

**ASCENT  
TO SPIRITUAL  
ILLUMINATION**

*Ten Lectures on Spiritual Practice*

Swami Ashokananda


In each of the ten lectures collected in this book, Swami Ashokananda, a master of Vedantic elucidation, speaks to the average spiritual aspirant — one who desires spiritual enlightenment, but who is not yet willing to let go of worldly pleasures.

He shows us a gradual way — not a way of compromise, but a way of steady and sure advancement toward the ultimate goal of illumination.

The Swami was convinced that every man and woman was fully capable of such achievement. In these lectures he tells us how to go about it and why going about it is the only natural and rational thing for human beings to do.

To ascend to illumination with open eyes and a sure tread is, to the Swami, what it means to be human. And to be human in this true sense is the whole point of being alive. These lectures speak to us all, wherever we are on the spiritual path, whatever we think we are doing, and whoever we think we are.

Students of the Swami's other books will find that the lectures collected here will serve as practical guides to his more philosophical expositions of Vedanta.



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# ASCENT TO SPIRITUAL ILLUMINATION

*Ten Lectures on Spiritual Practice*

Swami Ashokananda




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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

We take pleasure in presenting a third book of lectures delivered by Swami Ashokananda. As was the case in the two previous books—*Meditation, Ecstasy, and Illumination* and *The Soul's Journey to Its Destiny*—the lectures that comprise the present book were for the most part delivered in San Francisco in the 1950s. After 1952 until 1969 the swami's lectures were recorded. Many of the tapes have been transcribed, and, in order to transpose the swami's extemporaneous spoken words into printed ones, they have been edited. The swami's students who, under the auspices of the Vedanta Society of Northern California, have undertaken the task of editing have, they assure us, used a very light hand so as to retain as fully as possible the unique flavour of his lecturing style.

In the ten lectures on spiritual practice presented in the present book Swami Ashokananda necessarily gives us a good deal of Vedanta philosophy along with instruction, for before one can earnestly undertake spiritual practice, one has to know what the goal of that practice will be and what one's relationship is to that goal. At every step of the way one needs to have at least some idea of what one is doing and why one is doing it. These lectures, therefore, are not only practical in the sense that they tell us *how* to

proceed along our chosen path, whatever it may be, they also expound the great principles of Vedanta. In other words, they point to the summit of a towering mountain and, at the same time, they give us the equipment to climb it and show us the various techniques of doing so, until at length we stand victorious on the highest peak.

But the spiritual aspirant should not expect to find a cut-and-dried "how-to" manual in the pages of this book. Just as there are no charts to tell a plant how to bloom, there are no maps to guide our individual spiritual growth. Still, a guide there must be in the uncharted ocean of spiritual life, and the reader will find an expert one in these pages. Through stories, analogies, and metaphors, as well as through tough philosophy, Swami Ashokananda presents the subject matter in his characteristic simple, charming way.

The swami was born in East Bengal (now Bangladesh) in 1893. He joined the Ramakrishna Order in 1920 and was ordained a sannyasin by Swami Shivananda, an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, in 1923. After five years in the Order's monastery in Madras (now Chennai), he was stationed at Mayavati in the Himalayas and there became editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, one of the Order's primary English-language journals. In 1931 the swami was sent to San Francisco, where a year later he took charge of the Vedanta Society in that city, a post he held until his death in 1969.

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# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GOD-VISION

## 1

This subject, the psychology of God-vision, presupposes the view that God-vision, like every other perception, depends on our state of mind. You could not, for example, perceive a tree if you did not have the necessary state of mind behind that perception. If your mind were scattered and inattentive, even though there were a tree before you, you would not notice it. And I may say further that although it would seem that anyone, man or beast, who has eyes should be able to perceive a tree if he has attention, it is not necessarily so. Yes, if there is attention and if there is the right sense organ, then an object would be perceived, but whether that object would be perceived *as a tree* by an animal is debatable. Something else may be necessary which man possesses and beasts do not before a tree can be perceived as a tree. In other words, we find that certain conditions have to be fulfilled before we can have even ordinary sense experience. Similarly, spiritual experience depends upon certain states of mind.

Now, I know that there are other points of view regarding God-vision or spiritual experience, and I should mention specifically the view that is generally held by Semitic religions. Although there are mystics among the followers of these religions, mysticism has not gained a very strong hold. Rather, it is generally accepted that if a person experiences God, here or hereafter, it is through God's grace; it is a miracle. It cannot happen on a causal basis; it has to be granted to us by God Himself. When you take this view, which you might call the theory of grace, you thereby contradict—not openly, but virtually—the view that spiritual experience has something to do with the state of our own mind or consciousness, the view that if one has the right kind of mind, grace of God or no grace of God, one will have that experience. This latter view, generally speaking, is the Indo-Aryan view, and therefore you will find that Indo-Aryan religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, lay down certain rules of spiritual living, certain methods of spiritual practice, and they tell you plainly that if you follow these rules and methods it is just a question of time before you have the desired experience. There is no question of miracle here; there is no question of grace as we ordinarily understand it.

Of course, like all other philosophical or religious views, views regarding spiritual experience are connected with other ideas. For example, if a religion emphasizes the idea of grace and minimizes the efficacy of human effort, it has corresponding ideas about God. According to such religions, God is the Lord of everything; He is the Creator who has created even the

souls of men. He is totally different from His creatures, and what these creatures have, they have because He has willed it so. No one can ever step beyond the limitations that God has set upon His creatures, human or otherwise.

That is not the view of Indo-Aryan religions. They believe that the soul is without beginning and without end, that it has never been created—not by God or by anybody else. As long as the souls are overwhelmed by *māyā*, or ignorance, they seem to be under the control of God. But the moment they become free of this ignorance, they are not under anyone; the soul becomes its own master. Its very nature is freedom, and therefore neither the divine will nor any other will can have anything to do with its true status. In ignorance come all the troubles, along with bondage; in knowledge there is no trouble and no bondage. You see, these two views of the soul and God differ; therefore the method by which spiritual knowledge is attained is one thing according to Indo-Aryan religions, and another according to Semitic religions.

Some of you will remember here that one of the principle teachings of Vedanta is that all religions are true; you will think it ill becomes me, who preach and hold such a doctrine, to show difference and even distinction among them. Let me say, however, that when we judge, for example, Christianity or Islam or Judaism, we do not judge them as taught by their priests, but rather as they are experienced by their mystics. And when you go to the mystics you discover a wonderful thing: there is almost a complete unanimity amongst the mystics of all the different religions. The Christian

mystics and the Hindu mystics talk the same language; there is no difference. And if you analyse the methods these mystics have followed in order to reach their spiritual goals, you find they are about the same; maybe they have different guises, but underneath they are essentially the same. That is where we find the unanimity, the unity, and even the identity of all the religions of the world.

But when we come to church doctrines—doctrines enunciated by the priests of these many religions, we discover all kinds of differences. One priest says this, another says that, and you can carry on a fight for as long as you like. Because of these priests even the same religion becomes divided into many denominations. Consider how many denominations there are in Christianity; there are also a lot of denominations, or sects, in Hinduism. There are even sects in Buddhism, though probably not as many as in other religions. To put a good face on these differences, we can of course say that they suit different temperaments and to that extent they are necessary. We can say further that however desirable mysticism is, it cannot be practised by the majority of people, who are not ready for it; therefore religion has to be taught and administered by the priests everywhere, and it is no use condemning them. In short, the differences that we notice among the teachings of the priests (as distinguished from the teachings of prophets or mystics) are good for people of differing temperaments; they are also good for people of various states of spiritual growth. One person may need this particular teaching; another may need a little more, still another may need some

other doctrine. So in regard to church religion also, we need not quarrel.

But when you discuss these various religions in their final aspects, as these religions are believed by the majority of their followers, then you notice this well-marked division between Semitic religions and Indo-Aryan religions: the first speak of grace; the others say there has to be a certain state of mind.

Some will try to patch up even this difference (I myself would like to do so) by saying that whether a spiritual experience comes through self-effort or through the grace of God, the person who is having that experience *has* the necessary state of mind. In other words, when God grants a vision of Himself, He also makes the soul capable of receiving that vision. Whether you say that the state of mind or consciousness necessary to hold the divine vision within itself is granted by God, or achieved through self-effort, you will find that in both cases there *is* the necessary state of mind.

Many people don't remember that. They somehow believe that when God is gracious He just gives a spiritual experience, forgetting that the recipient of grace has been taken through long and strenuous training. You will never hear of anyone who has received the grace of God who has not been made equal to that grace. And being made equal to grace involves a great deal of struggle and suffering. This part we forget. When we remember it, we wonder which is less painful: to receive grace through the struggles and blows that come from God, or to undertake the struggle and suffer the pain that is involved in self-effort. We don't know which is really

better, and the wise man is he who reconciles himself to the view that both are equally painful. He then does not just sit quietly and say, "The grace of God will come; meanwhile I need not make any struggle."

Then there is another practical consideration: You cannot say that the grace of God must come to you or will come to you at a certain time. Grace is something that is beyond determination; that is why it is called grace. How do you know when it will come to you? How do you know it will come at all? You don't know. So I think the practical thing is to go forward on your own. If help comes, so much the better! If it doesn't come, at least you are not wasting your time; you are going ahead.

But to come back to the main point: all kinds of experiences, sense experiences or spiritual experiences, are dependent upon certain states of mind. And my purpose this morning is to define the state of mind necessary to the experience of the Spirit.

## 2

What is this experience of the Spirit? Generally we think it is experience of God. All over the world it is assumed that there is a being called God. I know that there are religions that don't believe in God, such as Buddhism and Jainism, but I notice that they have put Buddha and the Jinas in the place of God; the same adoration and worship is given to them as theists offer to God. So for practical purposes we can say the object of spiritual experience is God Himself.

Now, what is God? By very definition God is eternal, that is to say, He is unchanging, imperishable,

and unconditioned. Nothing in this universe can influence Him or change Him. He is beyond time. Eternity is not endless time. If we are told that we are eternal, the idea that rises in our mind is that we shall continue to exist endlessly; there will not come any time when we shall cease to be. That, of course, is not a correct idea of eternity. Eternity is beyond time; therefore the concepts of time must not be applied to God. He is the Eternal One; He is the Infinite One; He hasn't any limitation, and, of course, He is Being.

I should mention here that some philosophical texts do not ascribe *being* to this Eternal One. They say that being brings its antithesis—nonbeing; if there is being, there also has to be nonbeing. That is the trouble with logicians; let us run away from them; they are terrible people! There is a tradition in India that if you study logic too much you won't have devotion to the Lord. It is seriously believed that if you want to grow spiritually, logic is a deterrent. So let us not go too close to the logicians. Let us say for our purpose that God is infinite, eternal Being, unchanging, imperishable.

If you ask what is the nature of this eternal, infinite Being, we say He is Spirit. Now, the word *Spirit* doesn't convey anything. When Christ had to explain Spirit, he gave the illustration of the blowing wind. When wind blows you do not really see the wind at all, but you see its action. You see the leaves moving, the trees bending, and so on, and thereby you infer there is a wind. In the same way the Spirit exists within the body. It makes you see, it makes you talk, it makes you think; by all these

actions you recognize its presence within you. On the more direct side there are certain things our philosophers and sages have said about Spirit. They don't help much, but they help somewhat. For example, it is said the Spirit, or God, is all-conscious Being; that is, He is conscious of everything in every way. His whole being is fully known to Himself. That of course makes Him a personal being. Consciousness is always *self*-consciousness. Always remember that. Consciousness is not an abstraction, nor is it third person; consciousness is always first person, always self-consciousness. And self-consciousness is the essence of personality: I am a person because I am self-conscious. Because of my present state of self-consciousness, which seems to be limited, I recognize other things outside of me; therefore my self-consciousness is also an awareness of other things, a reaction to other self-conscious beings—that is to say, to other persons. But God is *all*-consciousness and He is all self-conscious. When you come to this definition, you must also say He is limitless, for you cannot apply to the all-conscious, self-conscious Being any kind of limitation.

You have to say, therefore, that He is all joy. You may ask, "Why not say He is sadness?" But if He is sad, there must be a cause for His sadness, and that cause must be either within Himself or outside Himself. It cannot be within Himself, because then He would be made up of parts; nor can it be outside Himself. There is nothing outside Himself. Of course, if you want to be very logical (some people like logicians), you cannot say anything about Him at all. But that does not help you in any way; you are just reduced to a blank state. So since

you have to say something, you are forced to say that this infinite Being is all joy, all light, all goodness, all truth. This is the Being whom we are seeking to experience. When people speak of spiritual experience, this is the goal.

The question is, where is that Being? All theistic religions have maintained that He is everywhere, that He is omnipresent. "Everywhere" implies space; although He is beyond space, our present conception of reality is in terms of space and time; so He has to be in this space. Wherever there is space, He is there: He is within me; He is outside of me; He is penetrating everything that is. If mind is to be considered as occupying space, then He is in the mind, occupying our whole mind, interpenetrating it; occupying our soul; occupying our consciousness. Everything that exists He is interpenetrating through and through. That is God. There is a wonderful discourse given on Brahman in one of the old Upaniṣads: "Everything in this universe is penetrated through and through; outside of it, inside of it, He is there."<sup>1</sup>

And that is true. You cannot get away from this fact. How is it, then, that we don't perceive Him? How is it that we don't experience Him? Two answers have been given. One is that you *are* perceiving Him. What do you think you are perceiving? Whatever you are perceiving is God. That is one answer. Well, no satisfaction comes to you thereby. "If that is seeing God," you

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<sup>1</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 3.8.11.

may well say, "it doesn't help me; I am no better off. Here I see my enemy grinning at me. Here I see poverty creeping towards me, old age coming towards me. Here I see insecurity and danger and death, and you say that whatever I know or see is God. Who cares for that kind of God?" Well, we shall come back to this. The other answer sounds very practical and is well-known: The fact that He is everywhere cannot be denied; so there is some kind of block because of which we are not able to perceive Him. What is that block? This is the simple way you can put it: it is the distraction of the mind, the scattering of the mind—that is the block.

Let me make certain things clear to you so that you can rightly understand the import of this answer. First of all, Vedantins distinguish between the Spirit on the one side, and the body and the mind on the other side. The mind is different from the Spirit, or soul. In Christianity the soul has often been identified with the mind, so there is a difficulty in using this word *soul*; however, if you know that by *soul* we mean the spiritual being—that which is called Atman or the Self by the Hindus—then we can say that both body and mind are different from the soul. Mind and body are *jaḍa*, unconscious; soul, or Spirit, is all-consciousness. Mind and body are perishable and continually changing; the Spirit is imperishable and doesn't change. That is the distinction we make.

I should remind you that the scattered mind is our so-called normal state of mind; *kṣipta* it has been called in Sanskrit, which literally means scattered. Every moment it changes. Not for any two moments does the

condition of the mind remain the same: it is now on this object, now on that; continually it is moving. Anyone who has studied his mind recognizes this fact. I know many of you take it for granted that that is the nature of the mind—why fight it? Vedantins have never accepted that. Here again Hindu thought differs very much from western. We believe a person should sit still; you believe he must move like this and move like that, make gestures, assume postures, and so on. If you travel in an automobile, you go on talking, talking, talking—endlessly. Once I inquired, "Why do they talk so much?" I was told, "That's politeness." You don't believe that two people can meet and just sit quietly! When necessary, let them exchange words, but when it is not necessary, they need not. Some high-sounding scholars tell us that these are two different outlooks on life: in the Orient people have gone in for quietness; in the West they have gone in for action—both equally good! Fiddlesticks! Such scholars don't understand what is meant by quietness; they have never tasted its value. As for action—what action? A powerful civilization is active for two or three thousand years—and ends in rubble. That which is loud, that which is seen, is perishable. How long it takes for us to recognize that everything that is on the surface is perishable! This visible world is the effect, not the cause. The cause is deep, deep down, and you have to find it. That is where the world is immortal. As effect it is dead; no sooner does it come into existence than it changes. How can you give any importance to it? And yet we build up a philosophy in terms of superficial things and try to guide our life by it. That's all wrong.

