmovable, unshakable, like space, with nothing destructible. Fana means to unlearn the false identification of thought-waves with the ego-senses. This process of unlearning involves a complete transformation of character and the freedom from all lack of poise.

Sufism urges man to move from the world of concepts, theories, and imaginations into actual (spiritual) living. Man can never know his real Self as long as he is falsely identified with the ego-senses. Sufism directs the seeker to cherish the awareness of the existence of the Reality behind the changing world of name and form. Allah is beyond the comprehension of human speech and mind, and therefore, when a Sufi realizes God, he becomes silent and merges in the bliss of infinity. Meditation serves as a spiritual link to God.

At a certain stage of spiritual development, the seeker grows more complete in his contemplation and finds fulfillment in perfect oneness in the Divine Unity. Then the Sufi sees everything as Divine because his vision is such that he has reached the transcendental state of Baqa, in which exalted state the Supreme Consciousness prevails in him, and in that perfect liberation he leads the life of fullness and blessedness. The state of Baqa remains forever outside the power of thought-waves; it is essentially pure, enlightened, and free.

In Baqa we touch the perennial substratum of all manifestation in the universe of space, time, and causality. It is the essence of Reality, attribute-less Supreme Consciousness, the pre-creation state of silent non-dualism and indivisibility.

Psychologically speaking, this state of Baqa is seeing in wisdom the truth as the truth, falsehood as falsehood, free from delusion and ignorance. This supreme

awareness is not an ordinary perception of something, but actually an experiencing of the Truth at that moment in which the ego is completely cut off (inert).

Sufism recommends that in preference to worldly pursuits we must work for the spiritual liberation of ourselves and for the good of the world. As we approach the supreme state of self-realization we are even better equipped to encourage others spiritually. Peace of mind is a universal longing of every human being. We may differ variously by race or religion, but we all agree with the value of having a peaceful mind. In our modern age of ever-increasing complexity, greater importance should be given to mental health, and to reach peace of mind, certain self-disciplines are to be practiced. Whenever we meditate (properly), we have mental clarity, spiritual alertness, and Divine awakening within us, and at that moment the mind is pure and silent.

† Article No. 17

The Spiritual Science of Sufism

It should be understood that there are two kinds of happiness, one kind derived from sensual pleasures which may arise from sense-perception. But the fact remains that everything experienced by the senses is misleading. The other kind of happiness is spiritual liberation that is realized through meditation. A purely intellectual comprehension of the divine life is not possible because it is not within the scope of mere logic. Spiritual life should never be thought of as an austerity, a kind of self-torture, grim and painful. On the contrary, spiritual life finds expression in joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and reverence for all.

The purpose of Sufism is to gain self-knowledge through direct perception. Sufism is a practical science of life, which opens direct experience to the field of reality as well as the different levels of spiritual consciousness. The Sufi way of meditation refines the nervous system in a gentle way, removing all mental strain and leads to higher consciousness. Spiritual freedom does not mean refraining from the responsibilities of life, but rather giving all aspects of practical life their due while spontaneously maintaining the meditative

awareness as separate activity. Since our mind is unsteady, Sufism gives a definite method, the practice of which brings it under control and thus enables us to cultivate and enjoy evenness of mind in higher consciousness.

Many people advocate the material mode of life because they think that through material prosperity all happiness could be achieved, but actually it is not so. Although we get more and more comfort and pleasure, we are still not happy or free. On the contrary, our problems only increase. The simple fact is that when sense-desires are continually gratified naturally, the mind becomes poorer and more disturbed. Further, the mechanism of the mind is more thirsty, more craving and clinging towards sensual gratifications.

The other extreme considers that spiritual life means to give up their work and responsibilities, renouncing the world and refusing to face what arises in their lives. In fact, the world cannot be renounced since human relationships and life situations continuously reappear in different forms wherever we go, for problems cannot be escaped by isolation. We have to accept life as it is; life has both good and bad, conflict and pleasure. In fact, we can learn more from pain than from pleasure because without conflict we may just continue to sleep in life without spiritual awakening; so any unpleasant experience can be used to teach and bring wisdom. So it is not by avoiding suffering but by going through it and working it through that we discover something very important in life about ourselves.

Sufism stresses the importance of mental purification and refinement because it is the confused mind that prevents the beauty of intuitive awareness. Mental disorders are closely connected with emotional distortions which obscure creative intelligence. Fear, anxiety, guilt, envy, grief, and pride of any kind are major mental and emotional barriers that have to be eliminated from the human system. To be aware of our spiritual nature, we must have the capacity to rise above the mundane without identifying ourselves with the mental or emotional processes and this constant conscious awareness of the super-consciousness is meditation.

The true goal of spiritual liberation consists in living on a higher divine plane, being not influenced by desires and not creating new desires as a result of thought or action. By not being influenced means that one is not inwardly

touched by the working out of the residue of impressions. Enlightenment means not only mastery or total understanding of life, but also living with the awareness of pure consciousness, although with mental activity.

To progress towards spiritual life does not mean to be selfish or to be aloof from society. It means to abolish confusion and bring about clarity of mind. Until this is achieved within the individual it will not be possible to bring about a new order to society. Without first reforming oneself within, it is impossible to change society radically, because disorder and chaos in the world are nothing but the reflection of the chaos in each one of us. To establish oneself in silence is not a simple matter. The greatest patience and perseverance are called for.

Ordinarily we do not even observe the flux of thoughts crossing the mind. In meditation, particularly in the beginning stages, it is not that more thoughts rise, but we become more aware of them. Whatever is hidden comes to the surface and this is the proper time to deal with them and still the mind by practicing choiceless awareness. When we can look towards the cause and origin of our thoughts, the chaos ceases and dissolves on its own.

Spiritual life signifies a simple, easy, and unstrained method of living with a proper sense of values without giving undue importance to worldly activities. The best and most harmonious relationships are based on non-attachment, in which we do not need others for our happiness and support. If we can be alone, then only are we free from ego wandering. In that state we do not carry anything with us and we do not look backward or forward; this is the stage of freedom from experience and non-experience. Further, in this state we can live every moment of our life in appreciating fully, and at the same time we can easily leave the state when the particular experience is finished.

Sufism is not a set of codes or tenets, but a way of life-being, from the beginning to the end a matter of spiritual experience. It is a practical way of living that avoids the extremes of self-indulgence and asceticism, and leads to an awareness of the divine center. The destiny of man is divine perfection and that spiritual liberation to be achieved is by going beyond the mind into the integral light of the immeasurable Godhead. The best form of prayer is to remain in perfect peace, avoiding even mental activity, because such profound inner calm will ultimately make our being merge with Allah, the Omnipresent.

Sufism teaches the technique of Fana which means not only erasing the already existing impressions on the subconscious mind, but also the method of performing action without attachment, so that no further impression is added to the subconscious mind. When once this method of doing actions without attachment is mastered, many of the causes for the emergence of psychosomatic ailments disappear. An analysis of the causes of diseases reveals that a suppressed emotion is quite dangerous and that emotional disturbances are due to conscious, subconscious conflict. Therefore, every action done with attachment produces an impression on the subconscious mind. This is the psychological weight that is to be removed by leading a life of purity.

Our life is a contradiction, one desire in opposition to another desire, one pleasure pulling us in one direction and another pleasure pulling us in another, making our life contradictory and confused. We cannot separate ourselves from the world because we are the world. To change the world we must change ourselves and to bring about an orderly change we must understand the causes of the disorder that exists in us. We have nothing to do other than to have the capacity to observe the cause of disorder with inner freedom, since most of us are very heavily conditioned due to various circumstances.

The fundamental question is whether it is at all possible for the human mind to un-condition itself so that it can be free. Sufism says that it is possible for the human mind to be free of its conditioning through the technique of Fana, only when our thoughts have been stilled and the mind has been cleared of all its impressions. Fana implies a state of mind that does not depend on another psychologically and is not attached to any person, which does not mean, however, the non-existence of love.

We must realize that pure love is not attachment. It signifies a mind that is uncorrupted and without any sense of fear or conflict. Fana is to be simply aware of what is going on here and now and to find the capacity to live fully in the present.

The best way to attain the state of Fana is by following the path of meditation with self-knowledge. The beauty of Fana emerges when the dying of the ego has taken place. Fana is not a nothingness but a state, a reality that is when all

our false values and desires are reduced to nothing. To keep our mind in a state of emptiness is quite indispensable so that we can contact and radiate spiritual magnetism. The wonderful capacity of divine consciousness comes into operation only when we abide permanently in the state of Fana and by living in the highest state of Fana, we spontaneously become a divine channel for the promotion of wisdom, unity, and universal brotherhood.

In Fana we not only transcend the mind, but also we touch the Cosmic Consciousness which gives us the bliss and divine guidance to shape our life in such a way as not to deviate from the spiritual path. The more we go into deeper meditation, the more we appreciate the beauty and usefulness of spiritual life. The divine contentment that we inwardly feel when we are in meditation is really a secret and sacred experience that sustains us and strengthens and stabilizes our divine life to which we are happily dedicated.

Our life is very complex and to understand the state of Fana we need to observe closely the structure of our mind. Since we are heavily conditioned, we are not free to understand the depth of mind. We have to find out how to die psychologically or inwardly because Fana means that every day we must die to all pleasures, to all psychological memories, to all the things we hold dear, so that our mind is always fresh and pure with meditative awareness.

† Article No. 18

An Esoteric Approach to Sufism

Medical research together with recent explorations of the mind have now confirmed that many of the ills that used to be considered as purely organic in nature are actually caused by our attitudes towards life and those around us. Even organic as well as nervous and psychological ills can be caused by hate, fear, jealousy, and anger. Therefore, we must make every effort to widen the vision of every human being by discovering divinity in each other, so that rank passion like hatred, anger, jealousy, and selfishness are set at naught.

When an aspirant begins to observe his mind he comes face to face with only a few desires and feelings which dance on the surface of his mind. But below the surface in the subconscious regions of his mind there are various kinds of thoughts and desires which exercise considerable influence upon the nature of the mind from behind the scenes. Further, when one makes serious attempts in controlling the grosser desires and feelings which create disturbances, one is surprised to find that many subtle thoughts and desires rise from the deeper layer of the mind and create troubles. The tendency of the mind is simply to drag us down towards the sensual attractions and if we indulge too much in any form of emotional excitement, then we are only damaging ourselves physically, mentally, and spiritually. We must realize the fact that we are attracted to sensuality because knowingly or unknowingly we derive certain pleasure by dwelling on those sensations.

Since the dangers of conflict of greed for wealth and power are so menacing, it is very essential that we lead a pure spiritual life so that we may cope with the innumerable problems maturely. To understand oneself correctly is a tremendous job, because the self or mind is never the same from moment to moment. It is an obvious fact that life is a struggle not merely with circumstances and environments, but also because our minds are pulled in different directions. If we keenly observe we will find that there are so many contradictory desire compulsions and so many urges in our mind. Unless we grasp the totality of the mind we cannot be free. Right meditation alone can bring the realization of the true character of the self. A seeker must inwardly feel the call of Truth and he must discover the fact that when the true wisdom of Reality is attained, the veil of ignorance disappears, which means one establishes the right way of living in his own consciousness amidst chaos and confusion.

If we are upset even by trivial affairs, if we lose our character even by a small temptation, if our self-control is damaged by outward attraction, then these are an indication that we have not achieved the spiritual life. The deteriorating factor on the spiritual path is the distraction of the mind one feels while in meditation. Practice of meditation makes the mind calm and steady and eminently fit for reflecting the nature of Reality in its true light. Then the serene flow of divine energy is directed solely God-ward. Meditation sharpens the whole being, every pore of being becomes active in divine harmony. When

the total mind becomes silence, that supreme silence permeates the whole world, which brings spiritual upliftment.

If every moment of our waking hours is filled with ego-centered activities, we do not know how to live in meditation. Meditation is the way to understand the movement of the mind and not to identify with it. If we understand the mechanistic nature of the brain and cerebral activity as a fact, then there is no more psychological identification with anything that the mind brings up. If we can calmly observe our thoughts then we will reach a state where thoughts are completely eliminated, and after that the observer remains immersed in blissful silence. This is something which we can really experiment with.

Thus meditation is the total silence of the mind in action. A spontaneous meditation releases a new and dynamic energy. It refreshes the nervous system and increases the sensitivity of the total being. The state of living in meditation is moving in spiritual freedom. The beauty of meditation gives us a new dimension of divine living. Meditation is a science and it is not a speculative game.

The metaphysical science of Sufism explains that the notions of pleasure and pain result only from the contact of the senses with their objects. Since these contacts are connected with bodily existence, they have a beginning and an end and therefore they are not permanent. Further, it indicates that the unreal or impermanent is always in a state of flux. Change is its very nature. But behind the changing world is the unchanging Reality. In order to observe change, there must be something not changeable.

If the subject of the change is also changing, change could not be (properly) observed. Sufism insists that the true knowledge of Reality alone can be the sole means for the destruction of ignorance and for deliverance from the illusory bondage and sufferings from which man apparently suffers in this world. Sufism is not a creed or a set of dogmas, but a process enabling each man, whatever be his station in life, to grow and develop into a higher state of spiritual perfection.

Sufism insists that until and unless the practical life is fully imbued with love, devotion, and contemplation of the Absolute, one cannot enjoy the beauty of

spiritual life. The true goodness of divine life consists in the all-around discipline and development of the physical body, the senses, the mind, the intellect, the emotions, and the heart, for the realization of Truth. Sufistic philosophy points out that everything except That is changing and only That is eternal and that eternal Reality is the Self of man. Everything else has an impermanent existence only in relation to the Self. The indwelling Self is ever changeless, indestructible, and illimitable.

Sufism declares that the liberating factor is meditative awareness, which means that if we remain simply aware of the pleasurable and painful feelings that arise within ourselves as a result of our contact with the external world, instead of reacting to them with craving or aversion as the case may be, then there is the possibility of putting an end to this mental distraction and disturbance. For this reason only the cultivation of self-awareness occupies a central place in Sufism, and in order to attain the true state of Fana, the mind must be perfectly pure and transparent, calm and tranquil, absolutely undisturbed. It is only when the self is not that there is Fana, that state of being in which alone there can be purity. The state of Fana comes only when the self (ego) (mind) (personality) which is the process of accumulation (entanglement) ceases to be.

According to the esoteric aspects of Sufism, if a seeker maintains this state of Fana sufficiently, he will experience that his individual consciousness completely unifies with Reality. In this state the subject-object relation vanishes from the mind and no modification of the mind is felt; then only the real state of Baqa is attainable. In the highest state of Baqa, the Reality is not experienced as an object, but one becomes one with the Reality and therefore there is no plurality or process of dualistic knowledge.

The unconditioned state of Baqa is a supreme consciousness in which there is no difference between the knower and the knowable. A Sufi is an integrated, total man with a mind set free. A Sufi is he who has passed through various spiritual disciplines and attained the frame of mind which does not react to any condition or circumstance of life. A Sufi is not one who has retired from worldly life and lives away from the strife and turmoil of the world. A Sufi finds perfect inward peace and bliss in the midst of all the bewildering diversities of the world.

Sufism insists in understanding the fact that man suffers because of his false identification with an illusory separate self. His attachment to this fictitious entity, the 'me' is a result of distorted, dualistic, partial perceptions and conditioned responses due to past psychological memories and experiences. Although to keep the mind quiet is one of the most difficult things to achieve, it is very necessary that one should cultivate the habit of maintaining the mind in a state of perfect peace.

When the total mind becomes silence, then only one could develop the utter detachment which brings freedom from all the worries and sufferings connected with worldly events. Needless to say, the cessation of (spurious) mental activity does not result in withdrawing from the active world and does not result in benumbing any of one's capacities. The fulfillment of life at all levels is the aim of Sufism.

† Article No. 19

Sufism, An Exploration

Nowadays man faces pressures of increasing complexity which impose a severe strain on his mind. A person well established in the state of meditation (Muraqabah) can easily free himself from the tension and stress of modern life. Further, he can be free from undue anxieties, abnormal fears, and depressive frustrations which lead to feelings of insecurity, inferiority, and despondency. Therefore, Muraqabah is an important part of the spiritual discipline which is needed by the entire humanity because it will help a person not only in overcoming ignorance and delusion, but also in the attainment of perfect sanity, the realization of the highest wisdom, and the gaining of divine illumination. Muraqabah is a process of understanding our own mind calmly without any emotional involvement. And this can be stated as choiceless awareness where one is a witness to everything without being psychologically disturbed.

Modern man is so preoccupied with his ego-centered activities that he has lost the mental equipoise and necessary relaxation so as to face problems in the society in which he functions. Mere outer changes of life will neither bring real freedom nor solve any problems. We cannot reform society until radical changes

first occur within the individuals who make up that society. Therefore, real education consists in the personal growth and harmonious integration of an individual, which means the discovery of inner spiritual values so that mere superficial external things and sensual pursuits lose their dominance. But alas, today major emphasis is placed on sensual enjoyments while little attention is paid to the spiritual fitness.

Life is an unbroken series of pleasurable and painful experiences, and so long as we function within the realm of ignorance we are under the tyranny of attachment and desires. Liberation is possible when the true wisdom of all our existence is realized through *Muraqabah*. Man has yet to learn how to meditate. An inquiry into the source of *Muraqabah* is the beginning of spiritual life. Personal discovery of the secret of *Muraqabah* implies the emptying of the content of one's mind. If we want to be free of mind, we must know what mind is. Until we watch and observe the movement of mind within us from moment to moment, we will never understand the beauty of *Muraqabah*. When there is inner silence, then there is the possibility of contacting (Dhat) which is eternal and the essence of reality.