Well, however that may be, in our present so-called natural state, the mind is continually moving. Several things are characteristic of this state: you are not able to distinguish your total personality from the rest of the world. A man whose mind is scattered can never feel himself as separate from the rest of the universe. His whole existence depends on others. One of our senior monks in India used to send questions from time to time to all the different monasteries. One question was this: "Suppose every person, every being in this universe were to die out suddenly and you alone remained alive, what would you do?" Of course, that was quite a stimulating question, and, as you can well imagine, we all talked about it. In order to please him we thought we should send him our answers. I remember I answered that either I would realize the Highest or I would die immediately. I still believe that. In other words, in our present state, our existence depends upon the existence of others; if they go, our own existence could not last; it would just perish. Either that, or we would go beyond all conditions, so that we would become unconditioned. When the mind has learned not to dwell on matter—and the mind can learn it—then spiritual life has begun, not until then. You may have committed all the Bibles and Vedas to memory, you may frequent all the temples and churches of the world, you may quote all the articles of faith, you still will be gross unless your mind has become fine. Let the millions go to churches and temples and mosques; don't follow in their wake. They have been going for ages and ages into these places—yet no change has taken place in them; the same ideas, the same instincts are there. Something more

is necessary in a religion to bring about a change. The mind has to become fine, subtle, and then you find that you are somewhat separate from this body. How that condition comes is very strange; it just happens. The scattered, gross state of mind is like a glue that has cemented your being to gross, material things. When you attain the subtle state and your mind has become comparatively quiet, then you feel separate from the body; the appetites and urges of the body can no longer afflict you as they did before.

In our present state the senses run after sense objects; whether you get those objects or do not get them, in either case you get burned by them; you become consumed by the senses and their objects, and you wonder how you are going to escape. You escape by learning to be quiet. That is the great art. Learn to be quiet, learn to feel the deep things within. You will then begin to feel your own nature as something different from the body, different from the senses, different even from the mind as we usually know it. As I have endless times pointed out to you, the mind as we know it is really an echo of the body, of the senses. The thoughts that it thinks, the desires that it conceives, are all supplied to it by the senses; that mind is no good at all. But we get separated from it. Yes, wrong things may still rise in that mind, but they can no longer pull us down; we are no longer identified with them.

I remember that when I was attending the University of Calcutta, I one day went to Belur Math, the headquarters of our Order (I was not then a monk). On that day one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna said, "Now, look, sin in

the mind is no sin at all. That is what Sri Ramakrishna taught us." It came to me as a great surprise, but of course also as a great message of hope. You see, all kinds of things rise in the mind, but when you don't carry them into action, there is no sin. Not that they are nothing; they also have to be got rid of, but they are not to be taken too seriously. I can understand why it is: If you become identified with the wrong thoughts that rise in your mind, then you will be forced to carry them into action. But a state comes when you don't become identified with them. Just as you see clouds rising in the sky and know that the blue of the sky, although hidden, has not been affected, in the same way, wrong thoughts may rise in your mind, but you know you are not one with these thoughts. Already a state of purity has come, a great fineness has come. And I must mention here that if you have reached that quiet state of mind wrong thoughts don't often arise.

So in that state you begin to feel yourself as not the body, nor even the mind; for the first time you begin to feel that you are Spirit. Further—and this is what is extraordinary about it—you look at others, and they appear exactly as you feel; they don't appear to you as physical or mental. Behind the facade of their body and their mind you begin to feel the presence of something else. In our teachings it is said that every person is an embodiment of Divinity, that the real soul is untouched by body and mind and is perfect, divine in nature. When your mind becomes quiet you begin to catch a glimpse of that truth. It is not merely doctrine. Who cares for doctrine! The world is groaning under volumes of doctrines; people are filling pages with this and that and

piling book after book on your head. Once Swami Vivekananda said, "Look, how great is the Self! Book after book has been piled upon the head of everyone, and he is not yet crushed!" That is really true; so many things have been written! But who cares for any of those books if he doesn't experience anything? When the mind becomes a little more peaceful you begin to *experience* the Spirit, and God, who seemed of doubtful existence, now seems to be everywhere like a faint fragrance wafting from your garden into your room. The presence of God is not too clear yet; on the other hand, you cannot ignore it—it is real; you find it pervades everything. That's the beginning of spiritual experience.

## 3

Now, how can we make the mind a little more peaceful? That's the question. Here are the things that occur to me as constituting the means and methods by which this calmness, this concentration, can be brought about: one thing of prime importance is to become detached from sense objects. This kind of religion, I must say, is not for all. Yes, religion is for all, I should not deny that; but a religion through which one can practise detachment and calmness and after some time have spiritual experience—that is not for all. Why not? Because most people are still eager to enjoy the senses. You tell them it is not the right thing to do, they would rather commit suicide than follow your words. Well, let them have their day. I am not one to find fault with anyone. But I also recognize that frustration is a necessary accompaniment

of desire. How few people are able to satisfy their desires! Only those who have become spectators of the game of this world can enjoy the world. If you are content with window-shopping alone, you can enjoy many wonderful things in the stores. But if you get the idea that you will take some of those things home—you are gone. If you are satisfied with just enjoying the beautiful colour, beautiful pattern, and so on, you are comparatively safe. Similarly, in this world you could be just the spectator. I don't mean that you should pluck out your eyes or destroy your hearing; I don't say that. But with perception let there be no appetite. That's where the trouble is: we perceive something, at once we want to consume it. Like children who want to put everything into their mouth, all our senses are avid for swallowing things. If we don't want these things, then they leave no mark in our mind. If we have no desire to possess anything, then perception is just a matter of knowledge. That is called the state of a *sakṣin*—a witness, spectator. In that state you are safe.

But how few people are like this! Whenever they see any beautiful thing, they put their hands upon it, they want to grab it. So for them there is only one way: nature has to teach them. But, as everyone knows, nature's ways are not straight ways; nature does not take a short cut. Many people think that nature will do everything for them. Yes, nature will do everything, but it will take a long, long time. It is as though you asked a bus driver to carry you alone. He says, "Oh, no. I have to fill up the bus before I can start." Nature wants to fill up the bus; nature's ways are always in terms of a whole species, never in terms of one individual. You have to go through so much

trouble before nature teaches you the lesson that you must not touch anything that is of the senses. It is a long, roundabout process, and it grinds all the juice out of you, causes you so much suffering! You will go through hundreds and hundreds of lives (to speak in terms of reincarnation) before you learn the lesson that as long as you want anything out of this terrible machine, you will be dragged into it and will be crushed by it. Then finally you will no longer want anything from it. That is the way nature will teach you. But human beings have the ability to apply their reason, and through reason they can look into things and can learn. Even Lord Buddha said, "Find fault with every sense object." Many of you think how easy Lord Buddha was: he followed the middle path; he didn't want us to exert ourselves too much—not too much asceticism. Don't fool yourself! In religion we often fool ourselves. Religious teachers themselves have a tendency of looking upon us as children with whom they cannot reason. You cannot tell a child every truth as it is; you have to pacify him and sugar-coat his medicine; sometimes you cheat the babies a little. The great teachers also do that. But Buddha said to analyse every object of sense perception and find that it is full of poison. In other words, what he proposes ruins our whole life! You see, if you follow Buddha's prescription, you cannot enjoy anything; everything is spoiled.

But that is the way. Following it, you will find the senses loosen their hold; they no longer stick to sense objects; they get separated. True, when a leech has filled itself with blood, it will fall off; the senses also, when they have their fill will become detached for a moment from the sense object. But there is this other way: if you

put salt on the leech it will at once fall off; when you apply the salt of discrimination, the senses will fall away; they don't wait to have their fill of blood. That is one way to bring them under control. Then there is another kind of discrimination: you not only find fault with sense objects, you find what is real in them and what is unreal. You will see that the unreal is that which is evanescent, that which lasts for only a few days. And you will say, "No, I don't want it. I want that alone which lasts forever; I want the Eternal Reality." You also exercise this kind of discrimination.

Another remedy for a restless mind is the companionship of those who have already reached a high state. In their company you will find that your mind will gradually be withdrawn from the gross things of the world. Seek out such holy people. I will admit they are not easily obtainable, but that which you are seeking is not a small thing; the company of the spiritually enlightened will make of a mortal man an immortal god. Search for such people! In the economy of God there is a possibility that you will come across them if you are earnest. Keep company with them, and you will find your mind has withdrawn from the sense world and a deep and calm state has come.

Simultaneously, you undertake certain practices. From the most ancient times in India the children of the higher classes are taught the art of concentration, of quietness, of meditation. It is my conclusion that the vast majority of those who are initiated into such practices benefit from them. Even those who are not spiritually inclined, even they attain some quietness of mind. Many

people admire the Hindu ways: their art, their sciences, their dance, their music—everything. There is a subtle quality about it. After all, if the people of a nation have undertaken religious practices for thousands of years, an element that is not on the surface but deep down in the being of man and in the being of nature is bound to form a part of whatever they achieve. It is just a natural thing to expect.

You should cultivate these various means—a little concentration, a little devotion to God. And service to others—service for its own sake, expecting no return—is also highly purifying, because it takes the ego away; if ego is not there, who will be seeking the pleasures of the senses? Then when a spiritual hunger comes, that is the time for deeper spiritual practice. You should then go to a teacher and learn from him. He will tell you how to grow more spiritual—what to do, what to avoid, how to live, how to behave, what your duties are, and so on. If you follow what he tells you, you will become spiritual. It takes time. But after a while you will find things are looking up; certain qualities are growing within you.

#### 4

Now, when you have undertaken specific spiritual practices, such as meditation, and when as a consequence your mind has greatly withdrawn from the things of the senses, you will become aware of another mind—not this present mind which is a slave of the senses, but another mind which you might call the slave of God, the mind that is hungry for God. This present mind takes us out

through the senses into the material world; the other mind moves in the opposite direction: it takes us deeper and deeper within ourselves towards God. Even when we perceive things in the outside world, this other mind helps us; it penetrates the surface of things; it pierces the sheaths of matter and of this accustomed mind and discovers behind everything that is—living or non-living—the effulgent presence of God. It is said in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *mayi sarvam idam protam sutre manigaṇā iva*<sup>2</sup>—“Just as on a thread all the jewels are strung, all the things in this universe are strung on one divine Being.” You actually feel that the Divine Being is holding all this infinite number of things together like so many jewels on a thread; you actually see the presence of this interconnecting Divinity everywhere. You begin to feel Him outside; He becomes more and more real. Remember, I tried earlier to define God: I said He is infinite and eternal; He is all Consciousness, He is all Joy, all Love and Beauty; He is all Goodness and all Truth. You begin to perceive that now. Many are the times during the course of the day when your eyes will be filled with tears; you will feel the touch of God in your heart, the living touch of God! Many are the times when you will feel your heart lift up in joy. Many are the times when you will feel yourself plunged in ineffable peace.

All these things you will experience more and more, and once this process starts, no one can turn you back. You will find that you have to go farther and farther until a complete concentration has taken place: your mind no

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<sup>2</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 7.7.

longer becomes scattered; it has become completely serene, and in that state the whole world, with its infinite diversities, has disappeared. You don't have to close your eyes; the wall of the senses has gone. Along with that, your body has disappeared to yourself; not that other people will not see your body, but you won't be aware of it. Your mind will not function as it does now, in terms of diversity and finitude, in terms of time and space and causation. This mind, in fact, is not there; there is a serene mind filled with the effulgent presence of the infinite Being, which is God, and at the same time is your own soul. It is not possible to separate one from the other. In the beginning when you first get a glimpse of God, you feel a little separation. You call Him "My Lord, my God," and you kneel down before Him. When you come closer to Him, you forget to say that; you cannot distinguish yourself from Him. And they say that in the highest development of this process the mind completely dies. After it has become absolutely serene, it dies; what remains nobody can say. Philosophers say the Spirit, which is the true person, becomes identified with the Spirit which is God. Identity. No mind is there, no body is there, nothing. That's the culmination of this process. That is the highest spiritual experience.

Some of you might ask, "What good is an experience in which we do not know anything?" Sri Ramakrishna used to say that there was a salt doll that wanted to measure the depth of the sea; so it entered into the waters of the sea, but before it had gone a few steps it melted away. Who, then, would measure the depth of the ocean? Yes, when you think of this ultimate goal there doesn't seem to be anything very exciting about it. Some philosophers say it

is a sort of unconsciousness—you are not conscious of anything. But that state is all Consciousness; how can you be unconscious in any sense? As everybody knows, philosophers are awfully intelligent; but what everybody doesn't know is that in certain respects they are awfully silly. I read a story somewhere about the great Newton. He had two cats, and he made a house for them; he made a large door for one cat and a small door for the other. Someone asked him, "Why two doors?" "Well," he said, "there is the big cat, and there is the small cat." For a long time the man argued with him, but could not convince him that the small cat could also go through the big door. One of the greatest thinkers that mankind has produced! Well, philosophers are also like that. When it comes to spiritual experience they say, "It is a sort of unconsciousness, isn't it? Losing oneself in God, you haven't any consciousness." But if you yourself are also all consciousness, then how can there be any unconsciousness? Nothing to fear!

I always assure people that since that fate has not yet overtaken them, they shouldn't worry too much. And if that state comes to you, you won't worry. *We* may worry, we who don't have that state, but *you* won't worry. Sri Ramakrishna said, "Do you know what it is like? It is like a fish that you have caught and put in a small jar of water; then you release the fish into a big lake. The soul becomes released like that into this infinite being of God. He just plays in great joy."

Well, to put it briefly, the whole thing consists of quieting the mind more and more, of concentrating the mind. The more scattered the mind, the more you have the senses and the sense world; and the more you have

sense desires and involvement in the senses, the less consciousness you have of your true nature, the less knowledge you have of God. Actually, there is no world; the world is a product or an accident of the scattered state of mind. If you say that mind itself is a product, that it is a part of the world and therefore cannot be the cause, then I shall remind you that in our present state the cause is also the effect. Like the egg and the chicken, you cannot say which came first. The mind is here, a part of this universe; yet the universe itself is a product of the scattered state of mind. If the scattered mind is here, then this multiple universe is here; when the mind is unified, there is only God. That is the simple fact.

Therefore, by hook or by crook, by every effort, take your mind away from the plane where it becomes scattered. It cannot be done by will power; it has to be done by the conquest of desire. If you want to exercise will power, do so by conquering desires, not by making yourself concentrate. The minds of most people are full of worldly desires; yet they want to concentrate. They have heard that concentration can bring all kinds of good results, but they do not know that it is a dangerous thing to do. So exercise your will power in conquering desires; find fault with the objects of your desires. Recognize that they are unreal. Tell yourself how horrible it is to submit to the dictates of your mind and your senses and how much better it is to be able to think purer thoughts. In this way exercise your will power. Slowly and slowly mind will become free; mind will become serene, and you will find that the things which seemed to be nonexistent are coming within the scope of your perception—vague in the

beginning, it is true, but they will become more and more clear.

And let me say at the very last that when we try to achieve the truth in this way, all the angels and all the gods and all the saints and sages of the past and the present—all of them range themselves beside us and push us forward. Don't ever forget it. Lest it appear to be a tremendous struggle for which you are unequal, remember this: when you sincerely undertake this struggle all the forces of good are at your disposal, and therefore there is no cause for any kind of pessimism.

## WHY IS THE MIND SO RESTLESS?

### 1

I think many of you appreciate the justice of this question "Why is the mind so restless?" because you find that when the mind is too restless you are uncomfortable. But I do not think that many of you would appreciate the opposite state. If somebody told you that he could make your mind quiet, you would say, "A little quiet, not *too* quiet." You would not want your mind to become inactive; you would think that also to be a very undesirable state. You would say it is unnatural and certainly useless. But you see, the trouble about this position is that it is not reasonable. If you do not want your mind to be restless, then you should want it to be as quiet as possible. And if you want your mind to be very quiet, then you should reconcile yourself to the position that the mind must not be allowed to become active at all. But I know that most of you, as I have already said, would not accept that.

Now, in India we do accept it, and that acceptance has a philosophy behind it. You see, we believe that all great

achievements are not achievements in the ordinary sense. We do not, in fact, like to use the word *achievement*; we would rather say *discovery*. Every achievement is a discovery. What I achieve I discover within myself; nothing new has been added to me. Generally, we think an achievement has behind it the contribution of several elements—our own self, our own mind, then some tools or instruments outside, and the cooperation of some other part of the objective world, living or nonliving. As a result of the cooperation of these several elements, something happens, and that is what we call our achievement. In India we do not accept that view; although apparently all these elements have contributed to an achievement, we say the actual contribution is of the mind. It is the mind which can constrain outside things and outside people to cooperate in your achievement. Your own contribution, your own state of mind, is the determining factor, and I would say it is the only important factor. I would go even further—I would say it is the *only* factor. That may sound a bit extreme to you; however, let me be extreme.

Now, that is the case regarding objective achievements; but most of our achievements are subjective, and since you have come to listen to this subject in a religious place, I think I shall be safe in assuming that you are concerned with inner achievements. And those achievements are certainly discoveries—discoveries of things which are already within ourselves. They are not achievements in the objective sense of something being added on to us by our own efforts. Nothing of the kind.

Now, since we have so many things within ourselves—since we possess infinite possibilities of

accomplishment, of discovery—how is it that when we want to find those things our efforts often prove fruitless? The reason is very simple—although it does not change the situation very much: it is the state of the mind. If the mind is very restless, continually moving and continually becoming dispersed, then nothing within ourselves is seen; even if something is there, it is not seen and therefore it is not utilized. But if this same mind becomes quieter, then we begin to discover things within ourselves. We can use those things, and we undergo a profound change in every respect.