Consciously or unconsciously all are seeking happiness. Man is almost incessantly engaged in diverse activities and the motive behind all actions is the pursuit of happiness. But paradoxically, happiness seems to be always eluding our grasp. We must realize that the major obstacles to happiness are wrong emotional drives like greed, hatred, jealousy, and vanity. All these stem from one basic defect, namely egoism or selfishness. Lust and craving bring sorrow and not real happiness. Ambition may take us to the pinnacles of power and glory, but that is not real happiness. Pure joy of everlasting happiness can be experienced by leading a spiritual life, which means the silencing of sense agitations and the quieting of the mind.

One of the major problems in one's life is psychological conflict, and from this conflict all kinds of neurotic activities arise. The aim of Sufism is to eliminate all conflict inwardly and outwardly. *Muraqabah* is an action in which there are no regrets, no failure, and no sense of frustration. Spontaneous cessation of mental activity opens the doors to divine awakening. If we realize that Allah cannot be perceived by our mind then the mental activity comes to an end. We will never discover the immense timeless space of the infinite ultimate truth

(Haq) until we realize the fact that in the midst of diversity of name and form there is the unity of essence of existence.

And when it is known that the same divine manifestation is in all creations, then there is no room for illusion or distress. It is on this practical aspect of non-dualism that the entire Sufistic philosophy of life has been built.

In Fana the mind never loses its balance and it preserves mental equilibrium intact under all circumstances. The state of Muraqabah can be experienced here and now, and it does not require renunciation of activity or physical isolation, but it needs only the abandonment of the ego sense and the capacity not to identify ourselves with anything in the world. Meditation is a liberation from the resistance of the mind. Actually, spiritual freedom implies the cessation of all mental conflicts and the capacity to use the mind when necessary and yet be free from it.

When the mind is agitated we think that our Ruh or eternal self also seems to be agitated, but our soul has no such agitation and it is always silent, and the agitations or eruptions we experience are only on the surface of the mind. The real meditation consists in experiencing the divinity within, without the intervention of the mind. The idea of "I am the enjoyer or the doer" arises in the mind only. We come to know of things only when the mind is available for perception. In meditation we withdraw ourselves from the sensual plane and we are elevated to our real state of pure consciousness. Meditation is a process of inner communication in which we experience the unity of existence, and it is a communion of self with divinity.

Although the modern civilization through the help of the rapid progress of science has reached a zenith, it is evident that men of great intellect have failed to find a permanent solution to the world problems. The great problems in the world are merely the extension of individual problems. Thus, perfect peace will come only to the world when there is serenity and harmony in the minds of men. Man is ever in search of peace and happiness. But real happiness and lasting peace can be found only in meditation and not in the sensate objects of pleasure. Meditation is not only an integral part of spiritual life, but also a direct means to divine enlightenment.

Meditation is not only to observe every movement of thought attentively, but it consists in seeing the fact in totality. When the mind is unconditioned, unburdened, and unfettered by past psychological memory, then it is in a state to receive the eternal. It is only through dispassionate observation that the mystery of the mind can be understood. The mind must act without any resistance, without any form of friction, because mental resistance creates distortion of vision. We need a clear, sharp, sensitive mind which comes from intelligent awareness and not by suppression. The right understanding of the deepest inner layers of the subconscious mind will bring tranquility and stillness.

Sufism does not give man a set of finished and final dogmas or creeds, but it asks man to discover truth through an exploration of inner space. The joy that comes through the practice of meditation surpasses all the pleasures which the transitory objects of life can give. Man is seeking freedom, but real liberation is possible only by throwing away all the mental impressions and desires, which means to keep our soul (Ruh) aloof so that we can participate in the worldly activities and yet maintain a serene and blissful quietude of a peaceful witness-like state.

Our Ruh is a witness of the drama of life going on in our personality and in the world. The human body is an instrument for experience so as to attain oneness with the absolute reality. The object of Sufism is not only the naughting (negating) of the ego, but also the realization and the recognition that our true self is none other than the ultimate reality. Sufism is a science of life and it explains the art of living. It points out the goal of existence and provides methods by which sincere seekers can make their inner sacred pilgrimage towards Allah.

As long as the mind is a mechanical machine of psychological memory it is always restless, chattering and moving from one thing to another. Hence, it is essential for the mind to be unoccupied so that there is silence, calmness, and freedom. The quietness of the mind and the ultimate sublimation of all its thought currents is accomplished by the practice of Muraqabah. The process of emancipating the man from all his bondage and limitation and asserting his spiritual nature constitute the aim of Muraqabah.

The attainment of wisdom really means the discrimination of the real and the unreal and the detachment from the unreal so as to realize that one homogeneous being. There is a difference between theory and practice, because when crises come to us in life and put a strain upon us then at that time mere intellectual understanding or knowledge cannot give us specific remedies. The spiritual practice which means achieving self-mastery alone will help one to remain impervious to all difficulties in day-to-day affairs. To face all challenges and conflicts and to meet sufferings and sorrows with a pure and serene mind without being affected by them is the main goal of spiritual striving.

We must realize the fact that truth is not the product of mental reactions which take place mechanically. Mere emotional excitement in the name of devotion is not the goal of religious striving. When we are naturally calm and relaxed, when we enjoy the perfect peace within us, then only do we learn the divine art of meditative awareness which inspires us to have communion with the infinite. In meditation we realize that behind all this seeming multiplicity of existence, the one unchanging substratum alone persists.

When we have rediscovered this supreme truth and have begun to realize the oneness of this infinite reality in our pure consciousness, then certainly we do not mistake the relative world in which we live as existing apart from that divinity. But when truth is not known, then the reality of that eternal principle is veiled from us, and then we interpret reality through our own misdirected imagination which forms the delusory projections. When the intellect is clouded with ignorance then the mind will dance in agitation. Therefore, liberation is possible only when the true wisdom of our inner self is revealed in silence.

† Article No. 20

The Eternity Here and Now 1

The main purpose of coming into this world is to realize our divinity which is eternal. But we are conditioned by three states of consciousness, namely, waking state, dream state, and dreamless sleep state. In the waking state we see many things and people in the physical world and by seeing these objects

our mind is attached and identified with many forms and in this state we are functioning with our physical body and mind. When the physical body is tired we go to sleep. In the sleeping state the mind creates a mental world or image projected by desires. The impressions gathered while we are in the physical world are projected as a shadow form in the mental plane by our own mind with much exaggeration and dramatization.

In the dream state the world and the objects we see or experience are nothing but the product of our own mind. Both in waking and dream state our mind is functioning full of conflicts and agitations. Therefore, we are emotionally disturbed and our mind is also working at a tremendous speed in accordance with the intensity of the desire. In the dreamless sleep, the mind is not working in conflict but taking complete rest due to suspension of thought process, although it is covered by darkness.

We are all affected by three states of consciousness. In these states we are unable to discover our real self because of the projections and false images of our mind. The disturbing factors of mental projections obstruct us from realizing reality directly. The most fundamental defect in us is that we cling to the mind and the body as ourselves, whereas the body and the mind are mere instruments to be trained and purified for realization of divinity. Excitements and irritations are really blocking the path of self-realization which can be attained by transcending these three states. At this juncture it will be helpful to consider the method of meditation because only by understanding meditation correctly is there the possibility of going beyond the mind and thus liberating us from the clutches of sensual desires. The mind is continuously tempting us by identifying objects we see in the physical world. The question is how to stop the process of thinking so that we can realize our divinity.

The mind is changing from one desire to another and it is very excited with passions and hence through the mind we cannot discover reality. We are not so happy and peaceful because the mind is distracted by innumerable desires and as a result our energy is wasted in fulfilling the desires. The actual fact is that we cannot have real happiness and satisfaction when indulging in sensual pleasures because the desires are intensified and strengthened after enjoyment. The best and correct method is not to fulfill according to the dictations of our desires but to understand the mind by meditation. The art of meditation is to

keep the mind under our control by understanding the activities of the mind. If we can observe each and every thought in a detached manner all the time, then we feel the most profound state of calmness.

In this state of tranquility we are in meditation. We must note the very important point that if our mind is well concentrated in the work which we are doing then the very work becomes meditation, and further our mental energy is not wasted nor our attention distracted.

It is our common experience, as soon as we are disturbed mentally the whole body and the mind are shattered with a crude form of vibration as a result of which the sweet state of meditation is lost and we are thrown from the height of divinity. If we can keep our mind in a state of meditation all the time then we will see that the physical world and our relationship with people are harmonious. The emphasis on meditation is stressed because without meditation we cannot be free from the sensual cravings.

To attain our true state we must purify our physical body and mind by strictly following certain disciplines. If we fail in practicing our meditations regularly, then desires which are hiding in our unconscious mind will pull us down and impair our spiritual magnetism and therefore we must be careful even in moving with other people as there is a possibility of disturbing our mind by the influence of those persons who are leading a lower form of life. Meditation gives us spiritual vitality which shines through our face. The face indicates to a certain extent the inner state of mind. Those who are doing meditation reveal it in their faces. The face is the index of the soul.

The life of spirituality is full of cheerfulness and happiness. Indeed we who are leading a relatively spiritual life are fortunate because we understand the real purpose of coming into this physical world. In this world many are confused and they are leading miserable lives in that they are slaves to their own desires; they have destroyed the physical body and mind by enjoying the lowest pleasures. Although there are only a very few people who are sincerely dedicating their lives for the discovery of divinity, it is these few people who will guide humanity. Although we have to undergo difficulties in conquering our animal instincts we will ultimately succeed in winning our freedom. Real freedom is a state of mind in which we are undisturbed by environmental

influences. We experience the sweetness of peace and the extraordinary beauty of spiritual grace and bliss when we are in deep meditation. Therefore, let us devote our time in the attainment of self-realization.

In life we are all confronted with many problems, but to solve any problem what we need is a clear mind to analyze the problem. The most important question is whether the mind is capable of approaching the problem without distraction. The mind is all the time thinking about past incidents and therefore, it is unable to face the problem without projecting its past impressions. The problem exists because of the mind of the thinker. To the thinker alone the various complications arise because the "thinker" is a false entity which derives sensations from the painful and pleasurable experiences thus establishing its permanency. Innumerable problems and difficulties are fabricated by wrong thinking. In view of the above psychological reason it is necessary that we must transcend the mind to the spiritual plane.

A mind which is mechanical in its activities loses its capacity and pliability in receiving reality. A mechanical mind is lop-sided in its operation and is much disintegrated. To harmonize the mind we must have the ability to understand and observe the function of the mind dispassionately and this self-observation will lead us to self-discovery. To discover something which the mind cannot conceive is the right approach to meditation, a meditation in which even the meditator is absent in the absorption of divinity.

To maintain mental equilibrium it is very essential to study the function of the mind correctly. To penetrate into the unconscious level of the mind we must have meditative awareness to watch the hidden desires without being influenced by them. If we can undertake the journey of self-observation silently then we can gauge the agitation of unconscious urges unemotionally. The study of the unconscious mind is interesting if we can understand the significance of the symbols while we are exploring the explosive region of the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is working ceaselessly making suggestions to the superficial mind as the upper mind is mostly controlled by impulses from the unconscious mind. As we are unable to check these impulses we must observe the unconscious mind while we are in meditation. Then we can proceed further in the discovery of reality which alone will give strength, stability, and liberation.

The most difficult task in the world is to understand our own mind, and the capacity for observation is complicated because of the fact that the observer who watches mental activities could be easily influenced by the reaction of various psychological tensions.

Hence, we must be alert not only in detecting the desires but also in watching them in a detached manner. To contact reality, the mind must be still without projecting its past impressions. In this process of silencing the mind alone we can enjoy the blessings of divine magnetism which brings freedom. The mind must be kept under complete control by means of meditation and this contemplative attitude in life will help us to contact reality which gives significance and vitality to all. Beauty is really a divine attribute because beautiful objects elevate the mind to the height of purity. When the mind is excited by the impact of emotional confusions we cannot appreciate the beauty of divine creation. Anything that is creative is beautiful as it gives us inspiration to see things clearly. The true state of creativity is a state in which the mind is absolutely calm and silent. Devotion comes as a result of spontaneous dedication to that to which it is devoted and in this devotion we feel the beauty aspects of purifying experiences.

We are not the mere product of environmental influences or slaves to our instinctive passions and influences. We are creating environment through our thought and actions. If we have purity of heart and clarity of thought we will never be affected by environment. Our thoughts play an important part in shaping our spiritual life. Our thoughts do not only affect us, but also stimulate others as well. For an example, if we concentrate on pure thought, first of all it induces us to think intensely and deeply and at the same time we are also contributing right and pure thoughts abundantly, which will spontaneously tend to uplift others to think rightly and purely through the medium of thought vibrations. In view of this fact, we must exercise right thinking, right understanding, and right attitude in all of our mental activities.

The Eternity Here and Now 2

We cannot have real freedom until we transcend our minds by the process of meditation. We must understand our mental reactions and psychological conflicts by self-observation. Then there is the possibility of our minds moving into the realm of divinity. The fundamental principle of meditation consists in keeping our minds alert and calm, undisturbed by outward distractions. The radiation of divine current can be experienced directly when we are all tuned to that reality which operates when we meditate deeply. The meditative force and the vitality of magnetic power can be obtained inwardly when we commune with that divinity which speaks the eternal language of silence.

Whether we like it or not, there is an urge in us which seeks fulfillment only in perfect peace; to be "empty" ourselves is not a state of nothingness; it is the cessation of desires which gives us the perennial joy of liberation. We cannot establish peace in the world until we understand our inner reality and thus live peacefully. We all have to live in this world, but we must live happily and freely without being affected by the waves of mental disturbances. We must climb to the heights of divine illumination by the help of meditation. We must concentrate all our energies in purifying our minds, before we undertake the sublime path of meditation. When we are happy with meditative awareness then our relationship with others will also be happy. Our life must be a long, continual practice of meditation, and then only can we have fresh minds to face all problems effectively.

The greatest obstacles for the attainment of super-consciousness are our own minds, which deceive us all the time in various ways. Man is conditioned by the environment, and hence it is very essential that one should completely overcome such circumstances as would stimulate lustful thoughts. It is absurd on our part to expect pure happiness through sensual activities and further to depend on excitement for the satisfaction of senses which only lead to psychological depression and exhaustion. It is very difficult to maintain our

spiritual magnetism in the midst of sensational irritations. As soon as our minds are agitated, we are mentally confused by the false images of sensations. Clear perception takes place in a mind that is not distracted by external influences.

Although modern civilization has much advanced in scientific discoveries, the modern man is still groping in darkness as far as the true values of human life are concerned, because the vast development of material prosperity has blinded him to the necessity and importance of spiritual integration. Man thinks by amassing wealth and material goods he can attain happiness, on the contrary sensual enjoyments lead to utter frustration. One must learn to maintain the purity of one's mind and the clarity of one's thought all the time, even under unfavorable circumstances.

The innate divinity of man lies in his capacity to detach himself from the vicious circle which brings him miseries and mental complications together with physical contamination. Mere intellectual discussion without the flame of intuitive understanding is useless and wasteful. Ignorance exists only in the relative plane, in which duality plays a deceptive role. The elimination of ignorance can be achieved not by psychological projection, but in the heights of self-contemplation which is meditation. The necessity of negating the mind in the process of meditation would be realized in the actual practice of meditation; without meditation one would be forced down through levels of dualism instead of being raised to union with the one supreme. The state of real freedom from the bondage of suffering is a deeply personal experience and, therefore, this state of spiritual liberation cannot be gauged by one's intellect, which is limited.

The energy that is wasted in the direction of emotional distractions should be conserved and converted into meditative force for the benefit of soul elevation and enlightenment. Nothing in this world gives that freedom and happiness for which one is searching; silent contemplation alone will create such a beautiful atmosphere and effect such spiritual integration as to enable one to enjoy life freely and fully.

When our mind is calm and peaceful and when there is no craving for any worldly desire, we experience proper meditation. We must have mental power and purity to live harmoniously with the rest of the world. Truth cannot be

realized through mere intellectual capacity. If we are intensely aware of our thoughts, we will feel that our thoughts themselves are dissolved. We must have a fresh mind unclouded by past memories.

In direct experience desire is the effect of imagination. If an observer can observe an object without introducing past impressions, then there is the possibility of keeping the mind uncontaminated by desire because the observer is watching everything without condemnation or justification and thereby the strength of his mind is highly concentrated. The more we go deep into meditational awareness the more our minds become clear in reflecting reality or revealing truth. An aspirant must have the power of discrimination to perceive the reality hidden behind the appearance. To decide our spiritual destiny without the interference of emotional complication is an important matter, and for that we must get in touch with the supreme power through meditation and contemplation.

To receive the spiritual magnetism, we must attune our minds to the source from which the bliss of the soul radiates. To discover reality what is essential is the purification of the mind, which can release the hidden divine energy. This divine magnetism is so delicate, and yet so powerful, that we must keep our body and mind clean and pure, so that we can reflect and radiate the beauty of its spiritual force. If we can delve deep into meditation, we will find that the mind is nothing but a bundle of desires and sensations, and these are preventing us from contacting the supreme power.