Now, as I have many times told you, our states of mind greatly affect our state of being and our perception of objective reality. If the mind is scattered, it becomes gross and very limited in function and in power; the only thing it reveals to us is material reality, we are not then aware of spiritual things. But, at the other extreme when the mind is absolutely quiet, when it is completely unified and in the subtlest possible state, then the greatest of all reality, our own spiritual Self, or God—by whatever name you want to call it—becomes revealed to us. We perceive that everything internal or external is a manifestation of the Divine Reality. If we are thinking of wonderful attributes and qualities, these are manifestations of the Divine Reality. If we are thinking of the most extraordinary being or substance, that also is Divine Reality. There is nothing that exists that is different or even distinct from God; whatever exists *is* God; so when we find Him, we have found everything. This is the philosophy behind the desirability of an absolutely quiet mind.

This is why, you see, a typical Hindu likes to close his eyes and be quiet. As a nation, we have a terrible suspicion of all the frantic activities of people; we have been impressed with the idea that tremendous activity outside is deadly and does not achieve even what it seeks to achieve. Even material prosperity, economic prosperity, political prosperity—all those things which are sought by furious outside activity are not achieved thereby. You may say, "In this age when things are proceeding fast and furious, how can one just sit around quietly with closed eyes? That would be suicide." I am not so sure. After all, even in this age achievement comes through the power to resist outside forces. You are able to achieve in your own pace and in your own time when you are not interfered with by other people. Isn't it true? Here the deciding factor is the power of resistance. Let neighbours come and sprawl all over you; you will find that in two or three generations they will have perished if you have the power to maintain your own integrity. In the long run, those who have resistance win out; not those who immediately react and become violent. The latter will perish; they will burn themselves up. You find that is true of individuals. Why should it not be true of nations? So genuine Hindus, well grounded in their own culture, are not afraid of sitting quietly; for they know that one builds up tremendous resistance if one can learn the art of going within.

The attitude of true Hindus is to be calm and quiet. Whenever they start anything—any work or endeavour—they begin with a meditation. They would not consider anything to be started rightly otherwise. And

before meditation, there should be a little austerity, a little fasting. We are born and brought up in this idea of austerity and meditation. It is not only because we believe that all achievements are from within and are really discoveries; it is also because we have studied the human being and his states of mind very profoundly. We have found that there are two kinds of quiet and two kinds of restlessness. One kind of quiet comes when we have sated our desire for the time being. Most people like that kind of quiet. It has two conditions: One is that the objects of desire be supplied to us as our desires rise—if we have food to feed upon when we are hungry, then hunger would not disturb us. That is one condition. The other is that no evil consequence should follow the satisfaction of our desire. A person may be fond of eating, but eventually he might begin to suffer from indigestion. We don't want that. We want to eat heartily, and we do not want any indigestion afterwards. That is the kind of restfulness or quiet that we seek here. Another kind of restfulness comes when all desires have been satisfied. What this really means is that there are no more desires in your mind. A desire as we ordinarily understand it can never be really fulfilled; it only is temporarily fulfilled. Then again it rises and again clamours for satisfaction. Therefore it has been found that the real fulfilment of all desires is tantamount to all desires being eradicated. Then there comes complete quiet of the mind.

Or to put it in terms of restlessness: as I said, there are two kinds of restlessness. In our present state restlessness comes because of desires. Anything we do in our life—particularly if it takes the form of desire, of

seeking—leaves a deep impression on the mind—whether the desire has been satisfied or not. And that impression is not a neutral, passive thing; it is an active thing. Just as seeds that fall from dry pods into the ground only appear to be passive but are actually active and at the right time will sprout into a plant, so these impressions, seedlike, lie in the mind until at the proper time they sprout into plants. Then those plants—those full-blown desires—create a tremendous urge within ourselves. That makes us very restless, and then of course the whole cycle follows. We try to satisfy it. Sometimes we succeed; sometimes we don't succeed. When we succeed, we are sated for a little while, but only for a little while. The plants you see, have produced more seeds, and those seeds again will produce more plants. You will find within a short time an infinite number of weeds are growing in your mind. If desire is satisfied, it becomes like this. If it is not satisfied, then comes what is generally known as frustration. Frustration is a terrible thing! You cannot satisfy desire; so you become angry, you become jealous, you become envious, you become hateful, you burn with it. Sometimes, if you are wise enough, you hold it within yourself; you recognize it to be the state of your own mind. But more often your wisdom takes to wing, and you ascribe your frustration to other people, or to God, or to war, or to nature, or to anything you can get hold of—as long as it is not yourself. And you vent your venom towards that thing. Of course, that itself has its own effects. Anger, hatred, and all the things that have become impressed on your mind as a result of your dissatisfaction produce their own crop—a terrible harvest,

terrible harvest. Greed in one case, and hatred and anger in another case—that is the way of one kind of restlessness.

The other kind of restlessness is a wonderful state. A time comes for everyone when desires become eradicated; then a tremendous longing seizes the soul for the realization of the infinite being called God, for the infinite Spirit. You have read in the life of Sri Ramakrishna that when he wanted to realize God as the Divine Mother, all day long he would cry; and in the evening, when the day would be gone, he would be disconsolate, so disconsolate that in the agony of his heart he would rub his face on the ground until blood would flow. He would say, "Mother, one more day is gone, and I have not seen You." Once Swami Vivekananda asked Sri Ramakrishna why he had had that terrible longing, and he said, "My boy, if there were a thief sleeping in a room, and in the next room there were masses of gold and only a thin partition between, do you think the thief would be able to sleep? Until he had broken through this barrier and possessed himself of the gold, he would find no peace. I felt that the Divine Mother was there—just a thin barrier between me and Her. I couldn't just rest satisfied until I had actually found Her." Well, of course, Sri Ramakrishna was a very great soul; therefore everything about him was tremendous. But I say that to every soul this condition comes in greater or lesser degree—to each according to his measure. A tremendous longing comes, and the soul does not find any rest until it has been able to satisfy it.

You remember Sri Ramakrishna's teaching in this connection. When he was asked in what condition of mind we can have the vision of God, he used to tell a story of a teacher. He said a man came to this teacher

with the same question, and the teacher took that man near a pool and asked him to enter into the pool, and when he did so he held him under water. Of course the man struggled, but the teacher would not let him go. Then when the man was about to lose consciousness, he let him go. The teacher said, "How did you feel?" "Why, I was dying for a breath of air!" And the teacher said, "When you feel inwardly the same way about God, you will have the vision of God." That's the divine restlessness. Maybe some of you have reached that condition, but the first kind of restlessness is the problem with most of us.

Now, if you take the average person at any given time, you will find that he is more or less satisfied and has built up nice little patterns of existence. If these were his own patterns only, things would have been very hard for him. But the majority of people, being in the same category, have agreed with one another, and they have all built up the same nice patterns. For example they need sleep, which is one of the hungers of the body and the mind. We have agreed that a little while after it becomes dark we should all fall asleep; there has been that kind of agreement among us. Then when light begins to show in the eastern sky we have all agreed that we should wake up from sleep. The moment we are wakened from sleep, most of us hanker for a cup of coffee—or let us say for breakfast, whatever it is made up of. We think that is quite natural. Then we must rush to work. Who told us we must rush this way? Nobody knows. Nobody asks. Everyone has seen his father and uncle and all these people rushing to work; so he has also learned to rush to work. You have built up certain

habits; as a result your body and mind make certain demands at certain times. Generally speaking, the conditions exist by which these demands can be met, and so the average person feels pretty good. If things are not going too well, then he or she blames the government, or blames his ancestors who did things wrongly, or blames whomsoever he finds handy. If he doesn't find anybody, then he can blame God. In any case, he thinks *this* way of living is natural, and so he is restful.

Today there are many people who will tell you, "This is your normal state: you *should* have appetites, you should have things by which to meet these appetites. Of course, eventually you might get a little old, but even in old age you should be able to enjoy things." I think the objective is to make a man or woman live a hundred years or so in full vigour of youth, still going strong—able to digest well, hear well, enjoy life, enjoy everything—and then suddenly one morning die. That's the idea. And during this period of a hundred years one should take great interest in things all around, read all the books, hear all the lectures, join in all the discussions, vote rightly or vote wrongly, as one pleases—all these things one is to do; *then* one is the normal person.

The most horrible thing that is happening is that men and women are being pushed through the schools, through the books, through the lectures, through the government agencies, through all the thoughts that are being made current, into a pattern of sameness, of uniformity. Even your thinkers, however learned they appear, rarely give you one new thought in their learned

tomes. The only new ideas are in science, and they are disastrous in many respects. On one side is atomic power, on the other side is automation; nobody knows what their outcome will be. Even scientists are afraid now; it is they who are the most forward in telling us how wrong things are. They know it; they are afraid of what they have found out and of what they are finding out. The rest of us are lulled into a kind of sleep and are gradually being moulded into uniform units. That is what is happening. You are not allowed to think much. You *must* get along with your neighbours. A child is taught in school that the one thing he has to do is get along with all the others. Now, while I think that is very desirable, it is not by means of thinking like others and delighting in things like others that I would achieve understanding and harmony. I would achieve this harmony through self-abnegation. I shall be one with you: You want to play? I shall say, "Go on, brother, go and play. I at this moment don't want to play, but you go and play. Can I be of help to you in any way?" You see, I am abnegating myself. But this principle of self-abnegation, which is the real basis of harmony, is not being taught. Rather, we are teaching only those small sacrifices by which we can achieve the sameness of objective, sameness of action, sameness of thought, sameness of interests—which is deadly. Unity is very fine, but uniformity is the very beginning of death. And that is what is happening everywhere. All people are put into that machine and are being drilled like soldiers. Do you think that produces the ideal person? Many of you will say that the ultimate questions with which people have wrestled in previous

generations are unnecessary. Why bother about God or afterlife or immortality and all that rubbish? Many philosophers tell us that those philosophical problems do not really exist; they are just tricks of language and meaningless. So they have abolished them from the pages of philosophy. What we are asked to think about is what *they* consider to be real. I do not know whether people can be persuaded permanently to accept this way of thinking. If they can be, then I admit that many of the things which we have considered to be the objects of spiritual life will indeed become meaningless. Why should we have self-control? Why should there be self-abnegation, except the little that is required for adjustment with our fellow men? Why should we bother about spiritual qualities? There is enough food to eat, and we can grow more and more food so that everybody will have enough. We can go on giving people all the things they need so that there will be the highest standard of living everywhere. All these things we can do, and then we will be satisfied.

But here is the difficulty, at least as far as I am concerned, and I can only tell you what I have thought about: I *know* that there are other states of mind. I *know* that those states of mind are infinitely superior to our so-called contented state of mind, that is to say, the mind of the average person, the "normal" person. I *know* that there is God and that God has been seen by people and that this God-vision has required a certain state of mind. I *know* that man truly finds himself only when he has conquered the powers of the body and the mind; only when he has become master of their powers and has risen above

them, does he discover his own true nature. I *know* that all the things which plague the average person are nothing but echoes of stronger feelings and longings in the centre of his being. It is only in relation to these depths that are lying undiscovered that our present state can be truly explained and our present life truly directed. I know those things, and therefore so far as I am concerned I will not accept the supposition that this present state is all there is, as the modern thinker wants to tell us.

I myself think that if we try to train this mind the way modern people want it to be trained, we shall get into greater and greater difficulties; more and more mental diseases will come into existence, and man will become more and more helpless to take care of his mind. Of course, it will take time for that result to become apparent; perhaps before this experiment can be completed the other tendency will begin to assert itself. Men and women will begin to understand that it is not by pandering to the mind but by conquering it that we shall really bring health to it. Probably we shall find that many of the desires and frustrations about which modern men and women are so fussy are nothing. Provided you have a strong will, provided you can will yourself out of these conditions, you can this moment go free. If you don't make an effort, every situation is deadly for you; but if you make an effort, even the worst situation is nothing to you.

But we have become creatures of nature. We are giving too much attention to conditions within ourselves and outside ourselves. As a result, we have lost the ability to rise above circumstances; we have lost our will power. We have become weak. We run to doctors and to psychol-

ogists and to this one and that one for relief. Even religion has in many cases become our weakness. Many religions tell you that if you want to be religious you should continually take recourse to the priests of that religion; you should wait for his sanction. He will tell you "Do this; don't do that. Come and take recourse to me; I shall rescue and save you." And thus religion, which ought to make people strong, has made them weak. It is man's innate strength that has to be brought out. If you bring that out you will find many problems become easy to solve. Things are really not so difficult as we make them.

Now, you know, if you accept this old-fashioned proposition that man has the power of conquering himself and that he should develop this power, if you believe there is such a thing as spiritual reality, to achieve which is the goal of life and without achieving which we shall be at the mercy of things within and without and there will be no peace for us, no happiness, no sense of fulfilment—if you accept this view, then you can go about controlling your mind in a certain way. But since my subject is a question—"Why is the Mind so Restless?"—I shall give emphasis to it. I shall only incidentally and in a very secondary way speak about how to get rid of restlessness.

## 2

Why is the mind so restless? You probably know the answer already if you have read the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Of course we all know the answers. If I were to ask you, "Why do you think your friend is so restless?" I'm quite sure you would be able to give a reasonable answer. But if I ask you,

“Why are *you* so restless?” not only would you not be able to say why you are restless, you would not even admit that you *are* restless. I am not trying to find fault with anyone; I am trying only to emphasize a certain fact which I think is significant: In our present state we understand things better objectively, because our existence is so objective. We can see things more clearly regarding others than regarding ourselves. It is only after one has made a good deal of progress that one’s view becomes subjective and one begins to see within one’s self. Yes, I am sure you would be able to say why your friend is so restless. You will be able to say, “You know, he is too greedy. Why, he has enough money now; he could enjoy a nice life. But no, he wants more money.” You have noticed a little touch of greediness in your friend, but what about yourself? You have not noticed anything about yourself?

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* you will find many problems raised and beautiful answers given. In the sixth chapter Arjuna said: “The mind is very hard to control and powerful. I find that it is as difficult to hold the mind as to hold air within one’s fist.”<sup>1</sup> That is the way he put it; he did not minimize the problem. So when we read this statement, we feel very happy; we say, “Ah, he has stated *my* problem. He has not stated the problem of a great saint whose mind is under control.”

In another place Arjuna asks this question: “What is it that makes man do wrong things?”<sup>2</sup> What is it that makes

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 6. 34.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, 3. 36.

the mind go astray? Why should it behave like this? Sri Krishna has given a rather long answer to such questions. In the second chapter he said:

*dhyāyato viṣayān puṁsah  
saṅgasteṣūpajāyate,  
saṅgāt sañjāyate kāmah  
kāmat krodho bhijāyate.*

*krodhādbhavati sammohah  
sammohāt smṛtivibhramah,  
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśo  
buddhināśāt praṇāsyati.<sup>3</sup>*

A frightening list: “By dwelling upon sense objects a person becomes attached to them; when he becomes attached to a thing he conceives a desire for it. From desire arises anger, and from anger comes confusion of the mind. And from that comes the loss of memory, and from the loss of memory comes the destruction of intelligence, or judgment; and from the destruction of intelligence comes real destruction—destruction of the person.” That is a terrible thing he says there, but that is an exact description of the restless mind.

Now let me go into it. I told you the average man has built up a pattern: he sleeps, he wakes up, he has breakfast, and so on. But that is a rather distant picture of the thing. When you come close to it, you find that he has all kinds of ideas about his breakfast. He does not like

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<sup>3</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 2. 62-63.

the flavour of the coffee. He may get angry with his wife. "Why doesn't the coffee taste good? What did you put in it?" Toast is not rightly toasted. Butter has a sort of rancid smell about it. And what is the matter with this egg? Is it fresh or not? He finds fault with every little thing. From a distance it is just breakfast, average breakfast; you come close to it, every little thing has its problem. His clothes are not right. He sits in the bus; the fellow who sits next to him is a most unspeakable bore. He goes to the office: if he is the boss, then he is angry with those whom he bosses; if he is not the boss, then his position is miserable. Time goes on. He doesn't have the same promotion as the man he started with. The other man has gone ahead; he couldn't go ahead. His wife does not look as romantic as she did when he married her. Children are not as good as when they were infants. Everything is wrong! And all the time he sees ideal things all around him; why should he not have them? Why should he drive a miserable Plymouth when other people are driving Lincolns or Cadillacs? Why should he not? Can you tell me why should he not? And why is it he has to slave like this and cannot retire when the other fellow retired and is having round-the-world cruises all the time? All these desires arise.