Generally one is afraid of death because one is incapable of facing the actuality of that unknown state, or in other words, one is unwilling to dissociate oneself from the continuous process of sensual experiences. If one can live from moment to moment in that meditative awareness which is a profound spiritual state, so that one is not gathering worldly impressions, then one is gifted with the faculty of perceiving the secret of death in the midst of diversity. If one reaches the highest realm of contemplation, then one's action is complete and there is no room for emotional fear or psychological accumulation of sensual qualities and tendencies.

There is no duality as death and living, and this sentimental demarcation line has been created by the mind. If one can die daily or empty the mind from the

attachment of passionate desires, then one can experience the fact that in essence both life and death are joint phenomena and to meet the reality of death and the impacts of life simultaneously while one is in the physical plane is spiritual liberation, although this seems to be quite a paradox logically.

To a true seeker on the path the death is nothing and it does not change his freedom of search or function because the seeker who dedicates his life in the pursuit of reality does not die, but lives eternally with the infinite. Physical death is no way a barrier for a seeker to develop further towards the attainment of divine perfection. Needless to say, that one's spiritual progress and evolution does not end by the occurrence of death, but on the contrary, one can proceed peacefully and silently towards his goal of self-discovery. The purpose of creation and the manifestation of man on the material world is not to destroy and deteriorate, but to cultivate various divine faculties so as to reach the exalted state of enlightenment.

The nobility of man is that he is in possession of a soul which is deathless. For a man, the physical body is only a vehicle to gain spiritual liberation. The most important fact that one has to realize is that the purpose of having a body is to establish a link with the infinite while living in this mundane world. If one does not make use of the body for the realization of reality, then one's life in this world is a waste and in vain.

People are deluded and deceived by the pleasures on the material plane, but at the time of death one will awaken from the slumber of ignorance and will see the real condition of the life lived in the world. While living in the physical world, one is not capable of analyzing and assessing one's mind as it is, because of the fact that one's mode of thinking is tremendously influenced by the five senses with the agitation of carnal pressures and cravings. It is to be noted that for an aspirant this sort of obstacle will not hinder him as he is gifted with purity of heart and clarity of thought which brings the light of wisdom and ability to march cheerfully towards the path.

If an aspirant realizes the fact that divinity can be discovered in the realm of death, then his life will be a source of inspiration and his action will be fresh and fearless. From the point of absolute reality, death is not the cessation of life, but the continuation of soul energy in a different place for inner development and

spiritual integration. The heaviness of sensual impressions are so much loaded into man's mind, he is unable to walk properly towards the destination of death. With the emptiness of the mind alone one can enter into the kingdom of death. The materialistic attitude of the mind and poisonous sensual obsession should be obliterated or rather transcended by following the method of silent meditation and deep contemplation, then only is there the possibility of perceiving the mystery of life and death.

† Article No. 22

The Eternity Here and Now 3

Man's ability to perceive everything in the light of wisdom elevates his mind to the realm of divinity which is the spiritual plane. If we have the capacity to see the outward changes in utter dispassion and through the delight of meditation we can surely overcome all the difficulties and complications concerning the relative world which is always in tension.

The most practical method in retaining our spiritual magnetism consists in living always in the ecstasy of meditative awareness by dropping the dualistic mechanism of the mind in the absorption of the deep divine contemplation. The purpose of taking the physical body is not to waste in the blind play of sensual drama, but to live in the absolute reality which alone will give us liberation and happiness. Life is such that we have to undergo a tedious process of suffering so as to learn the lesson of spiritual liberation. The conflict that arises in our minds owing to entanglement of past experiences should be observed dispassionately.

The world we live in is in constant flux. There is nothing permanent in this relative world, because all the time it is in the process of change. It is nothing but delusion to cling to the physical world and we must liberate ourselves from the entanglements of worldly ambitions or attachments. We must dedicate our lives to the attainment of self-realization which alone will give us real freedom and enlightenment. A defect in us is that we are easily deceived by the impacts of lower sensations. The right way to live in this world is to detach oneself from sensual irritations.

The main reason why we do not have the capacity to concentrate on anything is due to our weakness in analyzing our thought process. Without understanding the working of our minds, it is impossible to proceed in the art of meditation. We mostly live with our own images which are the result of our mental reactions. By dwelling on past psychological memories we try to derive happiness, but we cannot attain bliss by clinging to sensations of sensuality. The living reality cannot be approached by the projections of our desires, as the freshness of reality is polluted by impressions and hence, it is very necessary that we must keep our minds refreshed by meditation.

The determination to lead a pure spiritual life is an important qualification because the spiritual life consists in discovering the reality which is beyond the senses. By sheer ignorance, we have identified ourselves with desires and thereby we have lost the capacity to live in the profound state of divinity. The cause for all suffering is mainly due to attachment to sensual gratification and if we can attune our heart to eternal silence of divine light, then only we can develop the faculties of intuition and the serenity of meditation.

To enjoy life one must master the lower tendencies and emotional weaknesses as otherwise one's life will be filled with miseries and frustration. Happiness is really an inner experience one has to find when all evil desires cease. The cessation of desires is the real basis for pure happiness. In an agitated state of mind one cannot comprehend the fullness of happiness, which blooms only in the state of meditation. Meditation is not focusing one's mind on an object, but one requires tremendous power of self-observation and the ability to be aware of the thought process before one could proceed on the right path of self-discovery.

In the height of profound meditation we feel that sweet state of cosmic consciousness which transcends the limitation of mental obstructions. Spiritual life consists in the constant supply of divine energy. Meditation is not an escape from the responsibilities or an avenue of worldly isolation.

Meditation is really a state of mind in which we are capable of realizing the reality of life without deception. Even in the worldly activities, the meditative mind can observe various complications in a detached manner without involving psychological likes and dislikes.

A man of meditation in a subtle way directly operates in the relative plane by generating tremendous spiritual vibrations which bring the favorable atmosphere in transforming humanity towards divinity. All living organisms are inter-related and therefore, any development in any sphere will ultimately affect and improve the other. We must create the most suitable climate for the manifestation of divine consciousness, so that a radical change of spiritual integration can be introduced in the physical plane.

Truth cannot be conceived by the mind which is in a disturbed state. A pure heart is the right instrument for experiencing the truth. The dynamic aspects of truth can be experienced when we are in deep meditation with mystical silence. The beauty of truth can be appreciated when we transcend the relative plane of mental process. The magnetic radiation of truth can be contacted when the mind is absolutely calm and serene.

Love is purely a state of divinity which cannot be captured by the mind because in the actual realization of unity, one transcends the mental realm of duality. Mere emotional attraction of physical objects is not an aspect of love. The quality of love can be experienced in the actual detachment in which reality alone is realized in deep meditative awareness. The beauty of love consists in dissolving the egoistic "I" by the elevation of the supreme super-consciousness of the absolute. There is nothing to unite because in the oneness of reality the pure consciousness alone shines silently. The question of union with higher divine self does not exist in the realization of reality.

The most difficult task in life is the maintenance of mental equilibrium all the time. The disturbing elements of distractions should be eliminated. We must have the ability to raise our minds to that level of meditation in which alone we can be aware of every mental activity dispassionately. The art of living is to understand all situations in a state of serenity. Our own mind is the chief cause for creating complications in our relationships with people, ideas, and things. To watch everything quietly without involving ourselves in it is important in developing meditation. Deteriorating factors come into one's life when one is not capable of facing the challenge of life calmly. A healthy sign of the mind is to receive every impact and situation without emotional disturbance.

The beauty and the purity of the divine life can be understood only when one improves in the art of meditation. The ability to understand the mind is prevented if one becomes a slave to one's own desires. An important aspect in the path of reality is the discovery of the inner workings of our minds in the mirror of relationship. Needless to say, that the spiritual life is not separate from daily practical problems, but on the contrary the spiritual life must be tested in the day to day life. We aspire for inner freedom, but real liberation can be had only in the spiritual palace and that spiritual plane or state is a direct experience that comes as a result of intensive meditation.

The sacredness of cultivating the wisdom consists in assessing the relative world as it is without the deception of attraction or repulsion. An intellect which is not properly governed by intuitive awareness is useless in the discovery of reality and therefore, it is necessary that one should train the intellectual faculty to be an instrument for the expression of divinity. Intuitive awareness can be achieved by the purification of the mind through self-contemplation.

The aim of human life is to aspire to something higher than mere sensual gratifications. All experiences in life amply prove the urgency of transcending the mental plane to the divine plane of intuition.

In meditation alone we are elevated to the height of bliss as material comforts will never bring happiness and contentment. The impacts of worldly enjoyments are transitory and they will not provide us with the peace of mind or the ability to live in the world without mental disturbance. Freedom is really a state of mind in which we observe all the activities in a manner not to be attached and contaminated by them psychologically.

The mysterious force of divine magnetism alone will purify the polluted atmosphere of mechanized materialism and our sacred task is to create the harmony of understanding by facing all the difficulties and obstacles calmly without deviating from our central aim of self-realization. The divine link and perfect peace can be fostered only in an atmosphere of purity and profound meditation. No one can change the mentality of others quickly and we elevate humanity to the extent we commune with the reality.

If we observe our minds we will find that we are never free from the corruption of desires. The cravings are given much importance by repeated gratifications and we cannot expect the blessing of divine manifestation if our minds are distracted by the impacts of material pleasure and mental confusion. In life we must have the ability to move in this world fearlessly with the meditative magnetism of spiritual serenity, so that the grace of divine power can be radiated for the betterment of humanity.

† Article No. 23

The Eternity Here and Now 4

Man is all the time deceived by his projections of the mind and it is apparent that the cause for suffering is due to the various attachments that he has in the material world. The nature of the mind is to cling to innumerable sensations and therefore it is very necessary that one must observe the activities of the mind in a detached manner dispassionately. We give importance to many things and if we watch closely, we will find that nothing in the world will ultimately give us happiness and liberation. Real freedom consists in keeping our minds undisturbed under all circumstances and needless to say, that in meditative awareness alone we can attain to that state of liberation from the conditioning factors of emotional complications.

The beauty and the sweetness of meditation can be experienced directly when we elevate our minds to the height of super-consciousness. Perfect peace is really a state of mind one has to realize through deep meditation and thus only we can establish true freedom and tranquility in the manifested world. Meditation consists in understanding our minds in the mirror of relationship as this kind of self-observation is very essential for the development of spiritual integration. The capacity to be aware of everything including the function of the mind is the correct method for the attainment of reality.

Do not react to anything violently, take what comes to you in an attitude of utter dispassion. Let nothing worry you as your business is to do your allotted job silently with a smiling face and leave the rest to universal law without bothering about the result. Be restful always in a relaxed mind. Mental

excitements and sensational irritations should be avoided by adopting right concentration and clean conduct.

It is very important to impart the knowledge of spiritual hygiene which means the conservation of sex energy for utilization for intellectual work, emotional refinement, and spiritual service to humanity. In the past, the Eastern tradition emphasized through various methods of self-discipline that the householder's life was only a stepping stone for the moral advancement in the direction of spiritual emancipation. The householder's life was a centre for undertaking various kinds of mental adaptability and emotional adjustment. But nowadays very few people realize the utter necessity of preserving the sex energy for spiritual development.

The defects that prevail in family life can be eradicated by showing the strength of spirituality through meditation. Married life must be based on divine understanding for the harmonious development of physical body, emotion, mind and soul. Silent communion and the delight of purity is the deciding factor in experiencing love. The reason for keeping the body and mind strong is purely for the sake of receiving the spiritual energy and in this connection, the conversion of sex energy into brain power will help the manifestation of divine dynamic force.

The nature of the mind is such that it takes all impressions into the subconscious mind. Through self-observation one can eradicate the impressions provided if one can delve deeply into that dark region without emotional entanglement. The ability to perceive the actuality in all is the virtue one must practice in the art of self-mastery. One cannot have freedom by obeying the blind forces of desires. It is very necessary that one must dwell in the higher consciousness so as to function freely without the limitation of mental agitation.

Realization of reality is here and now and not in the future. This dynamic aspect of living in the eternal now all the time is the most fundamental factor to elevate the man from the mess of mental distraction.

We can attain divinity only when we know the art of meditation and the correct approach to the realization of divinity is the self-observation of the mind and

through meditation we can lead a life of detachment and dispassion. The beautiful aspect of divinity can be seen only when we experience an inner state of spiritual upliftment. Beauty is a quality of devotion which can be comprehended by the stillness of the mind. The bliss of silence is an attribute that can be enjoyed in the alertness of the mind. To commune with reality we have to eradicate psychological impressions through mental discipline. It is very necessary to lead a pure life so that we can be free from the complications of mental disturbances.

The metaphysical approach of solving the psychological problems does not mean the control of the physical body and mind, but the unfoldment of intuitive awareness and the harmonious development for the attainment of the absolute. There is nothing in the world either to reject or accept as in the higher realms of super-consciousness, we are able to observe everything calmly in a detached manner. It does not matter whether we live in the East or West, our souls are inwardly attuned to reality.

One is unable to present the inner mystical experience in terms of logic so as to be convinced and understood by ordinary people. The reality cannot be comprehended by the mind which is caught in the whirlpool of worldly agitations. The highest wisdom cannot be revealed through words. Hence, we have to keep silent and we also feel anything that comes to the verbal level is not the essence of That which can be contacted by meditation and contemplation.

The happiest period in life is when we are in meditation. Let us utilize our energy in developing our spiritual capacity. Concentration provides an opportunity to train one's mind properly and efficiently. One should not neglect the importance of spiritual training because the meditative atmosphere gives us an avenue to purify the emotional expressions in a dignified manner. Purity can be achieved by the practice of meditation. We are all influenced and conditioned by the sensual pleasures of the mind as the mind is all the time in movement chasing desires. Therefore, we must observe the subtle activities of the mind with alertness in a detached manner, so that there is the possibility of freeing the mind from the clutches of the cravings to which it is blindly attached. If we observe our minds deeply we will discover the very nature of the mind is such that it always creates problems, however subtle.

What is important is not the outward activities, but the vital interest in watching the reactions of our minds and this self-observation is very helpful to free ourselves from mental complexes and psychological complications. The basic approach to reality cannot be understood by the mind and hence, we have to find out whether there is the possibility of transcending the mind. If we observe the mind attentively, we will see or rather be aware that the mind functions by dividing into thinker and thought. The metaphysical puzzle is who comes first the "thinker" or the "thought." Our common knowledge suggests that the thinker, as well as the process of thinking, are inter-related in their operation. But reality can be realized only when the mind is silent which means something unknown to the mind alone can bring liberation. And that unknown factor is not conditioned by time, space, and causation. In meditative awareness there is no physical-relative world and therefore, we can say boldly the world seems to exist because of the mind.

The attainment of absolute reality cannot be achieved by the mind because it is a bundle of impressions. The mind is limited by its very function, because the experiences of the mind are nothing but false images which have been gathered and stored in our subconscious mind. It seems that the very foundation of the mind is made by wrong notions which erect barriers in paying attention to an object. To observe our minds in the wakeful state seems to be easy, but to watch the activities of our minds while we are in sleep is very difficult.

The more we go into the deeper layers of our minds the more we feel the difficulties in watching the operation of our minds because of the sensitiveness we have developed in the course of self-observation. This sensitiveness seems to be a higher form of activity. However, the capacity to observe everything with full attention comes as a result of silent contemplation.

The physical world we see, as well as its diverse manifestations are mere projections of unreal appearance. When the mind is dissolved in proper meditation, the relative world is negated and then it can be proved or rather directly realized that supreme consciousness alone is real. We attain real happiness and satisfaction only when the mind is quiet without being disturbed by distractions. The physical world seems real only in relation to our mind. If the mind instead of seeing the world sees the seer or observer, then there is the

possibility of transcending the mind and thus establishing a divine link with the higher consciousness. Meditative awareness and self-contemplation is the royal road to discovering divinity. Our physical eyes see only outward appearance, but to contact the unmanifest secret realm of cosmic consciousness, we have to train our minds efficiently by cultivating mental discipline and dispassion.

We can experience the beauty of perfect peace only when the mind is silent. It is very essential that a seeker should realize the importance of controlling the mind as otherwise he will be easily deceived by temptations. The mind is a bundle of contradictory desires.

† Article No. 24

The Eternity Here and Now 5

It is always clinging to sensual pleasures because the mind itself is a collection of sensations. Therefore, the mind is not the proper instrument for the discovery of reality. Pure contemplation is a state of mind in which there are no distractions of thoughts and only in this level of meditation can we observe everything clearly. When we are in deep meditation, we are extremely sensitive to external influences, but the mind is not disturbed by outward attraction and repulsion because of spiritual ecstasy; any pressure from outside has not the power to irritate the seeker who is in meditation because of the fact when the mind is fully concentrated, it has the capacity to face all situations unemotionally. Meditation is the assurance of a new and free life. It is a wisdom born of a new revelation by which the world and life are seen and encountered in freedom and serenity.

In meditation, we do not feel the weight of the physical body and mental reactions; we do not feel the time factor or environmental pressure. We are transformed to a peaceful atmosphere where beauty and wisdom alone shine and if we can live in the inspiring meditative mood, then we can do our ordinary daily work most happily. To reach that level of meditation we have to watch our mind constantly. Any experience which brings painful sensation or irritating excitement is a disturbing element to be avoided immediately by the

process of self-observation. To get to the root of the problem one must stop the disturbing factors of mental agitations by watching the function of mind in a detached manner through meditative awareness. Then there is the possibility of discovering divinity.

An aspirant who is well attuned to the infinite is a source of inspiration to all because in the height of contemplation he generates spiritual magnetism for the betterment of humanity. Prayer is a method of contemplation which provides facilities to commune with the omnipotent spiritual power and this magnetic grace transforms and uplifts to the height of perfection. Man is essentially divine and immortal. Hence, man cannot be destroyed by the impacts of the phenomena of physical death. The main cause for taking the human body is to eliminate all the impurities and thus prepare physically and spiritually to receive the grace of divine energy.

Therefore, let us all attain the state of spiritual liberation. The necessity of taking the human body is stressed because of the fact that the highest state of spiritual elevation is possible only to the man. This physical world is only a temporary abode for us to prepare and equip ourselves with the spiritual powers and potentialities, so as to undertake the long sacred journey towards eternity. Therefore, let us make every effort to cultivate the divine attributes of silent contemplation, internal purity, and intuitive awareness.

Nowadays people are extremely alert only in scientific discovery, but in experiencing the inner freedom of reality they are not enthusiastic and this lack of interest is purely due to too much of mental activities. We need a peculiar state of mind to observe the process of thinking in a contemplative attitude and we must also have the ability to be aware of the emotional conflicts in a detached manner so that the bliss of the supreme can be attained. The determination to lead a pure spiritual life is an important qualification, because the spiritual life consists in discovering the reality which is beyond the senses. By sheer ignorance, we have identified ourselves with desires and thereby we have lost the capacity to live in the more profound state of divinity. The cause for much suffering is due to attachment to sensual gratification. When we attune our heart to eternal silence of divine light, we develop the faculties of intuition and the serenity of meditation.

Whatever job one may be pursuing, there must be the yearning towards the attainment of inner freedom. The world of phenomena is nothing but the expansion of the mind. Therefore, to identify ourselves with any emotional attachment is futile because the secret of self-reliance lies in discarding all desires and to rest in perfect peace. The most important problem that we are facing today is to free ourselves from the confusion of psychological complications. It is very essential that we must understand the activities of our minds all the time correctly and completely or otherwise there is the possibility of erecting false projections and complexes by the mind.

† Article No. 25

Earth Changes

Since the beginning of time on earth, planetary stress has been a part of our planet. Its purpose is for evolutionary development, as a pressure for growth and progress. When man is responsive to this evolutionary pressure, working constructively, learning, and progressing naturally, there is less likely to be any pain or suffering accompanying the pressure.

Nothing ever stays the same. Just as the human body changes, so does the earth's body change for evolutionary purposes. Earth changes such as volcanoes, earthquakes, glaciers, etc., are natural occurrences and do release some of the planetary stress as well as create environmental adjustments.

Human consciousness is a relatively potent force within the planetary scheme. In accordance with karmic law (cause and effect), every significant human experience or activity on some significant scale evokes changes as appropriate to relieve the planetary stress, balance planetary forces, and bring about the needed lessons in consciousness. War, disease, pain, and suffering are karmic consequences of inappropriate activity, which balance the forces and provide needed lessons. They encourage adjustments to be made in human consciousness, which results in spiritual progress. When man is initially spiritually responsive, these kinds of effects are not karmically merited or needed for learning.

Fear of earth changes is a negative emotion which can immobilize humanity and prevent it from working for constructive adjustments. The two primary sources of fear are the individual's imagination and the collective mass consciousness of feelings and thoughts on the lower levels of the astral and mental planes where illusion and glamour abound. The vast majority of fear is unfounded, but even where real danger is present and one is aware of it, fear is not warranted, though caution and humility are. Freedom from fear comes from individual confidence in God, the Spiritual Hierarchy, and one's soul, and the cultivation of spiritual poise in the face of uncertainty.

Sometimes short-term predictions are made about humanity's future, but it is a fallacy that the future can be seen with any absolute accuracy. Even the most talented can only effectively generalize future tendencies or patterns because the future consists of vast numbers of dynamic karmic threads, ever changing as new inputs are added and old ones fulfilled. The resulting complexity is at best probabilistic and generalized, as well as open to much bias. At worst it is misleading or totally inaccurate.

Sometimes predictions are intended only as a warning of cause and effect, but are misunderstood. An old saying states, "If you touch the hot stove, you may be burned." The message is not that you will be burned no matter what, but rather if you don't adjust your course of action, this consequence may result. This cause and effect analogy can be applied to humanity and earth changes, when positive adjustments are needed.

Another problem with predictions is that they can become self-fulfilling prophecies. If enough people of thinking and feeling potency believe something will happen or fear something, then a tendency arises for that belief to come about for good or ill, consistent with karma. In this way, the intended karmic consequences can be altered, bringing about, for example, war or peace as the case may be. If enough people fear earth changes or an end to civilization, by leaving society in search of their own survival, they will weaken society, and their thoughts, feelings, and actions will be strengthening this fear, belief, or prediction.

Therefore it is prudent for spiritual students to seek the good in all, emphasizing constructive processes and not fearing or overly dwelling on the negatives in life. Energy follows thought, so give energy to the good.

As a spiritual student and observer, one should of course, be aware of humanity's many problems and failings. One needs to recognize what should be improved and work to improve it. Spiritual students can help uplift humanity's consciousness by helping humanity to improve its values, overcome materialism, selfishness, and separateness. Humanity will eventually become inclusive instead of exclusive and realize the unity and oneness and work for the highest good of all. Spiritual workers can support constructive people, groups, and ideas. They can daily send out light, love, and healing energies to encourage others and to cleanse the planet of coarse and negative thoughts and feelings. They can visualize and strengthen the planetary network of light, and they can say the Great Invocation daily. They can work to help humanity change and make its needed adjustments.

As ever there will continue to be planetary stress and individual stress, for pressure is an evolutionary factor and a necessary part of growth and progress. The problem then becomes learning to live with some measure of stress, allowing that stress to be an encouragement in consciousness without being disruptive. By facing stress appropriately, and making needed adjustments, spiritual students and humanity will balance the karmic and evolutionary forces, bringing increasing harmony, joy, and spiritual growth to the individual and to all mankind in accordance with the beauty of God's Plan.

† Article No. 33

Self-Assessment 1

A serious spiritual student necessarily must develop a mature understanding of the formal spiritual path and what it genuinely constitutes. Accordingly, the serious student is expected to develop the discernment and awareness needed to determine which teachings concerning the path are relatively valid, and which teachings are relatively misleading.

That same perception and discernment must also be applied analogously in regard to oneself. It is relatively important to be able to properly evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses, and to ascertain one's relative stage in regard to the formal path. Personal energies, lack of objectivity, or self-deception will cloud the evaluator's perspective, as will lack of awareness and a deficiency of self-knowledge. The ancient maxim, "Know Thyself" ever well serves the spiritual student.

Numerous qualities and factors can indicate an individual's quality of consciousness and his resulting relationship to the spiritual path. Being aware of some of the qualifications required on the formal path will enable the student to more accurately assess his own stage and thus realize what is before him to do, i.e., what qualities still need to be developed or strengthened, and what limitations still need to be overcome. In time, working with these concepts and energies and consciously qualifying (programming) oneself with the desired attributes will eventually bring about the needed qualities. This self-qualification effort can be achieved through the processes of affirmation and visualization, or for those who are properly trained by an esoteric group (at an intermediate stage of the formal path), through more occult methods involving energy manipulation. When these self-development and self-refinement undertakings are coupled with continual, sincere, and dedicated spiritual service with selfless motive, spiritual growth and progress become the natural and indubitable result.

The most meaningful and significant qualities and qualifications on the formal spiritual path are ones which are the most esoteric and subjective in nature, and thus the most difficult for a student to evaluate. For example, while qualifications such as cleanliness and neatness may be easy for one to assess, qualifications such as integration of the personality, alignment with the soul, and level (plane) of polarization of consciousness generally are not readily ascertained by the average or beginning spiritual student. First is required an accurate understanding of what each qualification actually entails. Then a true assessment of oneself is necessary. These evaluations lead to even more esoteric and subjective qualification such as evaluating one's overall quality of consciousness, one's stage of ray development on each of the seven rays, one's relationship to the formal path, and one's status on the path, both for one's soul

and for its reflected personality. Again a serious student must first achieve a true (valid) understanding of each of these higher qualifications (their meaning), as well as a standard upon which to measure or evaluate himself. Then he must truly see (assess) himself, knowing that he cannot avoid some distortion, but seeking to minimize it through an impersonal and detached perspective, aided by meditative reflection. Initially the standards of measurement may not be readily apparent (they are more advanced in comparison with average humanity). But as one works with the self-evaluation qualifications over time, meditatively and conscientiously, (soul) insights will come.

Many of these spiritual qualifications are included in a two-part Self-Assessment Form that follows, which can be used by the serious student as an aid in his self-evaluation process. As a prelude to the most significant qualifications, there are a large number of somewhat more easily evaluated (less subjective, less esoteric, and not as heavily weighted in significance, but nonetheless important prerequisites) qualifications that can be focused on initially. By reflecting on these capabilities first and interacting with the attributes and energies during Part (1) of one's self-evaluation efforts, the stimulus and inner awareness will be developed for later assessment of the deeper, more meaningful (more subjective) qualifications in Part (2).

Reasonable (considerable) progress must be achieved first in the development of most Part (1) qualifications before any (much) capability can be demonstrated in Part (2) qualifications. In addition, notable progress in Part (2) attributes are required before one is accepted for occult training by an inner esoteric group. Development of Part (1) qualifications, therefore, will lead to development of Part (2) abilities, and eventual association and training with an inner esoteric group. Until that time, however, the student is not yet sufficiently developed, refined, trustworthy, or deeply spiritually (service) motivated to merit a close relationship and occult training with an esoteric group.

Self-Evaluation Method

The serious spiritual student should monitor and evaluate himself regularly to stimulate efforts to improve his character and quality, and to assess his growth. At certain times, however, in spite of diligent effort, growth in certain areas may not be readily apparent. The student should refrain from digging up the

seeds of refinement recently planted looking for results. If he deals with himself in an impersonal, consistent manner, growth is sure to follow, and the flower of spirituality to bloom. The following Self-Assessment Form, Part (1), consisting of some of the more (relatively) easily measurable qualifications on the formal spiritual path, may be filled out several times a year in a carefully considered self-evaluation process. The Self-Assessment Form, Part (2) (associated with Article No. 34) (the more significant part) will be aided by one's efforts in Part (1).

The serious student should rate himself on each quality listed, according to some qualitative scale. On a separate sheet of paper, the student might indicate in writing why he rated himself as he did. He might also indicate what is the next step necessary in his development of this particular quality. This additional consideration will benefit his growth process.

Please note that the purpose of this form is for a serious spiritual student to evaluate himself; it is not intended for the student to be evaluated by another person. It is incumbent upon the student to be able to see himself clearly and accurately to stimulate his own growth and to develop self-mastery (and not reliance on another). The results are private, and for each student's use only. Please do not return self-assessment forms to the Upper Triad Association for evaluation.

† Article No. 34

Self-Assessment 2

On the formal spiritual path, continual self-evaluation is a necessary and important undertaking for one's development, refinement, and progress. A spiritual student needs to recognize his own weaknesses that they may be overcome, while being aware of his own talents indicates to him how best he can serve. Both strengths and weaknesses aid in revealing one's place on the formal path and suggest the next stage of growth and service to be achieved.

Of the many qualities and qualifications on the formal path, a number are included in a two-part Self-Assessment Form for use as assistance in a spiritual

student's own self-evaluation efforts. Some of the qualifications are more objective and relatively easy for a serious student to evaluate in the self-examination process. Many of these have been incorporated into Part (1) of the Self-Assessment Form (with Article No. 33). Others are more subjective, esoteric (and especially meaningful), but more difficult to discern. Some of these are included in Part (2) of the Self-Assessment Form which follows.

Development of the more objective qualities leads to unfoldment of the more subjective qualifications and eventual affiliation and training with an inner esoteric group. But association with an esoteric group occurs only when the student has a considerable amount to offer in the way of quality of consciousness, trustworthiness, and talents (strengths) (or potential talents). For the student must be worthy of a deeper association and occult training (with an inner esoteric group) for it to occur, and there are many tests to be met and virtues to be developed.

As the student begins to know and understand himself better, he is better able to understand God and the universe, for understanding the microcosm gives insights (and correlations) into the macrocosm. But it is easy to be self-deceived; thus honesty and humility are vital prerequisites to realizing truth.

Self-Evaluation Method

The process of completing Part (1) of the Self-Assessment Form will greatly assist the student in accomplishing the Part (2) evaluation. The student must have a clear understanding of each spiritual qualification, and then must impersonally (meditatively, with detachment) assess himself, seeking to minimize personal energies and distortion. In time, as one ponders and reflects upon the qualifications, working with the energies associated with each quality, greater awareness and insight will be realized. It is a continual on-going process of review, wherein this form may be completed several times annually as a stimulus to growth and refinement, for self-assessment is a basic aspect of the formal spiritual path.

The student is cautioned against constantly looking for results, for that will undermine the growth process. But he should have confidence that with diligent effort, growth will be achieved. The sincere student should seek the

good that is within himself, and he should give energy to (strengthen) (refine) that good within while overcoming the shadows.

Please note that this form is for the serious spiritual student's use only, as an aid in his or her own self-evaluation process to be completed by himself (not another).

† Article No. 35

Theosophy 1

Theosophy is the ageless wisdom, a body of knowledge (and means of insight) pertaining to underlying reality, including the entire meaningful scope of metaphysics. Theosophical insight can be found reflected in the mystical and occult core of religion, philosophy, and science. The name theosophy means divine wisdom. It includes the accumulated wisdom of the ages. It is often called esoteric or occult because it deals with what is hidden and essential. Much of the esoteric teachings have not yet been revealed, but are available to those who are able to embrace them on the higher planes of consciousness.

Theosophy includes information and insight concerning the source and purpose of life, metaphysical principles, laws, and processes which uphold the universe. It concerns the mystery of God, and the mystery of the human being. It gives great insight into cosmogenesis (the origin and development of the universe), and into anthropogenesis (the origin and development of humanity), including human purpose and the means of spiritual evolution. In more recent times, theosophy has been widely identified with teachings advanced by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and The Theosophical Society, founded in 1875 as a revival of theosophical thought and carried forward today by a number of theosophical and metaphysical groups.

The tradition, however, is ancient. When human beings first individualized, i.e., became nominally self-conscious, they were guided in their development and experience by super-human beings who shared with them knowledge and understanding according to their capacities. These super-human beings passed

through the human stage well in advance of the present humanity (there is a continuum of lives, races, lifewaves, kingdoms).

As humanity evolved in consciousness and was increasingly able to experience without need for direct guidance, the "teachers" gradually withdrew to the higher planes and now only provide gentle and subjective encouragement. And as human beings have evolved onto those higher levels, the super-humans have been replaced by the pioneers among humanity, those who have become more than human (having completed the requirements at this level), and the others have withdrawn to even higher levels. But the body of esoteric knowledge continues from ancient times.

Generally, wisdom teachings consist of three major levels. The lowest level is that of exoteric teachings that are freely available to and comprehensible by the bulk of humanity. These teachings in their higher sense are limited, veiled, and often in the form of parables or aphorisms, but in their lower, more practical sense, are more-or-less self-evident to most of humanity. The intermediate level is that of the so-called lesser mysteries, includes metaphysical teachings above and beyond the conventional. The highest level is that of the so-called greater mysteries, that which is purely esoteric and in its truest sense is available only on soul (causal) levels and cannot be written, spoken or brought down into the concrete mind without great distortion and misunderstanding. The bulk of humanity are simply not sufficiently developed in experience and consciousness to understand. There is no judgment implied in this. The higher teachings are readily available, to anyone who can approach that place on the higher levels of consciousness. Few can. But anyone can, in principle, provided the student is clearly devoted to the quest.

The various so-called "esoteric teachings" are actually teachings derived from the lesser mysteries, and the translation and expression of these ideas into the concrete mind can vary widely in quality, depending on the character and quality of the intermediary.

Theosophy 2

Purely esoteric knowledge carries with it a great responsibility, as well as power that can be misused unless the recipient has a well developed conscience and sense of propriety. Therefore esoteric knowledge and insight is protected, inherently. It is not so much a matter of secrecy as it is a matter of most people not being able to comprehend it. However, as humanity evolves, knowledge which was once considered esoteric becomes, by degrees, exoteric and available to all, as humanity's consciousness, quality, and abilities grow. Today, for example, most of the lesser mystery teachings are generally and readily available for a serious spiritual student to use to teach himself the basic principles. The greater mysteries, however, remain secret, except to a very small number of people who are able to work through soul contact.

Even in the outer, orthodox teachings of religion, philosophy, and science, although the exoteric tenets may vary considerably according to perspective and culture, at the core of each is found the very same shining esoteric truths. At the highest level, all share the same (one) reality and truth, for all is one. The founders of all the great religions were initiates of the mysteries and taught some aspect of the esoteric tradition. A rich and profound source of theosophy has come from India, and The Vedas (Hindu scriptures), including The Upanishads, and The Bhagavad Gita. Aspects of theosophy may also be found in religions such as Buddhism, Sufism, and Taoism, as well as in The Kabbalah of the Jewish teachings, and in esoteric Christianity. Theosophy has no dogma, creed, or ritual. It simply presents certain ideas for one's own consideration and evaluation, and emphasizes the source of unity underlying all expression. In spite of diversity of approach and cultural differences, theosophical teachings generally contain certain basic principles.