Well, our explanation of all this is that you have dreamed of a nice family, wonderful wife, wonderful children, plenty of money—all these things you have dreamed of or have had in your past. You see, we Hindus make things still more lurid by thinking that this is not your first life. You have had many previous lives, and in every life you have behaved like this and have hankered for things. Some of those hankerings have been fulfilled,

but you know what fulfilment is—fulfilment is un-fulfilment. Only for a little time do you enjoy things; afterwards you don't enjoy them. If you eat a wonderful dish every day, you get disgusted with it; it is the same dish, but you don't enjoy it anymore. Our mind, our senses are our betrayers. First of all, they clamour for things, and you take trouble to give them these things, then after a little while they are dissatisfied with them. That's not fair, but the mind and the senses do not care for fairness.

You see, they want to ride you; that is the only thing the mind and the senses want. We think they want specific things and that if we give them those things, they will be peaceful. That's not true at all. This mind and senses want to make you work for them. That is all they want. So when you have done one thing, dissatisfaction comes and you are made to do another thing. This is the way it is: because we have done something in the past, we are doing similar things in the present.

This is what Sri Krishna described in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: *viṣayān puṁsaḥ saṅgasteṣūpajāyate*<sup>4</sup> —“when you dwell upon sense objects, you become attached to them.” Whether they are likable or not likable, good or bad, is not the point at all; you just become attached to them. You become attached to eating breakfast. You have become attached to going to a place of work. You have become attached to acquiring money, to buying things with the help of that money. These attachments which form the

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<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā* 2. 62.

pattern of your existence are the fruit of repetition. You have done these things before; therefore you have become attached to them and think they are natural, normal.

I am saying all kinds of disrupting things, am I not? You may object, "If I don't eat breakfast what am I going to do? Do you mean to say I have to go to the office without breakfast? In fact, you don't seem to like me to go to the office at all. Do you mean to say that I should not go to the office? Then how am I going to pay the rent? How am I to buy things? I won't have any money. Or you don't want me to buy anything?" Well, maybe that is exactly what I am suggesting.

But you see, my friends, don't take those things in an external sense. I am not suggesting that you don't eat breakfast, don't go to the office, that you just sit in your house until you are evicted and then sit in the street. That is external. That would not make the slightest difference within you. In fact, we say that that condition is worse—it is the condition of *tamas*. Therefore we study those who do not act like the average person, and we find that in most cases they are lazy. We tell them "Go and earn money." Only when an inward change comes, does the life of renunciation come.

You hear of people who have given up everything. How do they live? They live. In India a wandering monk will beg, but he gives something infinitely more precious in return. He begs for just the coarsest fare, but he will give you spiritual discourses which otherwise you would never hear, and he will remind you of God. Or you will ask spiritual questions of him; he will answer, or he will sing a spiritual song, or at least he will loudly repeat the

name of God; that's the least he can do—but I don't think that's too little.

There are also monks who say, "Why should I beg? If it is the will of the Lord, He will give me food." They will sit in one place and food will come—it will come. How?—that's the divine economy. If there is God, and if this is His world, and if He is the closest thing to the centre of our own soul, and if He is seated in the heart of every being, then it is true that it is He who is moving this universe. His economy is the last word in the economy of this world. There is another economy than the one propounded by the businessmen and the administration, and it is that economy that runs this world. Thus the needs of the spiritually minded who have inwardly renounced are filled; whatever they need they are given. It comes from God.

In all religions there have been many who have borne testimony to this fact. If you are ready for it, then it happens exactly as I say. Once Swami Vivekananda said, "God helps those who do *not* help themselves." You reach a state where the intrusion of your own will, even for the barest necessity, seems like a denial of God, the consciousness of God has become so strong within you. But that's the state which comes from an abundance of *sattva* quality—the quality of purity, God-consciousness, desirelessness. When that quality becomes very strong within you, then this happens. We have so conditioned ourselves that unless we have provided for the next one thousand years we feel uncomfortable; so all our life goes in providing for and worrying about the future. We have forgotten that other law of economy, which operates

when we have become desireless. I admit that if you have not become desireless this law would not work. However, who knows how desireless you can become until you have tried? You should try; we should all make an effort to reach that inner state.

Now, as I have said, in our past lives we have lived one way; habits have been formed. We are living according to the same habits today. Some of those things you will say are necessities; other things, you admit, are not necessary. It may be necessary that you have food; you should have shelter; you should have some clothes; but that you should drive a Lincoln or a Cadillac—that's not a necessity. Then there are many things in our mind which are not necessary. It is not necessary for us to become jealous of one and envious of another. It is not necessary to hate a bad man—unless, of course he has done something harmful to you; then you may think it is necessary to hate him. But you know often we hate people who are no concern of ours; we just naturally hate them. We have built up this kind of attitude. Those things are not necessary.

Now why do these desires and attitudes first arise, and wherefrom do they arise? Here we have to become a little metaphysical. I have mentioned this many times to you, but it bears repetition. The great truths have a way of gliding off our mind without leaving any deep impression. It is only repetition that eventually deepens the impression. And this is the great truth: that which we have forgotten is hounding us all the time. You know the poem "The Hound of Heaven," written by one of the English poets, Francis Thompson? I think it states a

beautiful truth: God is hounding us; we cannot really, totally forget God; we cannot totally forget our own real Self. You know the Vedantic theory is that our present state is due to the forgetfulness of our spiritual nature. When did this forgetfulness come? The answer cannot be given, because time itself came as a result of that forgetfulness. But we who are in time can say, "Yes, I did not remember God yesterday or day before yesterday; as far back as I can remember in this life, I did not think about God. That much I can say." You see, this is the peculiar paradox: if you put the question philosophically, it is unanswerable. If you study it factually, you can trace your forgetfulness further and further back. That much you can do.

Well, however that may be, we say that just as forgetfulness has brought about this miserable condition, remembrance of God will remove this condition in one moment. If we can become conscious of God, then in that moment all these conditions will disappear. If you strike a match in a room that has been dark for ages, in one moment the darkness will move away. Darkness lasts almost infinitely, but can be destroyed in a moment. Ignorance is also like this: I may have been ignorant about certain things all my past existence, for many, many lives; but the moment I learn about those things and understand them, knowledge comes; that moment this ignorance, lasting through ages, disappears.

But our forgetfulness of God has never been total; and it is because of this that we cling to existence. God, or our own Self, is infinite being; therefore we cling to life, as that is what *being* means to us; we hate death. We are

infinite; therefore we want to be liked by everyone; we want to feel at home with everyone, at one with everyone. Whenever any kind of opposition comes to us, we hate it. I may become jealous or envious of a person who is stronger than me. His greatness has seemed to overshadow me, and I do not feel at home with him. Therefore these opposite tendencies rise in my mind. Another person has caused me hurt or harm; at once he becomes a source of trouble; so when I see a bad man, say, a burglar or a thief, I have that sense of disharmony, and therefore fear or dislike rises in my mind. I do not feel an infinite expanse of harmonious being.

If you analyse all the impulses, negative and positive, that rise within you—the desires or the emotions or the feelings—you will, if you have penetration, be able to trace them either to the affirmation of your true nature or the denial of your true nature—the supposed denial. You are infinite; if anything in your experience seems to take away from the infinity of your being, then you find that you are resisting it, you are hating it or fearing it, and so on. In Vedanta they say that our nature is *sat-cit-ānanda*. *Sat* means being; *cit* means consciousness, truth, knowledge; *ānanda* means joy, love, sweetness, beauty. And you find in our present state these are the things we seek—do we not?

But because we have identified ourselves with the body, our joy has to come from adding material things to this body. That is why we like eating. Everything is in terms of body in this lower state: if we want expansion of being, we add another body to us. That is why people marry; that is why they have children; that is why they

want lots of friends and relatives; that is why they want to be looked up to by everybody. If a thousand persons cheer us, we feel a thousand persons are added on to us; a sense of great expansion comes within us—but it is all in terms of matter, of body. It cannot be real, because the body leaves us, and whatever we obtain in terms of the body also goes. In our present state we also seek knowledge: there is no end to our search for knowledge. Sometimes it comes to us in the form of curiosity. If people cannot read books and gain knowledge about reality, they certainly try to get knowledge about their neighbours. Of course, you don't approve of that; you call it gossip. Nevertheless, there is an endless irritation in our minds to gain more and more knowledge. Our interests vary, but we all seek to know.

In a sense, then, you may say that the origin of our desires lies in our true nature. It is as though we were trying through a wrong means or method to gain what we had seemingly lost. As such, I think desire is a good thing: we want to find *sat-cit-ānanda*. Our method is wrong, but our motive is right. Desires rise from our search for our own infinitude. So some have said that if you want to get rid of these desires, all you have to do is to magnify them to an infinite degree.

Magnify a desire to infinity. Say you are seeking union with someone: magnify it; become unified with the infinite. Or say you think something has hurt you; therefore you are angry. All right, magnify your hurt to an infinite degree and discover that forgetfulness of God is the source of your own finitude. Be angry against *that*, against that forgetfulness. Even these little things, if we can magnify them to an infinite degree—not in physical

terms, of course, but really—if we can make them infinite, then they become spiritual. There is not always much glory to the love people have for one another. But even regarding gross or finite love say, “No, I won’t be satisfied with it; I shall make it infinite and eternal.” Then this itself becomes spiritual love; it becomes love for God and will give you the revelation of God.

You see, the motive behind desires is right. Because of our forgetfulness of our true nature we have no rest, and we are trying to go back to our own truth. Unfortunately, however, because of our forgetfulness of Spirit, we become somehow convinced that the fundamental reality is material; so we started to realize this infinite being through matter, and therefore it became distorted. Its original character became lost, and all the desires and frustrations of our present existence came into being. That is the metaphysical explanation of desire.

## 3

Now, if you come to the in-between state where that distortion, that deformation, has taken place, then you find that there are four basic desires—sex desire, desire for possession, desire for progeny, and desire for the approbation of people. In this deformed state these are the four longings that dominate the mind. We have been trying to fulfil them and *never* has there been complete, lasting satisfaction. Even when there has been a complete satisfaction, death intervened and terminated it; therefore we have been seeking the same thing over and over again. This is why the mind is restless.

As for the restlessness of one's own mind at any given time—what causes it? There is rarely a simple answer. So many things join together to create a mental condition that it is very hard to put our finger on the trouble. Those who are spiritually advanced have, it is true, a clarity of vision into the mind; they can see into it as into clear water. You know, in some pools the water is so transparent you can see what is lying at the bottom: maybe a fish is moving there, and you can see it. Similarly, you can actually see the stirring of your thoughts in your mind. And you find that with a slight effort of the will you can destroy in the bud a wrong or disturbing thought. One can clear the mind to a very great extent in that advanced state. But in the meantime, what to do?

Several things should be done. I may tell you at the start that I am not in favour of self-analysis in the average case. One has to go very, very far spiritually before one can turn towards the instrument, that is to say, the mind, and do something with it. In a lower state you will find you have only pushed yourself into further confusion. Why? Because you who would analyse and correct the mind are so identified with it—your knowledge of yourself, your self-consciousness, is so much tied up with the mind itself—that you cannot exercise the necessary objectivity or detachment. So the net result is that your analysis is wrong. Even when it is correct, you get confused. The person who would wield the instrument should be independent of the instrument; otherwise it will get hold of him. So don't analyse your own mind. When you plant a tree which requires only two feet of topsoil, you don't make a pit twelve feet deep. You stir up

only as much as you need and can control. Some self-control, some understanding of the mind is necessary, but not more. We Vedantins don't bother about the unconscious at all; we are concerned with the *sub-conscious*, that is to say, that part of the unconscious which is close to the conscious. Our problems are in relation to this limited individual being, not in relation to the infinite being, which we truly are. It is this limited being which has to be illumined; therefore the little mind that it dominates is our province.

So as far as the mind itself goes, it is enough to exercise ordinary self-control, to practise moral virtues, hold noble thoughts. In addition you should think of the highest ideal. Think of God; or if you do not believe in God but in the Divine Self, meditate on that. Why? Light will of itself remove the darkness of a room; you do not have to push the darkness out first. You do not have to say to the darkness, "Get out now. Light is coming." You don't have to do anything; you just bring the light. In the same way, when you bring consciousness of the highest reality into the mind, the opposite will disappear. The tendency of the mind to be forgetful of God and then to build up imaginary things as substitutes for God is a negative thing, like the absence of light. And so you bring light—light as the thought of God.

Here you might raise a practical objection: it is not easy to think about God unless we have conditioned our minds spiritually. Yes, that is true; you should try to keep the mind as spiritual as you can—and I shall come to that point a little later. Let me just assume here that you are doing so. You should then give the greater part of

the mind to the recollection of God. For this you should undertake regular spiritual practices. Rarely does anyone attain to a quieter state of mind without regular practice. Whatever religion you follow, go to a good teacher and be guided by him. Although by reading books you might make some progress, there is also the possibility of mistakes, and mistakes in this regard are sometimes very harmful. As a practical measure I would suggest that you go to a person who knows these things and whom you trust and respect; you should learn from him and be guided by him. He will tell you how to undertake regular and definite practices. Then along with these you should try to recollect God throughout the day as much as you can. That is the most fruitful practice, because it is a direct method. In these ways the mind gradually becomes quiet.

Now, there are people who haven't any conviction about God; they cannot think about God and do not do anything about these religious matters. This method therefore would not apply to them; so how are they going to be helped?

First of all, I would suggest to them that they learn to live a normal life. You will find that every civilization has a concept of a "normal" citizen, a "normal" householder—a person who has some selfishness but more unselfishness, who satisfies some of his appetites and desires, but also has self-control and a sense of obligation; he or she has noble virtues, and feels for others. In every country there has to be a concept of an ideal citizen. We cannot get rid of all our ideals and at the same time find peace or happiness; there has to be an ideal.

Now, anyone who wants some quietness of mind should try as far as possible to live up to the dimensions of this ideal. If he marries, he should be a faithful married man, a noble married man. If he earns money he should also know the right use of money. I am not saying here that he should give everything away—that is not the man I have in mind. You see, the ideal man I am speaking of is within the understanding and scope of the average person. If the average person wishes, he or she can live up to this ideal and in so doing will learn some self-restraint. He will find that in regard to himself and to others he has to practise certain moral virtues and avoid certain wrongdoings. But that is just a prerequisite of what I am going to say.

If a person practises moral virtues, you may say, “What of it? He is still the same worldly person; he still has desires, and, as you have said, he will have restlessness of mind and all that.” But here is a new thing I am adding to the ideal man; it is the thing that Sri Krishna taught. Those of you who have read the *Gītā* must have observed that Sri Krishna is trying to help the person who lives in the world, who has many responsibilities and duties. His typical person is not one who has left the world and who wanders in the woods with the deer and other animals; nor is he one who has become silent, seated in profound meditation. That is not the person he is thinking of. Although Sri Krishna speaks of meditation and of going to a quiet place, and so on, the person he has most in mind, is the average citizen living in the world. And to him he says, “Do everything, but do it without attachment.” That’s the new thing he said. I do not think any other

teachers have emphasized that practice so much as Sri Krishna and, in our own times, Swami Vivekananda.

In the *Bhagavad Gītā* you find a beautiful enunciation of this teaching: Do whatever it is your duty to do, and then offer the whole thing to the Lord. That was Sri Krishna's prescription. As I told you, when seeds of a plant fall to the ground, they seem passive and harmless, but when the first rain falls we find new weeds are sprouting. Then we know that the little plant was not so harmless. Our desires leave an impression, and they sprout—they create an impulse within ourselves to repeat the same experience of which they were the impressions. But offering any experience, any action to the Lord, somehow deadens these seeds. Maybe they would not all be destroyed at first—dedication of the fruits of action can be done with the right spirit or the wrong spirit, wholeheartedly or half heartedly. Nevertheless, this offering of our action is an extraordinary practice. Sri Krishna said, "Whatever you do, offer this unto me." That was one of his sovereign teachings, and I cannot emphasize it too much. I suggest to each and all of you that you make it one of your primary spiritual practices.

You will find that although this offering is a moment's affair in the course of the day, gradually a new spirit has come into your experience. Into any satisfaction of desires that you indulge in or any duties that you perform a new element has entered; you feel like examining the motive or the impulse behind everything you do, and you find those motives become thereby more and more purified. If it is an appetite, it becomes weakened; it hasn't the same poison as before. Slowly,

slowly you will find that wrong desires have gone, wrong motives have gone, and right actions have come. And, my friends, if our motives are right, then whatever we do will not give us this restlessness of mind and all its consequences that we feel now. At length we will attain to a sense of fulfilment. That sense of fulfilment is the most important of all. You see, there is a standard of judgment, of evaluation within us. We have not learned it from any prophet or philosopher; it is within ourselves. Our sense of fulfilment will tell us that until we have achieved infinite Reality, which is God, there will be no peace, no satisfaction for us.