(1) There is One Life, eternal, boundless, and immutable, from which the universe arises. From this One God are differentiated all lives and all forms, with God being both immanent (within each life) and transcendent (external, more than each life). (2) Everything in the universe throughout all of its kingdoms is conscious to some degree, a consciousness of its own kind and on

its own plane of perception. This consciousness is evolving, as the universe is not the product of chance, but rather the outworking of a divine plan of inner guiding principles and purposiveness in progressive evolution of consciousness.

(3) Universes and the lives within them manifest and disappear according to a natural cycle, or cosmic law of periodicity. This process includes progressive incarnation (reincarnation) and is seen everywhere in nature, of periods of activity and growth alternating with periods of rest and assimilation. The universe and everything in it is temporary compared with the eternal, immutable One. (4) Life is conditioned by the Law of Karma, known as the law of cause and effect, which for man yields learning experiences and encourages evolution as a consequence of free will.

Theosophy also teaches that cosmic manifestation has two phases, involution and evolution. During involution, billions of units of individual spiritual consciousness called monads issue forth from the one undifferentiated source. Reflections of the monads descend more deeply into matter in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms and through this experience finally gain self-consciousness in the human kingdom. Evolution begins as these self-conscious human beings gradually develop the divine potential within themselves, gain freedom from attachment to matter, and ultimately return to the One from which they emerged.

† Article No. 37

Theosophy 3

As a result of this aeonic journey, there is definite improvement in consciousness and awareness, as human lives achieve relative perfection. Evolution then continues in other ways. Attaining human perfection is eventually within the reach of all people, like those who have already accomplished that ideal such as the Christ, the Buddha, and others who inspire and encourage mankind. Recognizing the essential unity of the major religions, there is no need to convert anyone from or to any religion, but rather people are encouraged to seek to interpret and illuminate the higher, inner meanings of religion and sacred texts.

Theosophy is a synthesis of the deepest thinking (more properly, realization based on inner experience) of the Eastern and Western worlds. It focuses on the broader picture of the totality of existence, all that is, and uses an inclusive, correlative perspective. Though ancient in origin, it is really ageless, and underlies much of modern insight. Throughout the world today, there are many theosophical organizations continuing in the tradition of the ageless wisdom teachings. Whether they are called or considered theosophical matters not. What matters is the quality of consciousness embraced. What matters is the character and quality of the teachings.

While theosophical principles have always been available to the enlightened, there have been cycles over the course of history where the teachings have flourished publicly and then declined. Declinations occur whenever the mass consciousness becomes materialistic, sense-oriented, or personality-centered, naturally, in response to subtle pressures and qualifications. But a resurgence of the spiritual stimulation and restoration of the ancient theosophical teachings follows eventually (similarly, in response to subtle pressures and qualifications) (as humanity passes through a cycle of responsiveness (often following a period of great distress)).

A revival of theosophical thought in the Western world was begun through the efforts of Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (HPB) and others. Through her many writings, Madame Blavatsky endeavored to collect the various wisdom given to man throughout the ages and to restate them for the Western world. She gathered ideas from the East and the West, going to their esoteric source (to the extent of her abilities and responsiveness), and showing their essential unity. Her magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine*, was published in 1888 and dealt with cosmogenesis, the origin and development of the universe, and anthropogenesis, the origin and development of man. Madame Blavatsky emphasized that the book was not a revelation but rather a collection of teachings from thousands of books containing ancient wisdom which had appeared throughout the centuries at different times and places. She was non-dogmatic in approach, asking readers to consider these ideas, and accept them only if they seemed valid. Through her efforts and those of The Theosophical Society (and others), the West has been increasingly exposed to the ageless wisdom, and to the religious and philosophical learning of the East, and the

compatibility and oneness of both East and West has become more apparent. The brotherhood-sisterhood of humanity was emphasized, as was the unity of all life.

The aggregation of divine wisdom teachings given to humanity over the ages comprises what is known as theosophy. Theosophical truths are not exclusive to any particular group or culture, but rather belong to all of the spiritually awakened within humanity who are therefore and thereby responsive to these teachings.

† Article No. 38

About God and Man

Attributed to Robert L. Moore

Human nature has outgrown the old presentation of the ever-needed truths, particularly the presentation through the dogma and ritual of the orthodox churches.

Traditional belief in a "God out there" is disappearing, but even if there is no longer a "God out there," as they say there was for our ancient forbearers, that is no valid reason to declare that God is dead, or that there is no God, as many now do. It is just that those who make such statements are looking in the wrong place, and not finding Him there proclaim that He is dead or never existed. They have not yet discovered that "God is in here" and in their ignorance and in their inability even to start to know how to look "in here" they write Him off as just a "myth." Slaves of the objective, they refuse even to admit of the existence of the subjective, much less to develop the techniques for its exploration. Particularly this seems to be true of some humanists who declare that "men have but one life to lead ... and need no sanction or support from super-natural sources, which in the form of heavenly gods or immortal heavens does not exist." Their philosophy is "that our only home is in this mundane world and there is no place else to go."

This type of thinking seems to be taking root in the age of the secular city, which is tending to become an age of no religion at all. Our intellectuals are particularly susceptible to this ailment. Charmed with their own brilliant minds and enamored with their supposed "advanced" thinking they consider that they have outgrown God and myth. Actually they have freed themselves, as all should, from subservience to authoritarian dogma and arrived at a mid or neutral point which they smugly consider an end instead of what it is, a beginning.

This new beginning should be to start the exploration of "in here," the search to find and know the Divine inner spark latent within the composition of every human being. To find and then nurture it until enlightenments it produces transforms them from caterpillars to butterflies.

There resides in the depths of each human being the same powers of transformation that are inherent in the atoms of uranium and similarly capable of vast releases of energy which can transform the objective into subjective, the illusory into the real.

To turn inward, then, it is for me a search for such spark of Divinity as I believe lies within the core of every human being. Call it the God immanent or as a generalization just God as He is personal to each of us.

In this context God is not external to man. Man and God are one. Neither is complete without the other. They are the two sides of the same coin. They are the greatest of all the sets of opposites -- the Spiritual and the personal or material. Man the personal, God the Spirit; Love -Law -Life. These are manifestations of God through man.

Recognizing God immanent as well as transcendent we can then view Him as the great power-house pouring forth a perpetual Spiritual love -- a symbol of which is sunlight; Creator of great impersonal Divine Law and Plan; Source of the "Élan Vital" (Holy Spirit) generating Life in all things.

Man the personal can encounter God the Spirit through man's Divine potential of apprehending and coming to an understanding of the great Laws and principles which underlie the Universe. And man longs to do so. God has an equal longing to become personal in man. For this He created man and

endowed him with the Divine Spark to make this potentially possible. God seeks to perfect himself in man as man does in God.

Divinity can only find expression through humanity and God must work out His will through man. The Divine Plan must be implemented by mankind. Mankind is free and men determine their own destiny. Man, gloriously created imperfect was yet endowed with the potential of perfecting himself and thus the God-man unit. This is the fundamental purpose and meaning of evolution of this planet. The Divine Plan was placed in the custody of man to work out and it is this task and responsibility to modify, qualify and adapt the Plan in accordance with the needs and environments of evolving humanity. Man is given the free will to do this. As individual souls we inhabit individual physical bodies and live individual lives. God is the Divine incarnation in humanity as a whole, providing the unifying power that can make all men one and endowing them with the potentiality of self-transformation into His likeness.

He sent His Son to show man the way to perfection. Now man must work toward that perfection through his divine capacity for self-transformation. Thus the great opposites are to be reconciled in divine integration, each working toward perfection and needing the other for its own salvation -- Man's salvation is in God but equally God's salvation is in man.

If then our task is to come to an understanding of the Divine Plan and to "modify, qualify, and adapt" it to the needs of humanity we must never turn away from concern with humanity's problems, we must unify ourselves with all that is, and working with and through things as they are, develop that loving understanding that alone can build the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. I suggest that this is a new and higher type of religious activity, a new method of drawing nearer to God, that may be the true way of achieving the "mystical union" of God and Man.

The way to the Union has already been pointed out by the Christ who unified in Himself God and Man. He has shown to man how he can draw on the great sources of Life, power, and Grace to live in conformity with the Divine Plan in recognition of the true meaning of our existence.

The devotee stresses the idea of gratitude to God: for his Mercies, for his Grace, and often for personal favors. I am grateful to Him for one great reason, that His Divine flow of Love, Law, and Life is so utterly, completely, perfectly, impersonal in its spiritual greatness.

Consider the great symbol of his Love and His Power, the sun. Truly the sunlight represents both. It is available to all to use and make their own. And it is so beautifully impersonal. It can warm or it can burn, it can make nature grow lush or it can scorch it dry, life giving or life consuming. We adapt ourselves to its best use. And so we must also adapt ourselves to all His great laws.

Divine Law grants to each of us, automatically and impersonally the chance to work out our own personal and self-controlled salvation. I am grateful for His great Law "as ye sow so shall ye reap." For that leaves it up to me and I shall have no one to answer to but Him -- He who is my Soul and deepest heart. He, Source of Love, of Energy and Power, pours it out on us constantly and freely. We can use it as we will. We can take it or not. We are responsible. We can progress (or retrogress) on our own. And if we choose to try to progress His Energies and Powers are ours to use to the fullest extent that we make ourselves capable of assimilating and directing them.

The great laws of life are impersonal -- automatic in their workings. The laws whose workings we understand little we often label "moral" laws simply for want for knowledge of the real workings of cause and effect which they represent. We understand the law of gravitation and so do not have to attach a moral label to it. We do not have to say that to break this law is wicked or to promulgate a commandment "Thou shalt not jump off the roof." We do not have to because we know just what would happen.

We do say "Thou shalt not steal -- or kill," or do a number of other things which violate other laws, the effect of which is not quite so apparent but really just as definite and automatic in their workings as gravitation. We lack the understanding of the consequences of our actions and perceive only the short term material results. When we "break" one of these so-called "moral" laws, most of which have as their underlying basis the great law of harmlessness, we do ourselves an injury just as definitely and surely as if we were to jump off the

roof, and just as surely will we have to work out the pain and bad results to the injury we have done ourselves and others as we would have to go through the pain and time of a broken leg.

The moral progress of a man or a nation is measured by his increase in understanding of the real effects of contraventions of the great natural laws. You do not seek to hurt those whom you love, you know that hurt to them is just to you. If you loved every one you would do harm to none as you grow in understanding you love more and more, since the scope of your relationships increases. When you "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself" and expand the definition of neighbor to include all humanity you have made progress, and not progress in just becoming "good" but progress in knowledge of how things really are.

From this knowledge comes progressively the sense of the meaning and significance of life and a guide to its direction, and as we progress upon the path of self-transformation ever new meaning will appear.

† Article No. 26

The Spiritual Path

Discerning What is Real

Much of the publicity associated with the formal spiritual path is quite distorted and misleading, however well-intended it may be. It is personality-oriented and often provided by unqualified persons. Those who are qualified are generally impersonal (trans-personal, universal) in their focus and involved more in non-public activities.

Most of the people who are attracted to the formal path in this public context are drawn by the glamour of the path and by their own personal interests. They are attracted to the personalities involved, to the mystique of the path, and frequently for ego gratification through a feeling of being special (or superior) in some way. Some see the path as a way to solve personal problems and obtain the external things they desire. Others are kind-hearted but are only interested

in dabbling. While aspiration and an interest in helping others may be present in many of these people, their expression of service is usually colored by self-focus and a sense of self-importance (self-deception).

The true attraction to the spiritual path comes from an inner soul prompting, from humility, quality of consciousness, valuing higher truth, a recognition of unity, and a sincere desire to serve God and humanity.

Part of treading the spiritual path involves developing the inner awareness and discrimination as to what is real and what is unreal (not truth, glamour, illusion). This is a continuing process as one is ever evolving and eventually recognizing higher, more inclusive truths and seeing through limiting and distorted concepts and ideas. Truth is relative. And truth is absolute.

Therefore discerning what is true about the spiritual path is part of the process of approaching the path itself. Interestingly, the majority of the people who think they are on the formal path, are not. And even those who are actually on the path frequently think of themselves as much farther along than they really are. Humility and impersonality are of vital importance in all spiritual undertakings so as to enable the student to realize the truth and avoid self-deception. Actually, the place of the student is not really that important if he is relatively free from glamour (illusion on emotional levels) and illusion (distortion, untruth on mental levels) about himself and the path, for then he can work and serve effectively and be of use spiritually no matter what his position.

Just what is the formal spiritual path? It is the path of conscious, accelerated evolution in consciousness (and service) eventually leading to human perfection and liberation (after which evolution continues in other ways). The bulk of humanity evolves gradually towards human perfection (which is a relative perfection) but some souls choose to achieve in fewer lifetimes what would normally take many, many incarnations. It is the soul that makes the decision to tread the spiritual path, which then must seek the cooperation of the personality. That entails a major challenge of the path.

There is only one spiritual path, but within it there are endless differentiations, encompassing numerous methods. However, there are certain general

requirements in consciousness and experience that all students must meet to achieve graduation or liberation.

The formal spiritual path has four stages: (1) the paths of approach, (2) the path of aspiration and the path of probation, (3) the path of discipleship, and (4) the path of initiation, including both minor and major initiations.

These stages lead to self-mastery, with each of the formal stages having progressively higher, increasingly difficult prerequisites. So much is required on the rigorous (formal) spiritual path, much more than a lot of the publicity about the path would imply. Those who provide public information about the path sometimes have little idea how much there is to know and to be and to do. They have little realization of the most difficult of spiritual responsibilities, assignments, and evolutionary pressures that must be faced.

They have little appreciation of all the many virtues to be developed, the great depth of impersonal (inclusive) love required, and the encompassing, high development of the mind needed, which then must be subjugated to the will of the soul. And they have little understanding about the total service requirements to God and humanity. While the aspirant is largely concerned with his own progress, the disciple on the path is much more concerned with the spiritual work to do. Progress then comes as a natural result.

The word disciple is related to the word discipline, and self-discipline becomes the keynote of the path. All that is notably coarse, dross, impure and limiting in one's personality (the physical, emotional, and mental bodies) must be largely overcome and purified (a long process) before one can enter the path of discipleship (where refinement continues). Personal energies (self-interest) and attachments, which distort one's perceptions and conclusions and prevent soul alignment and true spiritual realization, must eventually be transcended. The impersonal (universal) perspective of the soul must be developed to achieve spiritual understanding and awareness.

The path of enlightenment and service is a continuous, progressive test. And the testing and the work go on amid the noise and activity of modern life, for the spiritual student must meet his outer worldly responsibilities or dharma as well

as his inner ones. He does not seek to escape his duty, for the path requires that all dharma and karma be fulfilled in good order.

The spiritual path lies within oneself. There are many outer books, publications, groups, speakers, and schools which may or may not be helpful in the lower stages of the path. (In the higher stages only the soul can provide the needed assistance). The serious student must be able to recognize inwardly through the light of his soul the basic principles of the path and be able to discern what outer information is valid and helpful. The myriad of public information makes it difficult and challenging to discriminate the real from the unreal, but it is just this challenge that will help the aspirant to the path begin to develop the very needed sense of discernment required for spiritual work. With humility, impersonality, and determination as his co-travelers, the serious aspirant will eventually find and know the joy of treading the spiritual path.

† Article No. 27

Approaching the Path

The bulk of humanity is slowly evolving and becoming more responsive to evolutionary and spiritual pressure (energy). Within humanity, there are many, many men and women of goodwill in the world today, kind-hearted, well-meaning, and sincere in their practice of whatever religious, metaphysical, or philosophical approach they take. Even though these people are good people, who love God however they view God, and who are perhaps involved in humanitarian work, it does not necessarily mean they are on the formal spiritual path.

Out of this group, some (a relative few) may eventually begin to take the steps to approach the formal path. Within the human lifewave, those on the (formal) spiritual path are the pioneers or forerunners in human consciousness who have progressed more rapidly than the bulk of the lifewave. This is quite natural, as within every lifewave some lives progress more quickly than others, while most lives evolve at the intended rate, and some are not able to keep up.

Each group serves its intended purpose, the first group initiating the way and acting as pathfinders, the large middle group following, and the stragglers acting as a balance on too fast a pace, preventing unqualified development.

The (formal) spiritual path is found within oneself and is open to all who are able to respond. No one is chosen for it, rather one's soul, as a result of its progressed quality of consciousness, simply (hears and) responds to the inner call of the path and naturally "chooses" it. The soul by virtue of its developed quality commits itself to the spiritual path and then begins the process of gaining the personality's commitment. The personality alone cannot commit itself to the path, for that major commitment is in the realm of the soul (the higher self) alone. A personality commitment (of the lower self) by itself would not be lasting without the energy and support of the soul.

While everyone is meant to live and be as spiritual as he is able to be, not everyone is meant to travel the formal spiritual path of accelerated enlightenment and service. Within the human lifewave, the normal path of evolution for the bulk of the lifewave is itself evolving. More is required of man to keep up with the average pace of the lifewave than was ages ago. The accelerated, formal spiritual path (and its requirements) is also evolving. As an example of both factors, much of what was once esoteric (inner, hidden) knowledge is today exoteric (outer) knowledge, available to all.

A person must know himself through meditation and reflection to know what is appropriate for himself. Certainly the good works and spiritual efforts of all people are strongly needed and appreciated for humanity, whether it be expressed conventionally or through the formal path. Wherever one finds himself and under whatever circumstances, he can contribute to the progress of humanity and to his own progress, for all (the one humanity) benefit from each person's efforts.

Those who are drawn to and eventually qualified to tread the accelerated, formal path (disciples and initiates) face the most challenging spiritual assignments and responsibilities and work under the most strenuous and demanding evolutionary pressures. Only those souls (and associated personalities) who are qualified and consciously committed to the path could handle those pressures and assignments. Only those souls could safely and

effectively work with the types of potent spiritual energies contacted. And only those qualified personalities could be trusted for occult work and training.

Paths of Approach

The first preliminary stage of the formal path is called paths of approach. There are many outer ways and means (books, publications, speakers, groups, service, study, etc., aided by meditation) by which a person may initially approach the formal path (as a result of soul prompting). Much time and effort (and a number of incarnations) may be spent by the seeker exploring the many various approaches. At first his interest may wax and wane to a high degree depending on personality conditions and environment. At times, crises, pleasures, or outer responsibilities of daily life may seem to overwhelm and distract the seeker as he is absorbed in his personality life. But soul prompting eventually returns him to his task.

In the beginning, a seeker may move with enthusiasm and expectation (personal energies) from speaker to speaker, from book to book, group to group, and from one school of thought to another. Usually his search is mostly an outer one, filled with glamour and sometimes a high interest in phenomena which does call his attention to life beyond the physical senses, but which can seriously distract and ensnare him if he becomes too absorbed in it. The seeker also has his quiet, reflective, meditative moments, too, as he becomes more responsive to his soul. As time goes on, the seeker gains momentum as well as information and insight that will eventually be distilled and synthesized into useful spiritual teachings and understandings.

The Path of Aspiration

All true paths of approach eventually lead to the path of aspiration, (the first part of) the second stage of the formal path. As soon as there is a conscious interest in the formal spiritual path and in the conscious development required to make and receive a formal commitment to the path, a person becomes an aspirant. As ever in spiritual matters, one's motive is important. If a person is attracted primarily because of the glamour of the path or for ego considerations, he is not a true aspirant.

The path of aspiration can be divided into two categories: that which is mystical or heart-centered, and that which is occult or head-centered. The mystical approach is characterized by devotion, love, and aspiration. The occult approach is mental, characterized by light and understanding. In the beginning, an aspirant's nature is usually notably mystical or occult. However, eventually the serious student must develop and balance both aspects of himself.

The aspirant studies the (outer) esoteric philosophy, discerning with the aid of his soul what of the public information about the path is valid and beneficial. The (inner) guardians of the path become aware of the aspirant because of his increased quality of consciousness but no attention or energies are given until the aspirant has made considerable progress. There is much outer teaching already available for the path of aspiration, and the aspirant must learn the basics himself, of course always (albeit distantly) guided by his soul, the God within.

Sometimes a student in the preliminary stages of the path will seek a guru (outer teacher) to personally direct him. This was once the traditional way of learning for this phase. But even if a goodly amount of basic knowledge is learned, the student-guru approach has the problem of the student being dependent on an outside teacher instead of developing his own (soul) self-reliance and beginning self-mastery. This approach is also personality-centered, often with devotional attachment to the teacher, rather than focusing on the teaching.

While outer encouragement may be appreciated and may be offered by a variety of sources, any assistance should be viewed with discernment, discretion, and detachment (no lower emotional attachment). Today the formal spiritual path has evolved to the point where there is an abundance of outer material about the early stages, and now the student is expected to teach himself the basic teachings, directed by his soul (his own real teacher), thus cultivating needed inner self-reliance and discernment.

The challenges of the path begin immediately. Much of the aspirant's accumulated karma from past lives must begin to be fulfilled in more rapid fashion to free him for spiritual work. Normally karma is fulfilled relatively slowly, with earlier lives producing more karma than can be worked out, so it

accumulates. When one aspires to the path, this triggers the more rapid facing and fulfilling of past karma, until eventually as a disciple, most past karma has generally been met and new karma is fulfilled almost instantly.

Aspirants must come to realize that aspiration alone is not enough to travel the spiritual path. Many aspirants are well-intentioned, but weak-willed. Eventually they must develop greater determination and move beyond the path of aspiration.

When the aspirant learns and understands the basic principles of the path and overcomes any major obstacles due to his karma or character, he enters the second part of the second stage of the formal path, the probationary path. He becomes the probationary student. This means that the student has developed enough potential for making an eventual proper commitment to the spiritual path (after much more self-improvement has been achieved). At this stage (probationary student), the guardians of the path begin to offer impersonal encouragement and an overall qualification and testing. (Personality-centered attention, which is a glamour of the path, is not really an appropriate expression). Now the probationary training and emphasized self-discipline and refinement begin.

† Article No. 28

Probation 1

Physical Purification

The path of aspiration and the path of probation, which make up stage two of the formal spiritual path, usually take many lives to complete as the student must transform much within himself. With each new incarnation, a recapitulation process is necessary to overcome enough of the coarseness of the personality to reclaim the earlier achievements (spiritual progress). In the beginning this is difficult as the self-indulgent personality resists the will of the soul, but gradually the recapitulation process becomes easier.

The path of aspiration leads to the path of probation, a path of purification and preparation. This involves the purification of the physical, emotional, and mental faculties (bodies) of the probationary student and is known as the preliminary disciplines. Bodies of coarse, low vibration cannot respond to higher spiritual energies which are of a purer vibration. Therefore all that is coarse and dross must be eliminated. The three competing bodies must then be integrated into one unit, the personality, so that the personality may eventually be aligned with the soul.

The self-centered, reactive personality will by its nature resist all efforts to change. The casual student will give up the battle, but not the serious spiritual student. He will determinedly move on towards purification, refinement, and self-control. Until the student masters all the preliminary disciplines, he cannot be trusted by the guardians of the path, for he is not yet qualified to contact and channel the potent spiritual energies of the path effectively and safely.

Physical purification is a main aspect of the preliminary disciplines, with a large focus being on one's diet. All flesh foods (meat, fish, and fowl) must be eliminated from the serious student's diet, as well as all alcohol, drugs, and tobacco. Only those drugs which are medically necessary are allowed, but even so, they have a dulling and distracting effect on the physical body. Consuming the above items nourishes a coarseness in the physical body, lowers the energy balance of the etheric body, and creates roadblocks for personality integration and control. All have disruptive effects on higher levels as well.

Vegetarianism is important to the serious spiritual student for several reasons. Flesh food (meat, fish, or fowl), with its animal vibration, hinders spiritual consciousness and self-mastery. A spiritual student can go only so far on the path with a flesh diet. Eventually the change to vegetarianism must be made, in order to progress further. Karmically, the plant kingdom provides the food for the human and animal kingdoms, but this is not the responsibility of the animal kingdom (except as animal by-products like milk or eggs). Consciousness in the animal kingdom is too high for it to be appropriate for human use. Ingesting flesh with its lower physical vibration lowers the human vibration and stimulates the lower (animal) aspects of the human physical vehicle. However, just because someone is a vegetarian doesn't mean that he is necessarily

spiritually oriented, but at some point all serious spiritual students do become vegetarians for spiritual reasons.

The diet may be gradually adjusted (e.g., substituting cold-blooded fish for warm-blooded meat, as fish are less evolved and therefore less detrimental to human consciousness), but eventually the dietary disciplines simply must be voluntarily accepted and practiced, as prolonging the entire change strengthens the resistance of the personality and threatens one's success.

Alcohol, including beer and wine, as well as smoking, have a detrimental (dulling, distracting) effect on spiritual consciousness, and alcohol definitely weakens and undermines the self-control (self-mastery) which the serious spiritual student should be working hard to achieve.

Maintaining an appropriate weight is necessary also because over-eating and being overweight burden and dull the physical and etheric bodies and affect one's consciousness; and being underweight may mean a lack of vitality. Occasional fasting can be helpful in achieving physical transformation. Pure and nutritious food, moderate exercise and sunshine, fresh air, sleep and cleanliness all encourage vitality and fitness for spiritual work.

Purifying the physical appetites and desires also includes moderating and eventually transmuting the sexual desires. (This is in contrast to the relatively unrestrained sexual activity currently being expressed by much of humanity with its resulting karmic problems (consequences)). Suppressing the sex drive is not the goal for the spiritual student; rather, the sexual impulse is to be sublimated so that it is refined and the lower creative (sexual) forces are uplifted into higher creative spiritual areas. Instead of wasting this creative (propagative) energy, it can then be used by the soul for more appropriate (spiritual) uses. Sublimation frees the serious student from sexual need, from indiscriminate release of this force, and from distracting and absorbing physical and emotional sensation.

The serious spiritual student doesn't need to become and remain celibate, for the natural purpose of human sexual activity is (sensible) procreation, to provide opportunities for others to incarnate. And this is certainly appropriate for even highly evolved married spiritual students. Rather, the serious students must

begin to gradually liberate themselves from sexual need (a limitation), and move to sublimation through mental discipline and the appropriate spiritually constructive release of accumulated creative energies.

All the physical purifications should be approached with reasonableness and common sense. For someone approaching the probationary path for the first time, progress will come more slowly and greater effort will be required. But as momentum is built in this and future lives, progress is expedited. Once the preliminary physical disciplines are achieved, they no longer need be a major focus for the serious student. However, the preliminary disciplines also include emotional and mental refinement as well. By developing greater self-control and self-mastery in all areas of life, the serious spiritual student gains greater spiritual opportunities, enlightenment, and growth.

† Article No. 29

Probation 2

Emotional and Mental Purification

The path of probation, the second part of stage two of the formal spiritual path, involves the preliminary discipline. This includes the purification of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies of the spiritual student. Physical purification is concerned with the elimination of all flesh foods (meat, fish, and fowl) from one's diet as well as alcohol, drugs and tobacco. It also includes moderating and then sublimating (transmuting) the sex drive.

As physical purification begins, then the serious spiritual (probationary) student starts working on emotional and mental purification and preparation. Today Western society glorifies the emotions which results in unrestrained expression of coarse, unrefined feelings and desires. The base emotions and desires are the fuel and direction for the self-centered, self-indulgent, separative personality. This is harmful enough for average man, but it is particularly so for the serious spiritual student. Rather his goal is emotional (astral) purification. The emotions must be calmed, stilled, and controlled.

Then they can be purified and uplifted to be expressed (not suppressed) as aspiration and impersonal, inclusive (universal) love and joy. Negative emotions such as anger, hate, fear, and jealousy must be transmuted, as well as personal desires, selfishness, reactivity, and glamour. Glamour, which is illusion on emotional (astral) levels intensified by desire, can be a real stumbling block. Pride, self-importance, and self-interest are just a few of the self-deceptions to overcome, as glamour reappears in ever more subtle ways.

The refinement of the emotions does not imply passivity, nor does it include the opposite extreme of excitement. The middle ground of being spiritually poised and balanced is the student's aim, for then he is undisturbed by emotional eruptions, and his calm and purified emotional body can be used by his soul for spiritual purposes. The rarefied soul has no rapport with the vibrations of coarse emotions and desires and therefore soul contact is impeded. Thus in spiritual work, a calm, pure aura (emotional body) is a prerequisite.

How does one purify the emotional (astral) body? The student looks to the next higher plane(s) and calls in the efforts of his mind in conjunction with his soul. The mind is the instrument of discipline in both physical and emotional refinement. The strong and disciplined mind impresses and reinforces the needed goals upon the physical and emotional bodies, and should be used meditatively by the student to daily direct the pure white light of the soul through the bodies to aid in purification and transformation.

In Atlantean days, the emphasis for average man was on emotional (astral) development. Today in the Aryan Epoch, the emphasis for average man is and needs to be on mental development, even though most of mankind is still enamored with the emotions (is emotionally polarized). As humanity progresses, it will respond more to spiritual purpose and shift its focus to the mental plane, and the developed mind will then become the effective instrument of the soul. For serious spiritual students, today the area of emphasis is the abstract mental plane and the intuitive (buddhic) plane (mental and intuitive polarization) reached via alignment of the purified, integrated personality with the soul.

Frequently casual spiritual students become ensnared by their focus on the astral (emotional) plane and their excessive interest in psychic phenomena.

Sometimes this motivates them to attempt (lower) psychic development as they mistakenly equate that with spiritual development.

But astral (psychic) impressions are extremely potentially misleading or untrue compared to intuitive impressions from the higher, intuitive (buddhic) plane achieved by soul alignment. In Atlantean days, most everyone was psychic, as astral awareness was common, but it didn't and doesn't mean that someone who (was) is psychic is necessarily spiritual. Astral or (lower) psychic awareness is not one of the higher spiritual gifts, even though today many sincere and well-intentioned psychics give "readings" (which are often distorted or untrue) in the hopes of helping people. Astral awareness was generally closed off for man in this Epoch that man might develop his mind without distraction, and that he might move on to the higher (impersonal) spiritual intuition. Eventually the psychic abilities will be redeveloped as simply another tool for the spiritual student, but to focus on them excessively or prematurely now would distract and preclude development of higher spiritual faculties. And real danger such as instability or insanity can result from premature opening of the chakras (psychic centers).

As the mind is developed and used, it too must be disciplined and purified. The probationary spiritual student focuses on mental discipline to control and purify his thoughts and to prevent his concrete mind from becoming too independent and unresponsive to the soul. As the mind (mental body) grows stronger, the concrete mind (the lower mind) tends to be overly critical and separative. It forms opinions, mind sets, and attachments that invite illusion and prevent it from realizing higher, more inclusive truths. An open, unbiased, well-developed, and well-controlled (concrete and abstract) mind is a necessary tool for spiritual growth and illumination. A weak, scattered mind, or one that is full of unkind, critical thoughts, or closed to new ideas and concepts can be of little help in the study and improvement of self, or the study and application of the esoteric philosophy.

The probationary student must train the mind to overcome concrete-mindedness and to be able to think abstractly and correlatively. His goal is not intellectualism, rationalism, or being able to recite many facts (though he will know many), but rather to see the big picture and correlate the pockets of knowledge for higher understanding and realization. This happens through soul

contact and that is achieved only when the bridge is built from the developed, purified abstract mind (the higher mind) to the soul.

The student must use observation, study, and daily meditation (concentration, visualization, and contemplation) (20 to 30 minutes minimum) to develop the mind and build the link between it and the soul. He can program new mental habits into the mind. And then he can use his mind to avoid absorption in the mundane happenings of daily life, remembering instead the elevated spiritual perspective no matter what he needs to be doing outwardly. Retrospection at the end of the day helps the student review each day's living to make improvements. But actually, the serious student should program and qualify himself so that ideally he is always aware of his physical, emotional, and mental states and any inappropriateness so as to make an immediate adjustment. This will insure that he is living (practicing) the highest spiritual expression he is capable of and thus be in harmony with his soul, the God within.

† Article No. 30

Discipleship 1

From Probationary Student to Accepted Disciple

Going hand in hand with the preliminary disciplines of the path of probation (that is, the purification and preparation of the physical, emotional, and mental bodies) are the preliminary endeavors. These include practicing (the living of) honesty, harmlessness, humility, compassion, goodwill, inclusiveness, and non-criticalness, as well as undertaking daily meditation and spiritual service.

The serious student should avoid self-indulgence, pride, self-deception, personality inertia, mundane absorption, attachments, gossip, and needless talk (all glammers). He should maintain a balance between his head (occult) and heart (mystical) nature. And he should learn to work cooperatively in some type of preliminary outer service work with other spiritually oriented people. Most outer (exoteric) metaphysical groups, though well-intended and spiritually minded, are personality-oriented and hindered by aspects of glamour and

illusion. But they do provide a valuable opportunity for outer group expression, adjustment (learning to cooperate and get along), and service, until the student is more and better prepared and qualified to work with an esoteric (inner) group.

No matter where a student decides to focus his efforts, he should realize that there is no special chosen spiritual group or individual in incarnation, nor is there any special path to God. All are part of the One and all are used impersonally according to their quality and abilities. All are important; but none are especially important. Separativeness (setting oneself, one's work, or one's group apart by feeling especially important or superior) is a self-deception that denies the greater reality of Oneness.

With the encompassing requirements needed for the preliminary disciplines and the preliminary endeavors, and the problem of having an often recalcitrant personality, the path of (aspiration and) probation takes the student many incarnations and is often the longest stage of the spiritual path. After the probationary stage, however, a greater momentum is achieved. There is spiritual testing, and it demands the efforts of both the soul and the personality to succeed. Of course, none of the disciplines of the path are outwardly imposed. All are inwardly recognized and voluntarily accepted and practiced by the serious student in his quest for self-mastery and spiritual enlightenment.

When the guardians of the path see that the probationary student has fulfilled the probationary training and met certain requirements and qualifications (in consciousness and self-mastery) and is willing and able to make a formal commitment to the spiritual path, the probationary student then becomes the probationary disciple. Thus he enters the third stage of the formal path, the path of discipleship.

The commitment to the formal spiritual path that the probationary disciple pledges is made on the abstract mental plane (the lowest level of the soul) by the student's soul and is eventually realized by the mind of the personality on concrete mental levels. It is accepted on subtle (soul) levels by the guardians of the path who are not active on the lower planes. No true commitment to the formal path is ever achieved by the personality, by mere membership in outer organizations, or through outer means. Nonetheless, the cooperation of the personality is essential to the eventual success of the soul upon the path. While

the personality is, initially, the greatest hindrance and impediment, it becomes, eventually, a considerable asset.