But remember that we have come to this present condition through mistakes lasting through millions of years of life. We should not expect in one day or one year to have the whole thing abrogated. You should be ready to go through years and years of practice; then gradually you will find that it is beginning to influence your life. I say it is a miracle if after twenty years of practice we begin to find that these habits formed through thousands and thousands of lives are becoming weakened. Twenty years against thousands and thousands of years! That's the wonderful miracle of spiritual practice!

Now, I said earlier that I would tell you another practice. I said meditation on God, on the spiritual ideal, is like bringing light to darkness. It, too, is a sovereign practice. But the objection arises that it is not easy to think about God unless we have conditioned our minds spiritually. Yes, in addition to our regular spiritual practice we should make an effort to condition our minds. When contrary thoughts are not negated by the thought

of God, you should face them, argue against them, and weaken them. Think of their opposite. Buddha himself emphasized this practice very strongly, and in Hindu scriptures it has been stressed. In Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*, for example, he says to bring about conditions opposite to the undesirable ones. Say you feel greed for money; then think of the evils of it. Think of the serene state of being unburdened with wealth or with possessions; think of being free from the evils that follow from wealth; think of what wonderful peace you have. Think about that state, or about a person who has realized it, and you will find that this greed will gradually become weakened. So these two methods—meditation and deliberate weakening of wrong desires and conditions of mind—have to be simultaneously followed. But if there is a question of apportioning your energy and time, I should say give seventy-five percent to the recollection of God and twenty-five percent to the other practice.

Now, underlying these two practices, there should be still another, and it should be followed mechanically. That is the practice of *vairāgyam*. As I told you, in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Arjuna raised the problem of the difficulty of controlling the mind. He said: *tasyāham nigraham manye vayoriva suduṣkaram*—"I find it as difficult to hold the mind as to hold air within one's fist." Sri Krishna answered: *asaṁśayam mahābāho mano durnigraham calam, abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairagyena ca gr̥hyate*.<sup>5</sup>—"Yes, O mighty-armed one, mind is no doubt very powerful and hard to control,

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<sup>5</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 6. 35.

but through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgyam* this mind can be brought under control."

In other words Sri Krishna propounded two methods: *abhyāsa*—that is to say, repeated practice, doing the same thing over and over—and *vairāgya*, renunciation. Repeated practice I have dwelt upon: again and again try to bring the consciousness of the ideal spiritual state to the mind. *Vairāgya*, or renunciation, is also necessary. If you have come to the conclusion that something you are doing is not in consonance with your ideal, then give it up. Don't at that time say, "Oh, I shouldn't give it up. What would my friends say!" Will your friends take you to salvation? And what kind of friends are they if they cannot appreciate these things? I am a cynic, no doubt, but my definition of a friend is one who is a playmate. I want to enjoy certain things; I cannot enjoy them alone, so I want a few others to enjoy them with me. Those fellow enjoyers you call friends. No, they are not friends; they are conveniences. If you didn't want to do certain things along with them, you would shun them. So let friends say whatever they like; you should not make too much of it. And if they are real friends, you may be doing them good by changing your habits. The way things generally happen is that when you take to spiritual life, your friends at first ridicule you, hate you, shun you; but as you make progress, they become proud of you; they feel a vicarious enjoyment. Then if you fail to live up to your own spiritual ideal, they become your bitterest enemies—which is only natural, because they were enjoying this wonderful thing through you, and you have deprived them of it. But if you persevere in spiritual life,

you can really help them. So you shouldn't care what friends say or don't say at the beginning.

Then some of you may say, "I am not attached to all these luxuries. Why should I give them up?" You know, I always have a little reservation about accepting such a statement. But however that may be, some of these luxuries you *should* give up; otherwise you cannot give up the finer bondages. You do not even become aware of finer bondages in your mind until you have removed some of the external luxuries from your life. Then, when you become aware of the subtler bondages, you can fight them, and you can conquer them. Therefore, Sri Krishna advised renunciation. Whether you renounce both externally and internally, or only internally, renunciation there has to be. You should practice it almost mechanically. Say to yourself, "I don't need this thing: I don't want it. It will not lead me to the goal." In one of the Upaniṣads there is a story of a saint who wanted to divide his property between his two wives. One wife said, "Would that wealth grant me immortality?" He replied, "No, it has nothing to do with immortality." "Then what should I do with it?" Then the husband said, "I have always liked you, and now because you have said that, I am even more pleased with you." Yes, that is the kind of question you should ask: "Will this possession or enjoyment give me spiritual knowledge? If not, why should I have it?" That is the principle. The practice should be an almost mechanical habit with you. Of course, how much you should renounce will depend on the prevailing circumstances.

Let me conclude by asking you to undertake another almost mechanical practice, the practice of

concentration. Make a habit of it: whenever you do anything, do it with full attention. You see, the mind is a creature of habit. I have already said that mind takes an impression, and it is those impressions which create habits. Isn't there a mechanical quality about the mind then? So mechanically put the right impression on it. Even if you have no devotion to God, even if you feel no consciousness of God while you are meditating, mechanically do it. Mechanically do any other act of concentration. If you are studying, do it with full attention. If you are talking, give your full mind to it. If you are taking dinner, give your full mind to it. Anything that you do, learn the habit of giving your full, undivided mind to it. And you will find that gradually your mind will become quieter and quieter.

But concentration is in itself not enough. Perhaps some of you are thinking that it is the main thing I should have spoken of. If the mind is restless, what is wanted is concentration. But you see, mechanical concentration cannot go very far unless the causes of the scatterings of the mind have been faced. And they are not on the surface. They are deep down. As I have told you they rise from a metaphysical cause, and then there is that middle state in which we have built up patterns of action. We should attack our restlessness in both these phases and on both these levels. Only then can we attain to real peace of mind, and in that quietness of mind we will find more and more wonderful things within ourselves, and we will undergo a profound change for the good in all respects.

# THE PRACTICE OF INTERIORNESS

## 1

In every religion you will find that the practice of interiorness has been recommended by various teachers. It is quite clear that what we have, or what we perceive in the exterior world is not of very much value. Of course, we think there are many valuable things in the outside world, but we also know that we cannot possess any of them forever. I should also mention here that many people see great depths in outside things. Thousands of books have been written disclosing to us the wonderful richness of the external world. But you must admit that when such depth and richness are found, it is because the seer, the thinker has depth within himself. A person has to have something within himself before he can see it in the external world. So it comes to this: when outside things and people are praised to the skies and when we feel thereby that we should give our attention to the external world, really speaking we have to go within ourselves in order to enjoy this apparent richness.

One cannot get away from the fact that if we are seeking something everlasting, something that we shall possess forever, it has to be independent of the outside world and also independent of those instruments of perception by which we become aware of the outside. This is a simple fact, a matter of everyday experience. We know things are not dependable here; a little thought makes it very clear. No one can take anything with himself across the threshold of death. He has to leave everything behind, even his body. When he is born, he at least brings along a body, although he doesn't bring anything else. But at death even this body has to be left behind. Well, it is good that this worn-out, diseased body is discarded—but even if a person wanted to take it with him, he could not. Everything is left behind; we know that.

Then why is it that for seventy or eighty years we devote so much of our attention and energy to acquiring things and knowing them? It is such a puzzle! Nobody likes to make a fool of himself; yet we continually make fools of ourselves by running after things that are not real, running after things that cannot be possessed, which cannot be held on to. And all we do is wear ourselves out. If not for anything else, for peace alone a person should become a philosopher.

If you say, "There are systems of philosophy, such as realism and materialism, that want us to learn things here, see things here, possess things here," I will reply that such systems are not philosophy at all; they are just the talk of learned fools—or fools who think they are learned, and only fools will listen to such learned fools. Philosophy is that by which you can be sure of the

existence of something that you can possess forever. Until you have found something like that, you have nothing. Mere knowledge is nothing. You would not be satisfied if someone should tell you, "Look! In that bank there are millions of dollars." That knowledge would not make you happy at all. You would say, "Well, that may be right, but today I haven't the money to buy a piece of bread." Knowledge in itself is nothing. But if through that knowledge you acquire something that is eternal and that you possess eternally, then *that* is something.

One of our ancient sages spoke of this in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*. He begins a discourse by saying:

*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ  
tasmāt parāñpaśyati nāntarātman;  
Kaścid dhīraḥ pratyagātmānam aikṣad  
āvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvam icchan.<sup>1</sup>*

*Parāñci khāni vyatṛṇat svayambhūḥ*. *Svayambhūḥ* means the self-created One. He has so made the senses that they look outside; He made them outward-looking.

*Tasmāt parāñpaśyati nāntarātman*—therefore the senses perceive only external things and not the inner Self.

*Kaścid dhīraḥ pratyagātmānam aikṣad*—but there are some wise persons who saw this inmost Self. How? *Āvṛttacakṣuramṛtatvam icchan*—by having turned their eyes inward, seeking immortality, seeking something that is forever existent.

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<sup>1</sup> *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, 2.1.1.

You will find in our ancient philosophical books—Vedanta books—that the sages oftentimes spoke of attaining to immortality. Some critics have thought that these people were perhaps afraid of death. Maybe they were, but there is no sign of it elsewhere. They were great heroes; they used to go to the battlefields and conquer their enemies when it was necessary. Those ancient Indo-Aryans spread all over India, disseminating their ideas and conquering all kinds of opposition. They were not like the Indians of later times.

You see, India had heavy doses of two non-Vedic religions: one was Buddhism, the another was Jainism. The Buddhists and the Jains had kind hearts and were powerful people. They enjoined everyone to live a good, innocent life, to eat only grass and roots and fruit and not to lift a finger to conquer an enemy. So enemies entered India, particularly across the northwestern boundaries, and took over the country—mainly northern India. Again and again, again and again these hordes came. The last to come by that northwestern path were the Muslims. And, of course, the last people to conquer India were the British, who came by sea. The whole of India was at the mercy of these conquerors, because the Indians had forgotten how to protest. Fighting does not go well with grass-, root-, and fruit-eating. One cannot conquer an enemy and at the same time be innocent about food. One will not even have the energy or the desire to fight the enemy; one's blood will become too cold, eating all this grass. Even if one finds the enemy is killing one's parents before one's eyes, it will take a long time before one's blood becomes warm.

“What! This fellow is killing my father and my mother!! Let me *do* something!” By the time one has thought these things, father and mother are killed. It is my legitimate and deliberate conclusion that in the present state of civilization in any part of the world this kind of nonviolent philosophy is suicide. It will take many, many centuries before the world will be willing to listen to a reasonable, righteous philosophy, if it ever will. And a nation that wants to follow this kind of philosophy will ruin its people. Well, that is what happened. Buddhism and Jainism were not our basic religion. They brought about a strange transformation in India from which we are still suffering.

Well, however that may be, before this took place, there was the period of Indo-Aryan philosophy, which is found mostly in the books called Vedanta. According to that view, philosophy and religion are the same. A philosophy that consists in just talking, guzzling beer, and spending long hours at night discussing whether God exists or doesn't exist—that philosophy is not worth anything. Philosophy is that which can be actually experienced. If God is, let us resolve to see Him. Let us make efforts year after year, life after life, if necessary, in order to perceive Him in such a way that there can be no doubt or question about it; that is the proposition of the Vedantic sages; so they use the Sanskrit word *darśanam* for philosophy. *Darśanam* means seeing, vision; it is religion as well as philosophy.

Great philosophers in India will train you in religion as well as in philosophy. Of course, anyone can read Vedanta philosophy nowadays. Through the grace

of the printing press, one can buy any book, and people are willing to write books with commentary and explanation, because that is a source of income. You can read these books. But the reading by which these truths will become deeply imbedded in your heart, that's another kind of reading. And that has to be accompanied by practice. Both have to go together.

In this Vedanta philosophy it is said that because God has created the senses looking outward, we see only outside things and not the inside thing. But there are some intelligent, quiet people—the word *dhīra* in Sanskrit means patient, steady, as well as wise, intelligent—who turn their eyes in the opposite direction: *āvṛttacakṣuḥ*. Often when our sages speak of our eyes, they mean all the senses of perception; all are turned inward, and then these wise people perceive the inmost Self, because they are seeking something which is immortal.

The reason they want something that is immortal is, as I said, because it is everlasting. If you lose whatever you may have, you are nothing. Suppose you are a great scholar, have read 20,000 books; now your memory is gone; you cannot remember a single sentence! Then all this study of books—what good is it? If you cannot retain it, nothing is any good. So knowledge has to be immortal; it will never leave you; you will always possess it. Therefore, in the search for truth one very important element is to be sure that that which you are seeking is eternal. So it is said in the verse I quoted that the wise man is seeking immortality. He saw the inmost Self, because that is really the eternal Being, the eternal Truth. To see It is to become immortal.

*Āvṛttacakṣuḥ* is the important thing—turning your eyes in the opposite direction; your eyes looked out; now you are not allowing them to look out; you just turn them back. And how do you do it? That is the practice of interiority. The very first thing that will occur to you is to focus the eyes on something that is not exterior, to focus them on something interior. Of course, if you close your eyes, you cannot see the things outside; but this negative action alone will not do; attention is not thereby diverted. You simply close your eyelids! But where are your eyes? You have to find something within on which to focus your mental eye.

Now, there are difficulties about it. What is that thing on which you can focus your mental eye? What is that thing within? If you say, "Oh, anything will do." No! Anything will not do. Anything will do only to the extent of gaining the power of concentration. But the power of concentration by itself is not the way to spiritual truth. It has to be *spiritual* concentration: concentration *plus* meditation. The word *meditation* is always used in connection with spiritual or moral things, but not the word *concentration*. *Concentration* means concentration—not allowing the mind to get scattered in all directions but holding it to one point. All the different rays of the mind's attention have to be brought together and focused on one thing, whatever that thing might be. It is, of course, good to have concentration, even if it is not spiritual. You have better attention, and you understand things better. If you concentrate your mind on a problem, there is a better chance that you will be able to solve it. If the mind is scattered in all directions, you can do nothing

about it. But the question is, what is that on which your inner vision should be concentrated so that your concentration may become spiritual? That is one thing to find out.

Another thing should be remembered: Vision, or seeing, has been associated for so long in our behaviour and in our thought with the eyes with which we see outside things, that even when we want to see something within, we make an effort to look with these eyes, as though from above we were looking inside this cage. With these physical eyes! That tendency comes. Although the eyes are closed, actually they become active. Well, I think that is more or less unavoidable in the beginning. But if you could get interested in the object of your meditation, if, say, you try to see the image of Christ within yourself, not thinking of that image as a device for concentration but thinking that Christ is actually there and that towards him you have great devotion and love, then that application of your mind, that involvement with the Christ, will cut this tie-up between the physical eyes and the internal object on which you are concentrating. Suddenly you will discover that these eyes have nothing to do with your seeing. Then inner vision wakes up. That is *very* important. Through the practise of meditation you have to reach the state in which you are seeing things not with these eyes but with something else. I may say that that is the beginning of proper meditation. Your mind will still be restless and you will have to spend a lot of time before you can have steady meditation, but one main obstruction will have been removed.

Now, what is this interior thing on which you should focus your mental eye? Here you have to have a conviction. That conviction can come in various ways. One way is through philosophy; another is to see a person who has actually known the inmost Self. His greatness, his superiority, your sense that he possesses something extraordinary, will bring about the conviction that there is something within.

When I first came to know about Sri Ramakrishna, I came across a Bengali biography of him, a small book written by a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. In that book there was a little picture of Sri Ramakrishna standing with a smiling face. I cannot tell you how I used to enjoy that picture, that smiling face of Sri Ramakrishna! He was in *samādhi*. *Samādhi* is that state in which everything external is gone; the senses no longer function, the eyes, even if they are open, don't see. All consciousness has gone within. Your eyes would not see if consciousness were not behind them. Anything that becomes the instrument of knowledge has to have a little of consciousness behind it. In our case, consciousness has become spread over the whole body, everywhere. That is why if you touch my skin anywhere, I know that I have been touched.

But in the state of *samādhi* consciousness has gone from everything external. Even if you burn a person's hand he will not know it. Even if you pour poison into his body he will not know it. He will not know *anything*; all consciousness has withdrawn and has become centred on God within. I should not say "within": when you perceive God, there is no within or without at that time. When we talk about God being outside, above our head,

below our head, in all different directions—that is all small talk. Actually, if one has perception of God, one cannot talk of any direction—high or low, inside or outside. But that’s a very high state.

Well, there was that beautiful face! Those were the beginning days for me. I used to try to meditate, but meditation would not mean very much; my mind would not be concentrated, nor would I find any joy in it. But again and again I used to look at that face of Sri Ramakrishna, that smiling face. What a beautiful smile! His nephew, who in those days always used to accompany him, was holding him, because in that state of *samādhi* his body might fall, and he could break bones here and there; so someone had to hold him. And there somebody took a photograph. I think that was the first photograph taken of Sri Ramakrishna. No doubt many of you have seen it. He was younger in those days, and his face was just blooming with that smile, which you can see is coming from within.