The probationary disciple obligates himself to the spiritual path and all of its rules, while some who are already a part of the formal path obligate themselves to qualified students to provide additional training, qualification, and opportunity (which must nonetheless be earned by the student) (all is based on merit). The student agrees to subordinate all of his personality activities to the path, to deal with an acceleration of his own karma and to help offset the karma of humanity.

Concurrently, as the spiritual student has been progressing on the formal path gaining more experience, refinement, and quality of consciousness, he has been magnetically attracted to an appropriate (inner) esoteric group (ashram). This is a natural process which means that there is a magnetic rapport on soul levels (because of a similarity of vibration) of the student's ray energy, quality, character, temperament, qualifications and sometimes historical ties with that of the particular esoteric group.

An esoteric group (and ashram, its inner energy center) is a group of relatively highly evolved souls affiliated for higher spiritual purposes, usually organized subjectively along ray lines and existing beyond time, space, and the levels of personality existence. It is the subjective unit of service and spiritual evolution of the formal path. The Spiritual Hierarchy of the planet is made up of these ashrams (esoteric groups) and is an ashram itself in the larger sense.

The high spiritual quality (vibration) of an esoteric group acts as a ring-pass-not so that only those students who are properly qualified can approach or eventually move within an esoteric group. Many are the specific qualifications; the list is long and the tasks are demanding, though the list and tasks may vary slightly in emphasis from group to group depending on the esoteric group's charter and area of focus.

Much initial (probationary) spiritual progress can and should be made on the formal path as an individual, but eventually progress can be achieved only in group formation on soul levels via an inner esoteric group. The appropriate inner esoteric group may be approached directly through the soul, and indirectly

through a related outer (exoteric) group, if one is available. If an appropriate outer group is in existence, the student is obligated to work with that group and thus receive its encouragement in achieving soul alignment, leading to alignment with the inner esoteric group. The outer group's assistance to group members is subordinated to, but comes naturally with, its service activities.

The vast majority of spiritual students are not formally aligned with an esoteric group as they have not yet progressed to that stage. And the vast majority of outer groups are not aligned with an esoteric group as they are still personality-centered. Unaligned work is not nearly as effective or potent as aligned spiritual work; however meaningful experience and service can be achieved by unaligned individuals and unaligned groups as they endeavor to contribute to the spiritual plan.

The farther along the formal spiritual path one goes, the more narrow it becomes in not permitting inappropriateness, deviation, or spiritual inertia on the part of the student. For the disciple and beyond, the path is narrow in that a slight deviation elicits an almost instantaneous karmic response. For one not on the formal spiritual path (an individual not committed, who knows less and therefore is responsible for less), the same behavior will not merit the same consequences. His path is much wider and less demanding. But knowledge brings responsibility and a man is held accountable for that which he knows; he is required to live it.

Eventually, with diligent effort, the dedicated probationary disciple finally meets and passes the first major tests of spiritual consciousness on the path of discipleship.

Thus he becomes the accepted disciple and is formally assimilated into the appropriate esoteric group (ashram). This means the esoteric group accepts some responsibility for the disciple, whereas with the probationary disciple, no such commitment is made. The accepted disciple is assigned responsibilities commensurate with his abilities, talents and the needs of the group, and then continues the process of self-mastery, communion with his soul and the esoteric group, and service to God and humanity.

Discipleship 2

The Path of Discipleship

The path of discipleship is the third stage of the formal spiritual path and has three phases: that of the probationary disciple, the accepted disciple, and the obligated disciple.

Impersonality and detachment are the hallmarks of a true disciple. The disciple has moved from a personal focus concerned mainly with self (self-interest, self-development, self-expression) and the aspects of his personality life (work, family, friends, and outer groups) to an inclusive, impersonal (transpersonal, universal) focus. Impersonality in the spiritual sense does not mean coldness or lack of caring, but rather compassion and concern, although not to the state of becoming emotionally or mentally overcome (absorbed) and distracted. For the disciple, personal love, the lower emotional expression of love with its limiting attachments, has been transmuted into impersonal love (a higher form) that is universal and unlimited. It is an expression of the soul (the higher self, the God within) and not the personality (the lower self). The soul by its nature is impersonal and focused on unity; the personality by its nature is intensely personal, self-absorbed, and separative. Aligning with the soul and expressing its quality is the way of the disciple.

Detachment frees the disciple from attachment to physical objects and emotional pleasures. The serious student need not forgo worldly possessions in moderate amounts, but living in luxury implies an attachment to physical possessions. Properly, the student is simply a custodian for his material resources and is responsible for their wise use and spiritual direction.

By the time a serious student becomes an accepted disciple, he has benefited from many "teachers" in his lives. In the early and middle stages of human evolution, karma is the major teacher as man learns his lessons from life (karma, the law of cause and effect) and thus progresses in consciousness. As always he is guided indirectly through karmic qualification and by the soul, his own

individual teacher; but the soul becomes the really important teaching factor as a man advances onto the spiritual path and becomes more responsive to (aligned with) his soul.

There are also exoteric (outer) spiritually oriented individuals who may serve as teachers as well, and may be especially sought after (though not actually needed) by the seeker in the early stages of the path. Too much reliance on outer teachers can hinder developing one's own means of learning and realization. Ultimately it is the student himself who is responsible for determining if any particular teaching is valid and meaningful. Thus developing one's own discernment is quite significant. The serious student will find ample mature outer materials (books, writings, publications) about the first stages of the path, and by studying, pondering and meditating on these, will teach himself and eventually begin to develop his own inner means of learning as well. In earlier times, the student-guru approach to learning was preponderantly utilized, which is usually quite personality-centered. In this more mature approach (self-teaching), the student avoids becoming emotionally attached to a particular teacher, focusing instead on the teaching, not the teacher.

Today's approach to exoteric (outer) teaching beyond the preliminary stages of the path is a group-centered approach (rather than a personality-centered one), with the outer teacher taking an increasingly subjective role within a group of relatively mature spiritual students. Exoteric and esoteric (soul) group relationships and understanding are fostered impersonally.

The group-centered teacher (senior member of the exoteric group, and outer representative of the inner esoteric group with which the outer group is affiliated) becomes more of a "presence" or energy source of impersonal encouragement (and example) for students. Through the senior member's quality (inductive presence), impersonal teaching of principles, questions posed, and over-all qualification, the group-oriented teacher helps students to find their own answers to questions, encourages service (a priority) and aids in strengthening the soul alignment and the student's link with the inner esoteric group (via meditation).

The mature spiritual student (disciple) may also receive impersonal subjective teaching (encouragement) on soul levels from certain members of the inner

esoteric group (senior disciples and initiates) not in incarnation. It is important to clarify the nature of these contacts. Unfortunately the glamour of the path includes the glamour of seeking a contact from a master, the head of an esoteric group or ashram who has achieved human perfection. But the master (or esoteric group) has no personality attachments or interest in the personality life of the student. The master is concerned only with the overall divine plan and the immense spiritual work undertaken, not with the daily (mundane) affairs of a student. Although the master may infrequently offer spiritual encouragement or a hint to consider, he will never tell a student what to do. The student must decide through his own free will what is appropriate and he (not the master) bears the resulting karma for good or ill. Thus the student also develops self-mastery. By the radiance of the student's light will the master know the student and his progress.

Any contact from the master or esoteric group is usually subjective and general, and contact comes only when the student has achieved a high measure of soul consciousness and is well established on the spiritual path (and not so susceptible to glamour). Knowledge of the existence of the spiritual masters, the spiritual hierarchy, and the divine plan can be an encouragement to the beginning student, but it should not become a distraction or a glamour. The serious student must do what is before him to do (his spiritual and secular dharma), fulfilling all appropriate obligations, serving, refining himself and living the spiritual life.

The primary purpose of the inner esoteric group (and any related exoteric group) is spiritual service in some particular (chartered) way. The progress and evolution of its individual members is a secondary focus. Formal (official) advancement is determined according to group (higher) needs (that is, the needs of the esoteric group, the spiritual hierarchy, and the logos), rather than the desires of the individual. When one is focused on spiritual service, however, individual progress is the natural and inevitable result. Individualistic spiritual ambition (separative personal energy) and demands for advancement or initiation will thwart the very goal the seeker desires. With humility, selflessness, and service, spiritual evolution is achieved.

The more advanced (occult) training on soul levels becomes appropriate after the preliminary (probationary) training and refinement are accomplished. Many are

the abilities and qualifications (quality of consciousness) required by the candidate for occult training, and the student is continually tested. Some of the prerequisite qualifications include: being integrated as a personality; a polarization of one's consciousness at the mental (or above) level of consciousness; an appropriate degree of alignment with the soul; mental ability; meditation ability; visualization ability; ability to consciously program (qualify) the personality; achievement of the preliminary disciplines and the preliminary endeavors; potential telepathic ability and subjective awareness; selflessness; and a strong commitment to the spiritual path.

Also among the many qualifications are relative freedom from personality-centeredness, mundane absorption, glamour, and self-deception. Because occult training frequently requires adjustments in the student's aura and chakras (energy centers), considerable purity and stability are needed by the student.

Occult training includes working with a variety of potent energies, natural forces and energy manipulations to learn how to control and utilize them for spiritual purposes. It can involve knowledge of how to qualify an object with a certain spiritual purpose (in harmony with its higher purpose and natural order). It involves using the higher (abstract) mind and the soul in working with perception, imagination, creative visualization, and energy projection, while avoiding the inappropriate imposition of one's will.

Much of the occult work esoteric groups are assigned has to do with creating and sustaining energy patterns in accordance with the divine plan. A great deal of the occult work undertaken by an esoteric student in incarnation involves the evolutionary encouragement of humanity, by indirect and direct qualification. Much of that occurs indirectly (incidentally) as the mature student lives and interacts within humanity and thus qualifies it inductively by his presence and higher quality of consciousness. The direct qualification of humanity (imbuing it with certain qualities and conditions) for spiritual purposes also occurs, and is done by those who are properly trained (serving in and out of incarnation) and working with the evolutionary plan. The spiritual leadership and encouragement given to humanity never interferes with humanity's free will; it simply encourages (induces) progress according to the plan.

With occult knowledge comes power for good or ill. Thus it is so very important that the student be selfless, purified and trustworthy before any serious occult training is given. He must have the lower self well in hand and be in control of himself at all times, lest his efforts go awry with disastrous consequences for all concerned. The results in occult work of even momentary (careless) loss of self-control via negative thoughts or emotions (anger, hatred, resentment, jealousy, etc.) can be highly destructive, from being unsettling to the recipient of the energy, to being extremely harmful or even potentially fatal, depending on the potency of the sender, his link to the recipient, and his motives (deliberate or unintended). Energy follows thought. Even if negative thoughts and feelings (energies) are formed but held within oneself, they will be internally destructive.

Occult training makes one more potent (powerful), but it also magnifies any character faults a student may have. Because the harm and the karma can be great, the occult student qualifies himself to prevent any unfortunate, inappropriate (negative) energies from forming (within or otherwise) or being released, either through carelessness, or as a response to provocation from another person or event. Any coarseness embraced is a vulnerability and is a responsive, magnetic note attracting the coarseness of others, whether unintentionally or intentionally directed. Purity (light, love, quality of consciousness) aids in the safeguarding.

Sometimes in the case of certain advanced occult (spiritual) work, there is direct qualification of the occult workers by a more advanced (qualified) worker, and direct qualification (warding) of the work itself to protect it and prevent interference. Mantric defenses which call on external and unqualified forces for assistance are not used by esoteric workers. Direct qualification and manipulation of force fields are.

There is a great deal for the occult student to learn and assimilate, and the specialized training is a rigorous, on-going process. According to the student's measure of refinement, abilities, and the needs of the esoteric group, the occult student is assigned responsibilities, often working behind the scenes calling no attention to himself. The stresses and challenges of occult work and spiritual service are many. But great also is the inner joy of working in higher group formation helping to fulfill the divine plan of evolution.

Initiation

From Discipleship Through Initiation

By the time a serious spiritual student has achieved the stage of accepted discipleship, he is well established on the formal spiritual path. Before him lies still further development and the phase of obligated discipleship, before he advances onto the fourth stage of the formal path, the path of initiation.

With his heightened quality of consciousness, the disciple is a transmitter of spiritual energy. He is a link in an energy chain from higher planes of consciousness, as he invokes spiritual energy (through meditation, primarily in group formation), receives the energy, steps down its vibration, and releases it for humanity to use on etheric, emotional, and concrete mental levels.

The disciple is the observer in the world of humanity, the eyes and ears of those who are more spiritually evolved and do not descend into the physical world. The disciple is available (on call) for service at all times. There are no vacations from service, nor any hesitation to serve. And this is done entirely willingly (with right motive) without any thought of reward or recognition. With this attitude, the disciple finds that he is up to any assignment given, and his energies and resources are renewed as needed.

The disciple is not yet "perfect" and mistakes will be made. But the disciple will make the needed adjustments, learn the lessons, and gain from the experience. In this way there is no failure, just continued realization, growth, and service. The disciple does not interfere in the lives or free will of others or impose his ideas, values, or energies on those he seeks to aid. Though he willingly shares his beliefs if requested, he teaches more by induction (presence) and by example (in the way he lives his life). And that is a life filled with love, inclusiveness, harmlessness, goodwill, and wisdom.

In all aspects of his life, the serious spiritual student is required to live that which he knows. There are two grades of achievement associated with every

spiritual student (and every person in incarnation). One grade represents the highest degree of achievement ever attained by the individual's soul in its many incarnations. The other grade or degree is the one that the personality is currently manifesting, and that one is the important one. It indicates the level that the student is actually living at and determines his level of responsibility, opportunity, and trust.

With each new incarnation, the personality must again be overcome and the previous soul progress recapitulated. But this is not always readily accomplished (given the natural resistance of the personality and the varying circumstances in each incarnation), and thus there is usually a gap between the highest level of achievement of the soul, and the lower grade of consciousness currently being expressed (manifested) by the soul and through the personality. That gap needs to be bridged (the quality rebuilt and re-established) before any new spiritual progress can be achieved in the present lifetime.

As the accepted disciple accomplishes this, and focuses on what is before him to do, i.e., serving, refining himself, and living the spiritual life, he deepens and progresses in service and self-mastery. Thus he is able to pass the next tests and becomes the obligated disciple, which is the last phase of the path of discipleship (from probationary disciple, to accepted disciple, to obligated disciple). This is the first time the disciple is officially counted in regard to the esoteric group's measure (quota) of karma to be offset for humanity and the planetary scheme. It also means that the obligated disciple is now accepted at levels beyond the esoteric group.

With continued growth, refinement and service, eventually the path of discipleship leads to the path of initiation, consisting of both minor and major initiations. Initiation acknowledges the achievement in consciousness (and abilities) of certain significant qualities and attributes for (or toward) human perfection, and vivifies that consciousness. Formal initiation comes only in the context of the esoteric group, without being sought, and with the approval of the appropriate spiritual (hierarchical) authorities. It is conducted on soul levels, and no external organization or individual is able to dispense true initiation of the formal spiritual path.

Much glamour and misleading information exist about initiation. Many who don't yet have the spiritual means to understand, nonetheless convey information on the subject which is distorted and fanciful. Much glamour, illusion, and misunderstanding is thus created. However, serious writing on the subject of true spiritual initiation is naturally abstruse to protect it from those who are not yet qualified and purified, and in whose hands such higher knowledge would be dangerous, as great would be the temptation to misuse the knowledge to gain power for personal use, instead of for service. Thus in esoteric writings, there are blinds and veils to protect the teachings so that only those for whom it is intended (who are ready for it) can intuitively and symbolically unlock the key to the meaning. In addition, much about initiation simply cannot be put into words as there are no words adequate to explain, or the concept can only be hinted at or conveyed symbolically, so the knowledge, methods, and secrets simply cannot be passed along to one unqualified.

When a candidate is qualified and fit for initiation, there is a direct contact from the master that draws the individual into the process of initiation. Thus no outer knowledge or special training about the process of initiation is required. The occult training that a mature spiritual student receives is concerned with the work of the path (service), and not preparation for initiation. Paradoxically, service and self-refinement develop the quality of consciousness required for initiation. But the emphasis always is on continued (ever-expanding, never-ending) service and refinement, with initiation simply a natural and lesser consequence of the larger focus.

In the grand scheme of life (the divine plan), every (true) need is automatically provided for. Thus with any future needs (positions) (opportunities) within an esoteric group (ashram) or the spiritual hierarchy, the fulfillment is provided for in advance. The process is a natural, continuing, and flowing one in which those who are most qualified are, in the course of their spiritual service and self-refinement, naturally prepared by these efforts to take on increased responsibilities, and are thus vivified for the undertaking through the process of initiation.

There are three major initiations in the process of achieving human mastery or (relative) perfection. In theosophical and other metaphysical writings, five initiations are frequently noted. However, the first two initiations referred to

are minor initiations of the threshold (not major initiations), which reflect only that one is (somewhat) awakened and beginning or advancing on the preliminary or probationary stages of the formal spiritual path. These first two initiations are not considered formal (major) initiations by the hierarchy. Thus, the third initiation is considered the first major (true) initiation, for then one is truly transfigured and has become a refined, soul-responsive personality.

In the phases of the first two "initiates" (the "physio-etheric initiate" and the "kama-manasic initiate"), the soul is not yet in control of the personality, and a great battle of purification and refinement is still going on. Thus using the word initiate to connote those in these two stages is not really appropriate. Such spiritual students are more properly referred to as aspirants and disciples, depending on their current status.