So you see, it is not nothing when all consciousness is withdrawn and is focused on God, who is infinite joy, infinite love, infinite sweetness. A very little fragment of this joy and this beauty and sweetness has made this universe sweet—this universe at its best! A sage wrote about the spring season: “Just a little more than ordinarily, a little more of the joy of God and the beauty of God overflows into the universe, and that is why the spring season is so attractive.”

Just a little! A little bit of that beauty! Imagine, then, how He is in Himself, if only a little of His beauty has made the earthly beauty for which all people are mad!

Just consider what a thing it is! Sri Ramakrishna's face was just beaming with that joy from within.

One morning in Sri Ramakrishna's room someone was reading a scripture in which God was described as light. It was said that God appeared and the lotuses of all hearts bloomed. You know, that's a conceit in Sanskrit literature: it is said that when the sun rises, all the lotuses bloom of themselves; there is a sort of affectionate affinity between lotus flowers and the sun. When that was read, Sri Ramakrishna at once went into *samādhi*. His face became lighted up, and the whole room was lighted by the light from his face.

When Swami Vivekananda used to meditate at night in his later days, his room would become lighted by the light that would emanate from his body. One swami was an eyewitness; he had gotten up at midnight, and on his way to the bathroom he had to pass through a porch onto which a door of Swami Vivekananda's room opened. He saw that there was a light burning in Swamiji's room. So on his way back he peeped in, and he found there was Swami Vivekananda meditating, and from his whole body light was streaming. It was no miracle; that was a natural state. Others have borne testimony that as time went on Swami Vivekananda always looked as if he were just an excuse for an infinite light, as if behind him there was an infinite light. People used to feel it. Would they not become convinced that there was something wonderful within?

*You* are that infinite light. You are not this miserable body, which you cannot even see unless you light a lamp. *You* are that infinite light. *You* don't depend on this body

or this mind for this light to shine. God does not depend upon anything; He is His own support. Our Self is like that; we don't depend on anything. If we try, we can remove obstructions, and this inner light will shine; sometimes it will find expression on the outside, and people will marvel.

## 2

Well, I raised a question. What is it on which we should focus our attention? Concentrate on God; that is the usual way to meditate. I made a difference between concentration and meditation. Concentration can be on anything on which the different parts of the mind can be brought together. In itself concentration is not spiritual, but if the object of concentration is spiritual, then that concentration becomes deep meditation.

Now, when I say concentrate on God, you will ask, "What is God? How am I going to think about God?" So I shall mention this: If you are quite advanced and if you are so conditioned by your own need and temperament—your previous development—you can concentrate on the formless God. But you have to be trained beforehand. Say you have thought about the formless God for a long, long time; your mind has become trained. Otherwise it is very difficult for us to conceive of the formless. Very difficult! Because we are accustomed only to formed things. All our perceptions have been of things with form.

So if your inclination is towards the formless God, but if you are not trained to meditate on the formless,

then our sages suggest that you use symbols. The sky is a symbol and has been considered to be a very good object of meditation. Some do not say sky—the sky has colour—they say space, infinite space. Some symbols are visible symbols, like light. God *is* light. Although He has no form, He is still light. In Christianity, in Islam, in Buddhism, in Hinduism, God has been spoken of as light, and all of them have prescribed meditation on light.

How can meditation on a symbol become meditation on God? This is what happens: When an attribute of God is found in a material thing and when we focus our attention on that thing, thinking that it is God Himself, then through this practice a certain change takes place within us. Our mind shifts from thinking of that thing as a material object—that part is forgotten—and the idea that it is God becomes prominent. Say you meditate on a light; at first you see light as ordinary light—the sun or a flame. Very soon you will forget that it is an ordinary light; you will just think that it is all light—God. The mind has this tendency to shift its ground. If you give it something that might be inferior, you find that gradually it goes to the superior thing, of which the inferior is a symbol because of its similarity. In everything the mind works like this; and of symbolic worship, that is the process.

There are other symbols, but it is not necessary for me to speak of them here. The point is that either you meditate on a symbol of the formless God, or you meditate on Him directly: you have reached the state where you perceive the formless God.

How do you reach that state? You *live* formlessly. You do not care for anything that has form. You don't care for a steak dinner; you don't care for nice clothes, nor do you care for nice faces; all the things that have form, towards which our senses go—you don't care for any of those things; yet you exist. That is called formless existence; you are living formlessly. If you do it, then you will feel that infinite, formless Being. The formless God is everywhere, and you will directly perceive Him.

You do it through utter renunciation. That is to say, you don't want anything except God. That renunciation takes time to acquire. As a Hindu and a believer in reincarnation, I would say it takes many lives to reach that state. Little by little in the previous lives you have given up things, and then in this life that renunciation becomes complete; you don't want anything that has form, and therefore you are able to perceive the formless God directly. But if you cannot perceive Him directly, then, as I said, you meditate on Him through symbols.

Then there is another way of meditating. Those who believe that the ultimate reality or truth has form actually *see* this shining form in their heart. And they try to think, "This is He." Why "This is He"? Why not "This is just imagination"? Because if God exists everywhere, He exists in me. It cannot be that He is everywhere but not within me. God has this disadvantage: being all-pervasive and infinite He *has* to be everywhere. You might think, "God does not like me; I am not good enough." Well, good or bad, you have *got* Him! Don't ever forget it: you have *got* Him as a prisoner

in your own heart. He is the infinite One; He has to be everywhere. So what you are or what you are not, don't pay any attention; just say, "I have got You there! This is Your form. You look like this. I am actually seeing You!" and feel glad about it.

You are actually seeing Him, and you know that He is endowed with all wonderful qualities. It is said that He has infinite beneficent qualities and attributes. So there you are! Think all the nice things: infinitely good, infinitely beautiful, infinitely sweet, infinitely merciful, infinitely true. Read the books and find all the nice adjectives and apply them to Him and try to see Him in your heart. Our sages say that is the easiest thing to do. But, then, there are people who think God cannot have form. I say God cannot *but* have form. He *must* have form. Wherefrom do all these forms come? You cannot say that Satan sat separately and made these forms. All things have come from God, so the source of forms is also in Him. Therefore, He *has* to have form. You cannot say a spring, out of which a stream has issued, hasn't any water. It *has* to have water. So we believe that God has form.

Now, there is this question: Can I meditate on just any form? No, you cannot. You have to know which form is really of God. Great saints and sages have seen God with form, and they have given us descriptions. In Sanskrit there are short poems called *dhyānam*. The literal meaning of *dhyānam* is meditation, but here it means a description of the object of meditation. Anyone who worships God or meditates on God with form will recite one of these Sanskrit poems and that will evoke a picture

in his mind; he will try to *see* this form. That is the way it is done in India.

These forms are the *inside* objects. I mentioned to you a Sanskrit verse from an Upaniṣad in which it was said that some intelligent persons, seeking immortality, saw the inmost Self, that is to say, God, by turning their senses inward. How do you turn your senses inward? Let me first of all discuss this eye, which is the most important sense for our purpose. How do you turn it inward? You will find that as you try to meditate, all kinds of images will come into your mind, some are ordinary, and some are unusual. Don't pay any attention. Ignore them. That is one of the things you must do. Some of these images catch your attention—say a beautiful face will rise in your mind. You think, Ah! I shall meditate on this beautiful face. But that beautiful face does not remain beautiful always. It will become an ugly face. Then what will you do? Meditate on the ugly face? The fact is, whatever comes into your mind, you must not pay the slightest attention, but you should meditate on the form that has been recommended to you by your spiritual guide. You cannot choose the object of meditation by yourself. You may be right in your choice; still, that would not do, because on the second or third day probably you will begin to doubt it. Then you will start with another and yet another; you will not know what to do. If you find a true spiritual guide you should go to him, and if he is good enough he will tell you, "This is the form on which you should meditate. Don't deviate from it. Go on doing it." "Always?" "Always! All your life." Either he will tell you what to do always, or he will say,

"I shall change it afterwards." But whatever he says, you are to do it. There is *no* choice in this.

You should just let other things go. Some other thought might come into your mind; you find it such a wonderful thought that you want to follow its train during your meditation. You shouldn't. This is all distraction. If things with form come into your mind, or things which you have seen or perceived by means of your senses, you should always make a great effort to avoid them. Everything that comes into the mind you should reject; you should see only the form of God. By and by you will find that other things don't rise in your mind so much. Also you will find—and here is where the net gain comes—you will find that outside the hours of meditation things don't attract your attention as much as they did before. Formerly, if you saw something beautiful you would get mad over it; you would think about it, go and look at it, and so on and so forth. Now, not so much. Not merely the eyes; all the senses behave in that way. You find that things haven't much attraction for you. So you see, all the senses are becoming *āvṛtta*—they have turned backward. Instead of going outward, they are going within. And by and by, outside attraction will stop for you. You will find that you are not so imprisoned by the senses. The mind becomes restless because the senses are restless; so when the senses become less restless, the mind also becomes comparatively quiet. Whether it be the hour of meditation or not, you feel like closing your eyes and meditating.

Now you might say that this is all somewhat mechanical. "Yes, my mind is not so restless; there is a

little peace and quiet. But what have I gained?" This is the gain: you begin to feel the existence of a superior Being within yourself and outside yourself. You begin to feel the presence of God in both directions—inside and outside. That is when the process begins to bear fruit. Many wonderful states will come into your mind: you will feel peaceful, you will feel joyful. When peace become a little intense, then it becomes joy. When joy itself becomes a little intense, then you have sweetness. When sweetness has become intense, then you have love. You will feel all these things in regard to God. Thinking about Him, joy comes into your mind. You have meditated in the morning, you will find joy pervading your mind all day. Every day you meditate, you find more and more joy has come into your life. That doesn't mean that you will have all joyful things outside. "Oh, look! I followed that Oriental cult, and see what has come to me! My uncle died, and I have inherited \$50,000!" Ah! not *that* joy. Joy is that which hasn't any cause. Everything truly spiritual is without cause. It comes of itself. If it were produced by some outside cause, then when that cause disappears one day, as it will, joy also disappears.

## 3

Now, those are the general rules. You find all spiritual instruction speaks of them. But how do you do something specifically to have this interiorness? There are some monks in India who will not look this way or that way when they are walking along a road. They look only four or five feet in front of themselves. I don't know

what they would do in these days of automobiles; probably they don't walk into the cities. Anyhow, that is their vow: they will not see anything farther than a few feet ahead. They will not *talk* unless it is necessary; they will not *hear* unless it is necessary; no senses will be allowed to function unless necessary. This is a practice of interiority. Sometimes they will constantly try to see the object of their meditation within their heart. That will not be, of course, a very thoroughgoing meditation; it will be a thread of meditation continued all the time. They make a habit of these practices. Why should you look this way and that? You are going along a street, your head is turning—"Look! Look there!" Not only do *you* look at everything, you make others look at everything. But why? There is no reason. So you control your senses.

A further practice is this: All things have an external meaning and an internal meaning. You recognize that. Everything can be understood superficially and everything can also be understood very deeply. Make a habit of understanding everything in its essential character. You may look at a man; you can look at his face, his skin, his teeth, his eyes, and so on. Why don't you look to the real person beyond his body, beyond even the mind that finds expression in his behaviour or in his face? You *know* that the real person is that third entity beyond both body and mind, the pure Spirit. Just say to yourself, "I am seeing Spirit. I am seeing a fragment of God, God Himself in this form, walking." It is not easy, of course. The mind will not go that far. Just as sometimes you want to dive deep into water; you

go down a little, and then the water forces you up. The mind, also, wants to go to the central part of the man; it goes up to the skin, and there it stops and comes back. But through habit, gradually you find you have penetrated to this depth and you are face to face with the real person, which is Spirit.

There is another practice: instead of looking at an individual thing, look at the whole universe and say, "This is the form of God; the infinite God has this infinite form, this universe-form." There is an experience like that—the experience of God as *Virāṭ*. *Virāṭ* is a Sanskrit word that means "the vast"; this vast universe, infinite universe, is one being. All the stars, planets, trees, men, birds, beasts—all together are the form of God. All together they are that *one* form of this infinite Being. You think of Him as this universe, and you think of Him also as *beyond* all these forms.

In other words, don't let your attention stop with the surface of things at all. Let your attention go deeper. Try to go deeper and yet deeper in the different ways I have told you. You can practise one or two, or you can practise all of them. You can practise looking at this universe and saying, "Yes, this is God Himself. This universe is His form." And in imagination think of Him as existing behind this infinite form, this universal form. Or look at *one* person and try to reach this one Being, this one spiritual divine Being that is in this form. Some people say, "Body, mind, soul, then Soul of the soul—God." Make your mind come face to face with the Soul of the soul. Don't let it stop short. Don't say, "I like to study people. Oh, what a beautiful mind he has!" What has it got to do with you that someone has a

beautiful mind? Why are you going after other people's minds? Go to the thing that will enlighten your heart—the thing that will make your own spiritual nature shine. Don't stop short of it!

You like to meditate? Meditate! The different ways of meditation I have told you. But I shall again warn you that in these matters you *must* receive enlightened help. Don't do just what you please! Again and again you are warned—in our books themselves, in our talks—that you must never practise anything just by reading a book or hearing a lecture. But such is the perversity of the American mind, you want to get a book and from that you want to practise. Americans don't want to be beholden to another person; they are too independent. So they want to learn just from a book. Or they will go to different lecturers, who all talk about the same thing. They will make a choice, or join them all together and practise. The net result is they come to grief. And when they come to grief they say, "Oh, this Oriental stuff is most dangerous. Don't *touch* it, my dear! *Most* dangerous."

Most dangerous is his or her mind! A simple thing they cannot learn. In order to learn a simple thing in schools or colleges and universities they have to sit at the feet of their teachers for years and years. But to learn the most important thing, the subtlest of all things, no! They will not go to anybody and try to learn from him. That is "giving up one's freedom," that's dangerous! The more I live, the more I become convinced—because of experiences of different kinds—that you cannot practise anything spiritual without the guidance of a qualified teacher. There is no scope for individual liking or disliking

or any such thing. If the teacher is a good teacher, he will tell you what is right for you; he will not make things difficult for you.

So in this way, you will slowly find that you have become interiorized. Your eyes have become withdrawn. They say you can know if a person has reached that inwardness by his eyes, and you will know how far he has progressed. One glance, and you can know. However, suppose that we have not advanced very far. Let us try it! Let us start soon! If we cannot do the whole thing, let us do a little part of it. You will find this practice of interiority will always bring you benefit. It will not give you the animal energy of enjoying animal things. For that, you don't come to religion, you go to animals. But you see, if you want to be a moral person, if you want to be a good person, if you want to be a spiritual person, if you want to know truth, if you want to *live* according to truth, then you undertake this practice. And even a little achievement will be of great benefit to you.

## WHY SHOULD WE PRACTISE CONCENTRATION?

### 1

*I* think it is universally recognized that in order for religion to be fruitful, it is necessary that we practise it. This practice may be of various kinds and the general feeling about them is that they differ from one religion or one denomination to another, and of course most of the people of the world think that the practices prescribed by their own religion are the true practices; whereas the practices of other religions are not valid and are not expected to produce any kind of serious results. Our view is not that; as you all know, the Vedantic view is that all religions are true, and if those religions are sincerely practiced then the followers of any one of them will reach some desirable result.

That result can be spoken of in various ways. Oftentimes it is spoken of as God-vision, seeing God. In Christianity, in Catholicism particularly, it is said that the purpose of life is to love and adore God, not necessarily to

see Him. I must admit, however, that it is not easy to love God, and if you can love and adore God truly and intensely and fully, it will also be seeing God. Buddhists speak of the goal as attaining to nirvana; and so on. But when you sympathetically study all these goals of religion, you find that under different names about the same thing is being proposed. I say "about the same thing," because the goal of religion can be spoken of as having different aspects and shades. Suppose I am in another part of the world and I ask you, "Do you know America?" You can say, "Yes, I know America." On further questioning I find you know only a little part of America. Maybe you have always lived in San Francisco and haven't gone anywhere else. True, you still call it "knowing America" and "being in America," but you must admit that there is a difference between such knowledge and the knowledge of a person who has travelled all over the country and seen different cities and different countrysides. His knowledge is more complete. In the same way, there are differences in the knowledge of God; a saint or sage may once have had a vision of God; another may have reached a condition where God-vision is permanent with him, of continuous duration. That is why I said, "about" the same goal. But once a person has a vision of God the negative things have been destroyed for him. The forces which keep a soul away from God, tied to the world, and in ignorance—those forces have been destroyed; if they are not at once completely destroyed, they will later be destroyed of themselves. It is maintained that once a person has God-vision, the rest is easy.

In regard to the validity of all religious practices, however, we make one distinction, and that is where we

join issue with other religions, or with people with some general views about religion. It is that while ritualistic rites and ceremonies have their benefit, they lead only so far and no farther. I am tempted to say that sometimes they lead nowhere; because even these things have to be performed with a certain preparedness and with a requisite condition of mind and heart. If we just go through the routine of it—we go to church, we listen to the sermon (I would say not even listen), we sing hymns, and then we go out and have some coffee and go home—you would not say that that's much of even ritualism. But let us say that people seriously go through ritualistic practices. Would they take one to the highest goal of religion? Some people maintain that they will. I hope you will not think too ill of me if I say that most Christians think that if they lead a generally good life—that is to say, a normally good life—and observe the sacraments of the Church, then they have done all that is to be done and will attain to the kingdom of heaven after they die. We in India long ago repudiated that idea. You will find indications, even records, of this conflict in the pages even of the ancient Vedas, what to speak of the Upaniṣads and the later Hindu scriptures. Long ago this difference was made: yes, rituals and outward practices and beliefs and faiths have their value, but if you want to attain to the ultimate goal of religion, then you have to undertake other practices, primarily concentration.

And here I should say parenthetically that the practice of concentration is not what most of you think; nor is it what it is usually understood to be, and I shall have occasion to explain in detail what it really is. If I tell you these things, as I intend to do, you will then recognize

that the practice of concentration is absolutely necessary. It is not easy to practise—a great deal of preparation is needed before concentration itself can be undertaken—but necessary it is. And further, in order not to appear too discouraging, I will say that everybody has the ability to gain concentration, provided he is also willing to be patient. Patience is also absolutely necessary in the spiritual path. Just as when you sometimes find that the bud on a flowering plant takes a long time to mature and to open into an exquisite, precious flower, you do not touch the bud, you do not try to make it grow quicker or open quicker, you just wait for it, in spiritual things, also, infinite patience is necessary.

If you say, "We have so many other things to do; life after all is short, and we want to accomplish something," it won't have any appeal to me. I do not see any validity in that kind of attitude. What else have you got to do in life? According to my understanding, you do all other things because of a lack of concentration. That's part of the symptom of your disease! It is as though a delirious patient were to say, "Doctor, don't give me this medicine! How shall I howl if you cure me of it?" What do you intend to do? There is nothing else to do. All these things which you think are your duties and after which you run—all these things are due to the fact that you haven't got a concentrated mind; your mind is scattered, and it is the scattered mind which puts before you all these ideas of things to be done and to be pursued. Of course, we Hindus are spoiled by the teaching of reincarnation. We think that we don't have to finish everything in this life. We don't want to be slack about it, but on the other hand, we don't think

that we have to spoil things by our hurry. We think we shall do our best in this life, and then we shall do more in our next life; and maybe in the third or fourth life we shall become perfect. There is no necessity for breaking one's neck.

In any case, things can grow only so far. You really cannot make things happen just because you are impatient. Impatience is a state of mind which is to be condemned in every phase of existence. Even if you think that what you are doing here is worthwhile, even then you have to practise a great deal of patience. Do you know that patience is another name for eternity? How do you attain the eternal? To the extent that you become patient. When you have gained infinite patience, you have attained eternity; you have become the eternal one.

Now, before I say more about concentration, let me return to the goal of religion, because certainly the goal should be spoken of before the means of attaining this goal, concentration, can be properly evaluated. What is the goal of religion? Or, if you don't believe in religion, what is the goal of our existence, of our life? If I study life, I find (and no doubt you also have found) that as species gain higher and higher status in the scale of evolution, they are characterized by the development of what we might call the soul. In inorganic matter there is no soul. In organic matter there seems to be the beginning of an internal force. In more highly evolved living things you find that force—a force holding matter together, a concentrating power—still more clearly expressed. When you come to even higher species of living beings, you generally recognize that there is a unitary being somewhere. The purpose of a lion or a tiger, for instance, is to follow the purpose of that being throughout its living

existence. And when you come to a human being, you recognize that the purpose of this unifying force, this inner seat of concentration, is being fulfilled through all the infinite activities of the body and mind. This mysterious force, which I think you might well call soul, is more and more clearly expressed as species ascend in the scale of evolution. In religion, it is generally accepted that the soul is the most important thing; therefore we want to save our souls, and we want to save the souls of others.

In Hindu systems of thought, as probably you know, the soul is considered to be an independent entity; it is not considered to be a by-product of the mind or tied up with the mind. It may have some traffic with the mind, some relationship with the mind, but it is separate and different from the mind. And it is not made by anyone or by anything. The idea is that the soul somehow has become reduced to its present miserable state and is now trying to get out of this misery—that is the soul's struggle. And when the soul realizes its freedom, realizes itself, or realizes its union with God, then it has found what it has been seeking. It has reached the state of blessedness and peace, and that state is considered to be everlasting, a state of eternal achievement and eternal fulfilment. The soul has found what it has been trying to find, and having found it, nothing more is to be found. That is the goal of religion.

As I said earlier, you may express this goal in various ways. But in whatever way you speak of it, it is a permanent achievement and attainment. Never will you find a religion saying that its goal is something that will last only for five million years, and then you have to start over again. No such thing. It is eternal. Although some religions may not

expressly say that it is an infinite state of being, by implication it *is* infinite, because there cannot be anything eternal which is also not infinite. The point is, how are you going to reach that state?

## 2

At this point I think it will be well if I tell you, as I often do, of the condition of the mind as it is related to the knowledge of reality. Of course, at this late hour of our civilization it is unnecessary for me to stress the fact that whether things exist independently of us or are related to us and are only semi-independent, a knowledge of things certainly is dependent upon the condition of our mind. Here I am speaking to you, and I am trying to speak intelligently. If for some reason my mind becomes scattered I shall at once lose the thread of my argument; I shall become completely halted in my speech. In speaking, I am looking at you; if my mind for some reason becomes highly disturbed, I would not be able to see you clearly. It is common experience that if your mind is diverted by great worry or anxiety, someone may talk to you; you hear him, still you do not hear him. He repeats several times before you are able to catch his meaning. In everything you find that a certain state of mind is necessary before you can have knowledge. Generally, the knowledge that we have is through the senses. But the senses themselves, while going through *their* part of the process, cannot bring knowledge to us unless mind or attention is behind them.

This is the usual way we speak about this process: the sensations are carried over to their respective brain centres, and from there these sensations, which of course are a function of energy, somehow reach the mind. And here there is a sort of missing link: we do not know how this movement reaches the mind from the brain. We say it reaches a part of the mind which is submerged, which is not known to us. And there it arouses similar sensations, and a sort of generalization takes place. Then it reaches the conscious part of the mind where there is either a complete and sure knowledge or a doubtful knowledge. In either case, the process ends on the level of intelligence, which is a part of the mind, and there we have a sure knowledge of things. So when this intelligence part of the mind is not behind that which is taking place, even perception becomes impossible. This is of our so-called normal perception.

In normal existence, it is assumed that there are an infinite number of objects of various natures, living and nonliving, and that these can be perceived by us human beings in a certain way, about which, if we are normal, all of us agree. That's an assumption. When, however, this same perception, this so-called normal perception, is analysed and sought to be defined, it is found that it is a highly complex process, full of contradictions. Say there is a rose in front of you. We generally take for granted that the rose reflects itself in the retina of the eye, the optical nerve thereby becomes activated, and these sensations are carried over to a brain centre. From there, the sensation goes, as I said, to the submerged part of the mind where the knowledge of rose is already there, because I have seen roses before, and those memories will be evoked. And then

the sensation will be brought to the conscious mind, and I say, "I am seeing a rose." The assumption is that the rose existed outside and did all these things.

But you see there is a contradiction in our argument. It is first of all found that colour itself does not exist outside; even physics will tell us that colour is produced through the contact of our eyes with matter; this contact is the point where the sense of colour arises. Or, not being physicists but philosophers, we would like to say that colour is produced in the mind. However, I think both scientists and philosophers agree that colour does not exist outside. There might be conditions which will produce the sensation of red, blue, or green colour, but the actual sense of colour is our own. Well, if that is so, then here is a rose without colour. Now when you think of a rose existing outside of you which does not have a colour, can you say that there is a rose there? And yet it is supposed that this same rose has reflected itself on our eyes and activated all the other processes. How could you be a knower of a rose before the rose itself has been produced? On thorough analysis it is recognized that the rose itself is a product of this activity which we call perception. This activity which takes place within ourselves, that activity produces this rose. Rose itself does not exist. The process we generally call "seeing a rose" itself is the cause of the rose. The whole thing becomes highly complex. I think I am probably not clear enough, but if I am not clear enough, I'm not too sorry about it, because knowledge is itself confusion.

I shall help you with the first step. You are taking for granted that there are rose bushes, that there is this, there is that, and you are seeing these things. You are living

in a fool's paradise. On examination, no such things really exist. It is a well-known fact that if we were to perceive the world as it is recognized by science, we would not see any of these things which are present before us. None! Just imagine this: I am holding on to this lectern with great confidence, but if I were to know what furious activities the constituents of atoms are going through, I shall stay one thousand miles away from this lectern. Could you sit on a chair, knowing all these things? No, you couldn't. The world we think exists is a fantastic something that we have built up in our mind. It hasn't any more basis than a superstition, a tradition. The whole world exists as a tradition, but not in reality. That is what science tells us. Philosophy long ago told us this; mystics have always told us about this. But then they were only philosophers and mystics, and who would listen to them? At least you have to listen to the scientists.

I sometimes regret that scientists do not live up to what they have found. If they would just live up to it, they would become very great saints. And they would have tremendous influence on the world, because their lives would be highly spiritual and based on things which they can demonstrate. They can say, "Look, this is the way it is; this is what has made a mystic of me—knowing that this world is just a furious movement and that that movement itself is brain-splitting, cannot be understood. Having known these things, I have given up everything. I cannot sit on a chair, nor sleep on a bed, nor eat anything, nor can I consider myself to have a body. So I have given up everything, and I recognize myself just as a conscious being." You see, *mind* is the thing. Mind it is which makes this world; mind it is which

makes this world appear to you as it appears to you now. If this mind changes, the world will change automatically.

## 3

Now, let me put very briefly what I want to tell you. You see, our philosophers say that when the mind is scattered (please notice these words, *mind is scattered*), then we see gross matter. Just remember this. If our mind is scattered, that is to say, if we find that our mind is continually darting in infinite directions, that it cannot be held at one point for one moment, it moves on, then reality (let us use that word without defining it)—reality appears to us as gross matter. And because the mind is scattered, this gross matter appears to us as infinitely varied. No wonder there are an infinite number of forms in this universe. And no wonder that they are continually changing! There is not a single moment in which the universe stands still.

Further, let me say that while we recognize that we ourselves have a permanent entity—I recognize I am the same person who was in India, say thirty or forty years ago, went to college in such and such a place, knew such and such a person, did such and such things—while I recognize the continuity of my being, of my identity, I cannot put my finger on it. Everybody says “I am the soul,” but he cannot actually see the soul. Many thinkers have pointed out to us that when we try to see what the soul is we see only a condition of the mind, and conditions of the mind are continually changing. So they generally conclude that the so-called soul is a delusion; there is no such thing

at all; there are only changing states, nothing more than that.

In Buddhism, they made much of that idea. I have to add, however, that the Hindu philosophers found many flaws in the arguments of the Buddhistic philosophers on this point. And I think I can say without being accused of partiality that Buddhists were really not able to argue successfully that everything is just momentary, that there is no permanent entity at all. They couldn't prove it. Philosophically, they have really failed. In the West, also, there have been philosophers who have doubted the existence of a permanent soul or permanent self or entity.

But it is only when the mind is gross and scattered that we cannot perceive ourselves as the Spirit or the soul. Further, although most of us recognize that the universe is not really a scattered thing but a unity and that probably there is an intelligence governing this universe—in other words, although most of us believe that God exists—we cannot see Him. This is when the mind is scattered. These things are tied up together. They do not just happen simultaneously; they are causally related.

Now if by some means, naturally or through some effort, the same scattered mind is quieted and concentrated a little so that it does not run in infinite directions, then those who have observed these things at once find that behind this infinite number of external phenomena there is another reality, a finer, more unified reality. Or to put it more correctly, they discover that reality is something beyond this infinite number of external phenomena or forms. Forms are continually changing, but the real is not equivalent to the forms. The real is something beyond the

forms, just lying in the background, as when you go to a movie, the screen is always there. At first, before the movie begins, you see the white screen in the dark. Then, afterwards, you see all kinds of figures enacting a drama, and those are the things you notice. Then after the movie is over, again there is the same screen. Well, when your mind has quieted a little you have that insight, and you recognize that behind these continually changing forms of this universe there is the real, which is unaffected by forms but which nevertheless exists as a background. And they find further that all these forms would have been impossible of perception if this reality were not behind them, just as you would not have been able to see the movie if the screen were not there. You see, when your mind is quieted, you become aware of the real. And by the same token, you also become aware of a being within yourself which appears to you to be beyond the forces of the body and the senses, and also beyond the forces of the mind. The mind is not always our friend. Sometimes it is our friend; more often it is not. But beyond all these forces you become aware of yourself, untouched by them, ungoverned by them. And you begin to feel that God is closer and closer to you. Out of that comes what is called genuine faith in God.

If you ever come across a person who has an instinctive faith in God—there are such people here and there—and if you observe their life, you will notice that they are not much tied to the body or to things of the senses; they are comparatively free of those things; that state is natural to them. Of course we say what is natural is really what has been acquired in past lives. If a student

appears in a class, and reels out answers to the teacher's questions, the assumption is that he or she studied at home and learned the lesson. If in this life we manifest certain qualities of mind, it is assumed that we have acquired these qualities in our past lives. But whatever that might be, whether we acquired faith in God in this life or in our past lives, it is always the case that our mind has to get away from the world before we can really have faith that God exists.

We therefore say in India that all these questions which in the West often create turmoil, would be answered if those who talk all the time about whether God exists or doesn't exist, making other people miserable by their arguments—if they would just withdraw their minds from sense objects a little, they would have their answer. But they will not do so. Their minds are reeking with worldly desires, and they have an itch in their brains. Instead of anything else, they take up this subject of God to discuss. It is just an accident that they find it; it doesn't prove that they are really after the knowledge of God. Personally, when I meet such people I do not feel that they require any special attention, their talk is just a device for themselves.

Well, I said the scattered mind is the gross mind. A quiet or concentrated mind is the subtle mind, the fine mind, very fine mind. When you hear that somebody has intuition or perception which ordinarily one cannot have—that is the action of the fine mind. You wonder with what mind the great sages and saints were aware of God. This ordinary mind can only traffic with material objects, so with what mind does one become aware of God? With what mind do you think you will be able to meditate on God?

What part of the mind can feel the tremendous love of God because of which a person gives up everything and cries and cries for the vision of Him? That is the very fine part of the mind, and when you have concentrated the mind, quieted the mind, you become aware of it. Then you will begin to see everywhere the reality which is Divinity Itself. God is the reality.

I said that you are impatient because you want to attend to something else, and I said that that is your delusion. There *is* nothing else. It is the scattered state of mind which makes you think there are other things to do. In this subtle state of which I am speaking, you will find all is God. So the only one to whom you want to pay your attention is God. He is the only one. You may not know it, but persons whom you love and whom you hate, whom you serve, and whom you destroy—everything that you do unto any other person you are doing unto God. If you knew it, your action would change completely. But whether you know it or not, that is what you are doing. There is nothing in this universe outside of God. There is nothing except God Himself. It is not that matter exists *in* God. How could *matter* exist in God? God Himself is just pure Spirit; all that is, is God Himself. And in this state you realize it.

Do you want to realize that God alone exists? Well, I don't have to ask you that question, do I? You see, I am convinced that whether you agree to realize it or not, you will be forced to do it. It is just a question of time, my friends. Of course, while you are being swept away by a powerful current, you think you are deciding, "Should I swim toward the ocean or should I not? I have decided I won't swim to the ocean." Well, you may have the pleasure

of all these kinds of decisions and arguments, of doing this and not doing this. In the meantime, you are being swept away to the ocean. Do you think you have any choice about it? The choice is that you can either spare yourself all this unnecessary argument and unnecessary decision and indecision, or you can try to swim against the current and wear yourself out. If you just recognize that through all the mistakes you make, through all the right things you do, through everything you are continually being moved towards the ocean of the Divine Being—if you just recognize that, you won't struggle for all these nonsensical things; life will be easier for you and full of peace. If you say, "One cannot recognize it in a single day," I admit that. But although you cannot at once embody this conviction because of old habits, you will embody at least a little of it—a little of it everyday and everyday; then after some time you will find you are reconciled to it. You will say, "Yes, everything is for finding God, and whatever I do, I do it unto God." And so your actions, your thoughts, your emotions will undergo a necessary change.