Since the meanings of words such as initiate, disciple, probationary path, initiation, etc. can vary widely from source to source, it is quite necessary (imperative) that the serious spiritual student understand the context and the meaning of the word as used to avoid assumptions and misunderstandings.

The three major initiations relate both to stages of relative self-mastery and relative mastery of the lower planes of consciousness (the physical, emotional, and mental planes). With each major initiation, the candidate achieves a certain degree of development and refinement (self-mastery), and a particular level of mastery of certain planes (sub-planes) of consciousness. There can be some variation in candidates' specific abilities, but their overall quality must meet certain basic standards. The candidate must have achieved mastery over the forces of the corresponding planes, i.e. the appropriate number of sub-planes of each appropriate plane. This means he must be fully conscious (aware) of the forces and be able to effectively and consciously manipulate and control them. This is far more than just being able to be on a particular plane (sub-plane) of consciousness or to function there somewhat. While most people can function to varying degrees on the physical plane, few are fully aware of the forces on all seven sub-planes or can consciously control and manipulate them. Therefore, each of the seven sub-planes of each plane represents stages or degrees to be mastered.

Each major initiation also implies achieving some basic mastery on one of the seven rays. The ray that corresponds to the initiation varies, depending upon the ray of a candidate's ashram, the candidate's own ray composition, and the initiation being taken. The energy centers of the candidate are also vivified during initiatory processes. This is achieved safely, quite unlike the ill-considered (dangerous) dabbling sometimes attempted by beginners.

The subject of initiation elicits much glamour and potential for self-deception for those who are not yet integrated and aligned with their souls (whereby light and intuitive insights may be employed). Many outlandish claims are made by the uninitiated, while the true initiate has a great reluctance and no actual need to speak of his own stage of evolution. For him, the lure of the outer world is being or has been overcome and is transcended by an inner awareness of joy and fulfillment. At the master stage (the third major initiation), the initiate moves into the next higher kingdom (of souls).

Thus he continues to serve and evolve with his brothers, as the God within him (that he is) continues its path of unfoldment and service, knowing and merging with the God transcendent (with the lives and Gods and logoi beyond). It is an infinite, eternal spiritual path in the glory and progressive realization toward the One, eternal, all-encompassing, Absolute God.

A revealing, broader perspective hints at the magnitude of the spiritual path. Our seven planes of consciousness in the planetary scheme, including the monadic plane and our highest, the atomic plane or world of God (both far beyond the ken of most people), on a higher turn of the spiral, comprise simply the seven sub-planes of the cosmic physical plane (the lowest cosmic plane). In another correlation, our third major planetary initiation (wherein the master stage of relative human perfection is achieved) is only the first true solar initiation. In addition, one must complete our seventh major planetary initiation before one has achieved the first initiation from the cosmic angle.

Thus the process of evolution continues ever onward and upward, as all spiritual students are simply aspirants and disciples at some level. The masters and high initiates of the human stage endeavor to achieve their next step of service and refinement as do beginning human aspirants theirs. Our solar logos and all within the solar system, are, on a higher turn, simply a center of

consciousness in a great cosmic being. All are meaningful, no matter whether cosmic or microscopic, experienced or inexperienced, and all are evolving further according to a great and inspiring divine plan of evolution.

† Article No. 39

The Purpose of Life

From the time ages ago after the germ of mind began to unfold and man began to become a thinking being, certain eternal questions about the mysteries of existence first began to be asked and considered by the more progressed members of mankind. "What is the purpose of life?" "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" "What is my reason for being?" For those early seekers, insights into the answers were eventually realized through earnest reflection, contemplation, and meditation, and by exposure to the Ancient Wisdom teachings concerning the mysteries of life. Though many thousands of years have passed, the process today remains very much the same. But first one must ask the questions.

And interestingly, not that many people do. Most of humanity remain asleep, absorbed in mundane consciousness and daily living, never stopping to even pose the questions. Those who do usually become satisfied with orthodox doctrines and dogmas. Only a few resolutely search more deeply for answers to the meaning of life. But when the effort is intensified, and the questions asked with openmindedness, sincerity, and dedication, the searchers of today also begin to realize answers which have long been available to serious spiritual seekers.

Much of the hidden knowledge of the ages can be found in the Ancient Wisdom teachings which explain the source and purpose of life, and the metaphysical laws which govern the universe. Aspects comprise the inner, essential basis of religion, philosophy, and science, although the external expressions of these are often quite distorted. The Ancient Wisdom was once taught to the most evolved of humanity in the various mystery schools. Today as humanity's consciousness has improved and expanded, much more of the preliminary

information has been made publicly available by the inner guardians of the teachings. But there is ever a deeper, hidden core which is not revealed until humanity is greatly more evolved, for knowledge is power, and it would be misused by the selfish and unqualified. The deeper wisdom is available only to the more (properly) qualified spiritual students.

The Ancient Wisdom teachings which are disclosed have been greatly valued by many illustrious and profound thinkers over the course of history, but the teachings are not meant to be blindly accepted as truth unless they ring true to the individual seeker. Some ideas may seem relatively strange at first, but with an open mind, a person can initially consider them as interesting hypotheses until he is better able to evaluate them. At some point in a person's development, there will be an inner intuitive knowing as to what is true and meaningful, or otherwise.

The Ageless Wisdom teaches that the purpose of life is evolution of consciousness through experience, expression, and growth. The ultimate goal for man at this stage is human perfection, although as that is achieved ever greater vistas and possibilities become apparent, for evolution is never-ending and human perfection is only a relative perfection. Man (humanity) is a part of the one life (God) which is eternal, immutable, and boundless, from which the universe and all that is in it arises. The One Life differentiates itself into many lives, forms, and consciousness that operate within a great plan of cyclic evolution which proceeds progressively onward and upward. The ancient teachings state that everything in the universe including seemingly lifeless matter is conscious to some degree on its own level and is evolving. The consciousness in matter, however, is rather limited and dull compared with that of humanity.

It is not possible for human minds to understand this absolute creator, God, the infinite all, the "omnipresent, eternal, boundless, immutable principle, on which all speculation is necessarily limited, since it transcends the power of human conception." But it is possible for man to understand that there is a true unity and oneness of all life, because God is in all life in the universe (all life in the universe is in God), and yet God transcends it and is more than it. It is also possible for man to understand aspects of that part of the plan of God in which humanity has a role.

The problem of life in the human condition is man's inability to see through illusion, realize this reality, and understand what truth actually is. Truth is relative to the stage of a person's consciousness, awareness, and perception. In the world of ordinary personality existence, an individual's perception is clouded by illusion and by his personal desires, thoughts, and feelings which distort matters. These illusions can be dispelled only by self-refinement which enables a person's higher self or divine aspect to begin to be expressed and a clearer understanding revealed. Thus self-improvement and the overcoming of illusion are significant goals in life.

Those who seek to know more about the purpose of life may be prompted by their higher self through a variety of life experience. They may be experiencing much limitation, suffering, or hopelessness in their lives, and unable to find a reason or meaning for it all. Or they may have much opportunity, with an abundance of material things and myriad worldly experiences, yet wonder, "Is that all there is?" They may be scientifically oriented and seeking answers to these questions for which science (also religion) is poorly equipped to address. All of mankind is enrolled in the school of life, with its variety of experiences reflecting many different classrooms, with many different grades and levels of learning. Not everyone is the same age and not everyone was enrolled at the same time, but all learn through the same process of observing and assimilating cause and effect. The young ones are not very aware of cause and effect, but as they gain more experience they note that certain actions bring certain results. If they consider those results pleasant, they will want to continue the actions. However if the results are viewed as unpleasant, they will want to modify their actions.

The process of cause and effect is known as karma, and it is the great teacher. It is a universal natural law that encourages proper adjustment, learning, and progress. Through it a person realizes that the energies he sends out come back to him; as he sows, he reaps. Karma is not punishment nor is it reward. It is the fruit of our actions, impersonally providing the lessons and opportunities of life. We can improve our opportunities or conversely increase our limitations by how we respond to it. It is up to us.

But why, one may wonder, is life sometimes such a struggle, filled with so much seeming adversity, crisis, and limitation? The ancient teachings suggest that this is a forcing process to compel our development and provide the opportunity for learning. If life were always easy, it is suggested that mankind's growth would be much less, for there would be nothing to challenge and thereby develop or expand our abilities and capabilities. It is a way of learning in this school of life. It also reflects the type of energy that is indicative of the human lifewave, that of the quality of harmony through conflict. Thus out of conflict comes eventual harmony, realization, and progress. Our problems are our opportunities.

The experiences of life are merited no matter how unjust or severe they may seem to be to the normal observer, for the law of karma takes into consideration all causative factors and moderating influences. A person is responsible for all he experiences in life. His attitude toward those experiences often determines the degree of pain and suffering experienced, if any. When he is responsive to learning the lessons afforded (of circumstances), then insights can be more readily achieved and much distress avoided. But with resistance comes a prolonging of the situation which often produces pain and discomfort.

Man has free will in proportion to his stage of development and in accordance with the bounds of karma. It is appropriate for him to endeavor to change and improve adverse situations if possible. However if the conditions simply will not change regardless of effort, then he must accept it and make the best of it. A life of seeming ease may appear on the surface appealing, but it may offer little progress if it contains only little challenges to be met. A life filled with crises may represent much achievement in growth of consciousness if the problems and stresses faced are new and stimulating. However, if they are simply recurring variations of old problems (lessons) that one refuses to meet, little progress will be achieved.

As an individual evolves and gains skill in handling the challenges of daily living, his problems and tensions become more subjective and subtle and are not as apparent to observers. But tensions and stresses of an ever higher order will remain a part of the life process, encouraging, prodding, and impelling the student of life onward to greater heights of consciousness and realization. Eventually the real goal of life becomes not avoiding living in the world, but

progressing beyond the limitations of the world so as to be able to help others in the human family and in the lower kingdoms.

† Article No. 40

Reincarnation

With so much to learn in the vast school of life on earth, and with human perfection as man's goal for graduation, it seems unlikely that man could master all the lessons and accomplishments in merely one lifetime. It seems especially impossible when one considers how short the length of a human lifetime can be, such as for an individual who dies prematurely (for whatever (karmic) reasons). Nor does it seem fair (at first glance) that one might have a few years of experience (opportunity) while another might have many. Even a full lifetime seems too short a period of time for individual evolution.

The issue of justness also brings into consideration the extremes of opportunity and abundance versus deprivation and limitation which exist in the world. The learning conditions in one lifetime appear to be so unequal for men, that unless man had more than one set of circumstances for schooling, life would seem incredibly unfair and God very unjust.

The Ancient Wisdom teaches, in fact, precisely that idea that man does have the opportunity of more than one lifetime on earth to master the lessons of life. The teachings state that human evolution is a series of rebirths on earth until all that is necessary for man to experience and to learn and develop has been completed. Thus a myriad of conditions and circumstances are faced by each man which contain all the opportunities for necessary growth. The degree of effort that a man applies to his schooling determines how long (the number of incarnations) it takes for him to complete the various grades and levels.

The aspect of a man that is reborn or reincarnated into earth life is his personality. The ancient teachings state that man is composed of three different aspects. (I) The highest aspect of man is the spirit aspect, which is composed of a divine spark of God known as a monad. The spirit or monad is beyond man's real understanding or accessing until he is fully evolved in human

consciousness. (2) The intermediate aspect of man is a reflection of the monad, which is the man's soul, also called the higher self. The soul and its wisdom and guidance can be accessed and known by man as he purifies and refines himself. (3) The lowest aspect of man is his personality, known as the lower self. The personality consists of a man's physical body, his emotional nature, and his concrete mind.

Who and what is man? Most people (and modern science) only recognize and deal with external man, the lower man (the personality). But man is much more than that -- he is divine. However, this divinity exists as a yet unfulfilled potential waiting to be developed and unfolded. Man's personality is the aspect of himself that dies after death, but his immortal soul remains to absorb the wisdom assimilated from the earthly experiences. The soul is the repository of all talents, virtues, and development. These will be used again as the soul creates another personality for yet another incarnation in life on earth. The process continues again and again until the need for further experience, learning, and incarnations has been met and human perfection is achieved.

The evolution of consciousness is a glorious and progressive process, moving ever upward and onward. A distortion of this concept called transmigration exists in which a human soul is said to be reborn into sub-human forms instead of human. But that is simply not possible, as it would be a step backward not forward.

Reincarnation (rebirth) goes hand in hand with karma, as the law of cause and effect draws a soul back repeatedly into physical expression to learn more and to balance the effects the individuality has created in previous lifetimes. Because of this, an observer cannot always recognize the karmic cause of a particular result in an incarnation if the causative factor occurred in a previous lifetime.

And many effects are the composite consequences of more than one cause, which further complicates the delineation of cause and effect. One can only know that there is perfect justice under the law of karma, and the cause exists even if he cannot perceive it currently. There is an accumulation of karma to be carried over into future incarnations because less evolved man has little wisdom and creates many more inappropriate results than he can offset in one lifetime.

For the generally materialistic Western man, ideas about karma and reincarnation may seem quite new and foreign (although nonetheless intuitively valid). Western man might be surprised to know that a lot of the world already believe in these concepts. They are taught in Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and have been accepted by many great thinkers throughout history.

In the process of reincarnation, the soul is the aspect of man which before rebirth subjectively (qualitatively) outlines in a broad manner the plan of life, what lessons are to be learned, what qualities are to be strengthened, what failings are to be overcome, and what ideally should be accomplished in an upcoming incarnation. The soul has within itself the necessary wisdom for the personality to deal with any challenging situations if the personality can refine and quiet itself enough to achieve a measure of alignment with the refined soul consciousness. Daily meditation is a process by which this connection can begin to be bridged.

The soul may program for inclusion in the incarnation certain talents, abilities, and encouraging circumstances, all earned and merited by karma. Conversely, it may plan certain physical, emotional, or mental limitations or defects to be experienced by the individual to prompt growth in some area of the personality. Thus a blind person, for example, might develop an exceptional sense of hearing or touch. Or such a handicap may draw forth outstanding inner awareness, and heart qualities such as love, compassion, and goodwill. Then the "handicap" becomes an opportunity for growth because of the individual's (appropriate) attitude and response to the challenge.

Living in poverty, or in a family, work, or national situation where there is strife and oppression may not be easy. But the lives of numerous men and women in the past have shown how much stronger and more aware they became for having experienced and surmounted the more difficult problems. And in doing so, they no doubt balanced some of their individual karmic debt as well.

Additionally, in certain cases of national or group strife, the more evolved individuals might even have helped offset a small measure of group karma as well, for all groups, including humanity as a whole, experience the karmic consequences of their actions and learn through the effects. As the more

spiritually aware individuals balance their own karma, they naturally become service oriented and deal with group karma.

Opportunities small or great must be used and not ignored or they will result in further limitation. Whether there is abundance or scarcity, a person is responsible for using resources as wisely as possible in accordance with his quality of consciousness, his awareness, and consistent with his potential for service to others.

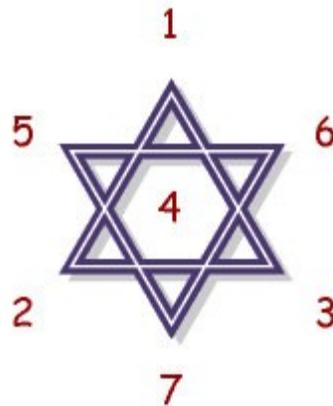
Since evolution in a new incarnation generally takes up at the stage it ended in the previous one, the factors of heredity and environment are dictated largely by past karma (and for the more evolved individual, considerations of spiritual service obligations to be met). The soul selects the physical plane parents according to the quality of parents merited by the individual and the quality of parents available. The incarnating individual brings forward a combination of hereditary factors both from the parents and himself. Frequently members of a person's family or some of his new associates will be individuals he has met and known before in previous lifetimes. Bonds of love or of hate draw them back together, as do unresolved energies where debts remain to be paid and energies balanced.

The soul also chooses the astrological factors, the time and place of birth, which set into motion the environmental circumstances and potentials to unfold. Because man has free will in accordance with his karma and quality of consciousness, much of what unfolds will be in like measure subject to self-determinism. After he has reincarnated, it is up to the individual to study himself and ascertain his strengths, weaknesses, and what might be the purpose of the incarnation. He must endeavor to know himself. Meditative reflection is quite helpful in the undertaking.

A person may wonder if he has indeed lived many lifetimes on earth, why doesn't he remember it? The memory of the previous existences remains with the soul consciousness. In each rebirth, the personality is a new one, with a newly created physical body and a new brain. Since the new brain has not recorded the previous past life experience, it cannot remember it. Moreover, the details of past lifetimes are not that important. What is significant are the

virtues, talents, and quality of consciousness developed in them. All of that is assimilated into the soul to be added to its accumulation of wisdom and quality.

If man were aware of all the details of his past lives, he would be overwhelmed with all that he has experienced -- the memories, the pain, the suffering, the anguish, the unfortunate matters that he can no longer do anything about, in addition to the happy occurrences that are past. It would distract him from his current life and events and relationships that he can and indeed should have an impact on now. He must currently do what is before him to do. Man must achieve the most he can from his present incarnation, and know that in doing so, the past and the future will take care of themselves. For by living a spiritual life in the present, he will assuredly balance the misdeeds of the past, as well as appropriately create bountiful opportunities for the future.



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