Since this is the inevitable destiny of the soul, then why not accelerate the process? You see, we human beings seem to have this choice given to us: because we are capable of seeing the past, and of looking into the future, we recognize what is taking place in life and we can eliminate all kinds of waste in our efforts. All our energies and all our attention can be directed to the right thing. Otherwise, we shall go on reeling here and there instead of going straight. That is the choice we have. And don't think it is a mean choice or not of much benefit. We can save lives and lives of suffering by this kind of choice.

I have heard some people say, "Since we are destined to realize God, what is the hurry?" But these very people, I have found, are mortally afraid of any kind of discomfort, any kind of suffering. How can they say, "Well, it doesn't matter. Since I am sure to realize God, I won't bother about it today, or in this life. Since it will come to me, why bother about it?" Behind that argument, there is a sort of assumption that all the things in this life will be pretty nice, good fun. "We'll realize God anyhow. Why not have fun in the meantime?" Everybody knows that life is not fun at all. There might be occasional, very occasional fun, but very soon it is turned into extreme misery. If you say, "We don't feel miserable," then I will answer that you have become desensitized; you have suffered so much, you have become so gross that fine sensitiveness has been lost. But however that may be, we can save ourselves all this nonsense if we just go about it in the right way.

Thinkers have noticed the interrelationship between the mind and the knowledge of reality, which I have tried to tell you about. Having found this out, they advised, concentrate the mind and thereby quiet it, refine it. To the extent that the mind is refined, refined reality within yourself and outside yourself will reveal itself to you. If I am suffering, it is because the thing within me which I call myself is not very pleasing to me, is not in perfect condition; also because the world in which I live and from which I try to acquire things that give me pleasure, this world does not appear fine enough to me. We continually have to fight against the world; it is full of dangers, full of fears, full of all kinds of hateful things. Now, suppose I find that by merely changing my mind I discover within myself

something extraordinary: mind itself appears wonderful, and I myself am wonderful—not the weakling I think myself to be, full of ignorance, full of all kinds of cross-currents and self-contradictions. I find I am beyond all these things, a wonderful person. I look at others, I also find them most wonderful. I find none to hate, I find nothing in this world fearful or dangerous. All these things have disappeared from me. Don't you think that would be a most wonderful world? That is why we should practise concentration.

Some of you might think I am talking about things that have no practical bearing on your life, so I shall begin with something that you might consider practical. Many of you have children. You should teach your children concentration. When they eat, when they are playing, or when they are reading—when they're doing anything, insist on their giving their full mind to it. It is a dangerous habit children are forming nowadays to have a television or a radio going while they are studying. They will tell you that this helps in learning, makes it pleasant. Never, never allow the mind to become divided; whether you are eating dinner, or talking with somebody, or performing a job, or watching television or listening to the radio or to music—whatever you do, make a habit of giving your full attention to it. That is an *absolutely necessary* thing. You won't know until you have trained yourself in this way what a tremendous difference it makes in your life. Tremendous difference! If you have trained an average child in the art of attention or concentration, you will find that he will grow up to be a stronger person. He will be able to control himself. And as a result, his life will be much easier. I would

not say his life will be perfect, but concentration is a great equipment.

Who does not know that much of our suffering comes because we cannot control our mind? I want to forget something, I cannot forget it. Continually my mind goes back to the memory of it. I get crazy. Then I take a tranquilizer. Well, tranquilizers do not take me far. The doctors are already warning that they are dangerous. So what shall I do? I find my brain has become torpid, my mind has gone to pieces. All right, I go to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist wants to put me in a nice place; but the nice places are all filled up; I cannot go there. What is my destiny? I am not saying this from a spiritual point of view. In everyday life you must have noticed that even among very worldly people there are some who have control over their mind. Others don't have that control because, apart from other reasons, physical or psychological, they have not been trained to concentrate. With concentration, a person understands a subject better. We somehow cannot get hold of all the aspects of things, whereas another person can. Scientists are continually finding new truths; inventors are creating new machines. One person at once sees all the different bearings of a certain situation; another person cannot. What's the matter with the second person? His mind is not concentrated, he is not trained in attention. When you concentrate the mind, there is something that produces knowledge. Concentration will not produce the machine you are inventing, but it will produce knowledge, which afterward you can set down on paper, or make a model of. It is concentration which suddenly brings out an explanation of a mysterious phenomenon. You have to worry over it,

hold the mind there, hold it, hold it, then suddenly something comes out. Just as sparks of fire come when you rub one piece of wood against another, sparks of knowledge suddenly come out of the mind when it is held at one point. These are facts, my friends; if we want to keep our mind in a right condition, we will recognize them.

There are many people today who really are worried that the human mind is degenerating. In the average college student, we do not find enough knowledge and enough efficiency. We ask, "What is the matter with the system of education?" The matter is that the art of concentration, of attention, is gone. There is too much scattering of the mind, too much scattering of life energy. That is what is happening. Of course, concentration itself is not as simple a thing as it is made out to be. There are so many distractions! A man comes to the office, his mind is not in the office. Then you wonder, "What is the matter with him? Maybe he has some family trouble." And you find yes, his son is going to the dogs and the parents are very much worried; he smashed a car and broke this and broke the other thing, and next time what the boy will do, nobody knows. Or maybe a man finds his wife has become an alcoholic, and the husband cannot give his mind to his business.

Unfortunately we are living at a time when very little attention is being given to conservation. Everything is just expression, scattering out. The moment a person thinks of doing something, he does it. The moment he seeks pleasure, he indulges in pleasure. But conservation is an important part of building up life; self-expression, self-manifestation is the least of it. You take for granted that

before a singer appears on the concert stage and sings well, she has trained her voice for years and years and now she has become an excellent singer. Why don't you think the same principle should be applied to every phase of our life, every kind of life? You find the average schoolboy or college student is perfect in self-indulgence and self-scattering; very few have learned the art of conservation. Conservation is not being an owl and sitting in one corner—though a good deal of that is necessary. You cannot spend all the evening dancing and drinking and become a very concentrated person. Concentration requires a well-disciplined life.

In India one of the topics of conversation among schoolboys and college boys is the practice of continence and chastity. You will probably think, "Oh, they're afraid." They are not afraid. It is taken for granted that until a person has entered his twenties and is ready to marry, he should completely abstain from sex. You might ask, "How many succeed?" That's not the point. The point is that if you do not make an effort, then many of you will not succeed at all. I am astonished that a country like America which has such wonderful opportunities of maintaining perfect health—prenatal care, then child care, all kinds of food, everything is available to you—yet the country is ridden with disease. Thousands and thousands of doctors are feeding upon your sickness, and where your body and muscles are strong, your nerves are shattered, brain cells are debilitated. And when you still have some brain, your mind is shattered. Why should you not be people of tremendous strength and perfect health, not only of the body but also of the nerves and the brain and the mind?

Why shouldn't you have that? You have been favoured by God as no nation in human history has ever been. Why is it you should suffer from all those things? My answer is that you have everything, but you also dissipate; you are continually scattering things away. You believe in self-expression. I say bunk! What self do you have that you want to express? First of all acquire a self, then express it.

Now, I am not dead to the danger of what you might call self-suppression in the name of concentration or conservation. I'm quite alive to it, but I make a distinction between self-discipline and self-suppression. If there were no distinction, then any kind of effort to hold oneself in would be considered wrong. But it is not wrong. Suppose somebody has given you cause for provocation, and you at once fly off the handle. Would you think well of yourself? Instead, in spite of all provocation you remain calm and quiet, you behave rightly, give the right answers, take the right action, wouldn't it be better? Under all kinds of provocations, whether by other people or by nature, external or internal, to maintain oneself in a desirable condition is called discipline. You see, when you do not have a higher ideal and are holding the mind down, then suppression has an ill effect, but when you have a higher ideal and contrary forces prevent you from attaining it, then when you suppress those contrary forces, that suppression cannot do you any harm. Yes, it is unpleasant, all struggle is unpleasant, but there is no danger to the mind. You will find that another vista has opened for you; you find you are moving in another, wonderful direction, much better than the direction in which you were being held. These are the things that everyone can practise.

## 4

Concentration, as the very word implies, is holding the mind at one point. We don't allow the mind to think of many things simultaneously or in quick succession. Suppose I am trying to concentrate on the image of the sun. I say the sun itself is the Lord, the resplendent Lord. God is considered to be effulgent; this is the effulgent Lord God. Well, I try to visualize the form of the sun, and I want to continue being aware of this vision of the sun in my mind's eye. You try to do it. You will find that in half a moment your mind is thinking of something else—the sun, then the sky, and the clouds, then a picnic, and then those who went on the picnic, then the car, and then this and then the other thing, and the mind is scattered so rapidly that you won't even know how it has flitted by association from one thing to another. In one fraction of a second your mind has gone; there is no concentration. Of course, then you bring the mind back, hold it there, hold it there, hold it there—continually try. Then you will find you have succeeded a little.

Why is it that the mind runs in all different directions? That is the thing to be understood. Another thing that has to be understood is that when we speak of concentration as productive of such wonderful results as bringing the vision of God to us, we should remember that we want our *whole* mind to be concentrated—the whole of the conscious mind and also the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind, according to us, is that mind in which the impressions of all our past experiences are stored. Along with that, there are many other things in the

unconscious mind, and all of those things have to be eradicated, otherwise the mind will not be concentrated.

Now, besides that, unless you have life energy or vitality within you, the senses do not function well, the mind does not function well. Vitality, life energy, is everything. For instance, if a person is starved he cannot see things clearly; everything looks hazy to him. He cannot hear clearly. Mind cannot think, cannot remember. That's a well-known fact. So you see, behind the action of the mind, there has to be life energy. Vital energy energizes the body, it energizes the senses, it energizes the mind. In Sanskrit, we call it *prāṇa*; if you want to attain to full concentration, you have to have full control over *prāṇa* or vital energy.

You will probably say, "I haven't the willpower to concentrate my mind." I would say that if you are a sincere person, surely you have the willpower. But behind your willpower, vitality is not there, life force is not there. It is because you are not eating well, or maybe for some other reason you are physically weak. Then the teacher will say, "Now, eat; make yourself strong." Or if you are sick, "Take this medicine and get well." But more often than not, vital energy is expending itself in other directions.

Vital energy is behind the senses; and, most important, it is behind what we call desires. When our external desires have tremendous vital energy behind them, then they engage our energy in their service, and there is not the same energy at your disposal when you want to practise meditation or concentration. It is no wonder, therefore, that every religion tells you that you must give up worldly desires. Many think, "Why not have both?"

There is no harm in living in a good house, wearing nice clothes, having many friends, travelling—what is unspiritual about it?” This is what is unspiritual about it: if you have put vitality behind these desires of yours, then you will not have vitality in practicing concentration or meditation. You might say, “I have so much vitality that I can scatter it all around.” Well, that’s not true. It has been found that if you put it in one direction, then it is not in the other direction. Vitality is behind the senses, vitality is in the whole body, so that every appetite of the body is clamouring for satisfaction, and from there you have to drag it. When you do so, you find that gradually you have separated your vital energy from the senses, from your desires, and from all the other things in the mind which are not spiritual. And to the extent that you have taken your vital energy from those things you are able to devote it to concentration and meditation.

Concentration requires not only bringing one’s whole mind to the point of meditation, but also bringing one’s whole vitality to it. It is said that when one has reached the highest degree of concentration, the body becomes as though dead. There is no pulse beat, and all the outward signs of physical death appear in the body. The eyes do not see; even if you shout in the person’s ear, the sound will not reach him. You can pinch him, you can burn his body, he will not be aware of it. That is called concentration, and at that time it is given the technical name of *samādhi*. A person in such a state has withdrawn consciousness from everything else, even from his whole body, even from his mind, and he has become one with God. You might say that that’s a horribly negative state. Negative and positive,

these are tricky words. But remember this: in that state a person goes from the world of darkness to the world of light—an infinite realm of light. You think this world is a lighted world? It is not, it is a dark, dark world. After a person in meditation has this vision of light and comes out of it, and if for some reason his mind does not remain in that exalted state, the whole universe looks dark, as if the sun had been extinguished. Literally! You think this is a lighted world! Compared with what you see there, it is nothing, it is darkness—so dark that even existence becomes obliterated. You cannot perceive anything here.

I should say that since we are not interested in concentration for practical purposes, although I alluded to this aspect also, but interested only so far as spiritual life is concerned, then these are the things involved in it: You live a very restrained life outwardly. You sometimes hear that people practise all kinds of austerities, they go to such extremes that they become comatose and they think that's a spiritual state. It is not a spiritual state at all; it's a diseased state. But when austerity is practised in a moderate and directed way, it is of extreme benefit. Everything has to be moderate; and you deliberately get rid of worldly desires. You cannot cater to these desires and at the same time have vitality to practise concentration. You won't have it.

Then, regular practise is necessary. I would say practise concentration in a mechanical way whenever you can. If you are reading a book, tell your mind that you will not at the same time listen to a conversation going on within a few feet of you, or listen to something in the street, or think of other things in between. When you are reading, read. This is a mechanical practise of concentration. Some people do

other practices. For instance, they will keep the attention of their eyes focused on one thing. They are aware of just that thing alone and of nothing else. They say that in such practices a correct posture is very helpful. The essential part of that posture is a straight backbone. Whether you sit cross-legged or sit on a chair, sit straight and do not let the spine touch anything. Of course that is completely against your idea of sitting, which is to incline against the back of the chair. You think that is quite legitimate. We think it is altogether wrong. First of all, the spine is not in a straight line, and next, the spine touches something, which it should not do. These are mechanical practices.

When you come to actual spiritual practices of concentration, it has been found that in order to make the mind concentrate, we have to give it an object that demands the wholeness of it. God alone demands the wholeness of the mind. Our sages maintain that the existence of the mind and the reason it is so active is that it is continually trying to see God. Even the mind of an ignorant man, or of a worldly minded man is really seeking God. Really seeking God. Haven't you noticed? The mind is capable of thinking of good things endlessly; it is not hurt by thinking of good things, moral things, spiritual things. But let the mind think of bad things. You will find that very soon it will become sick, body will become sick, everything will become sick. That shows what the normal tendency of the mind is. So when you give God to the mind as its object, you find that whatever the struggle to begin with, very soon your mind is waking up. It is an astonishing thing. How often I have thought about it! We struggle for so many things, and so few things we succeed in achieving; yet whoever has struggled for spiritual things

has achieved. No effort has been as fruitful of results as spiritual effort. So when you try to concentrate, you find that your mind wakes up. That's a wonderful thing!

First of all, the conscious mind comes there. Then you find your unconscious mind is coming up. All the things that are lying in the unconscious mind, impressions of the past, are somehow becoming transmuted or negated or destroyed. You do not have to make any deliberate effort about it. You do not have to say, "Now, since the unconscious mind also has to be occupied in concentration, let me find what is in it." You don't have to do that, and you shouldn't do it. It would be like saying, "Now, in order that the tree can grow well the roots should be strong; so let me dig up the roots." Every few days you dig up the roots and handle them and measure them, straighten them out, because they should be good roots. You know what happens. The whole tree dies along with the roots. Don't monkey with this! Of course, if you are a sick person, do anything to get rid of your sickness; I have nothing to say about it. But if you are a so-called normal person, don't do it. The very process of trying to be aware of the highest reality—this very process will purify the unconscious mind. If there is anything wrong in it, those things will be eliminated. This is our prescription. And don't force the mind too much; this cure of the unconscious mind should take place at a normal speed, then there will not be any difficulty about it.

It is said that life energy also is seeking God; life also is seeking God. So when you try to think of God, you find you have more willpower; life energy is behind your desire to be aware of God and to hold the mind to God, more and more, more and more. Not only does your mind become less

distracted, it becomes deeper, and you also discover greater and greater expansion in it. When you achieve a certain degree of success in this practice of concentration you will be astonished to see how many extraordinary things are coming out of that mind. Then one has to take care that these extraordinary things do not distract your attention. You are not to pay attention to them. It is like a person going to a distant city; he is driving through a beautiful countryside, he catches glimpses of beautiful scenery, but he may not stop.

Well, after some time, when you have become established a little in this concentration, which is meditation on God, you will find that nobody needs to lecture you on why you should practise concentration. You will find that your mind has gone higher and higher, higher and higher—wonderful things come. It is then that you recognize that all these seemingly external things are foolish things; they exist because of a certain state of your mind. Things exist because we have created them through our own mind, they do not have any independent existence at all. Every moment we are projecting things in order to satisfy our own vision of reality, and that projection is called the external world, including our own body and mind. Gradually we become free from those things. Gradually we become more and more aware that we are the independent Spirit, the Atman, which is of the divine nature and which is a part of God and which is God Himself. We become aware of it and eventually we fully realize it. And when we fully realize it, we have attained to highest concentration, which is called *nirodha*. There all mental activities have ceased, and the vision of the divine alone has remained.

## FROM INITIATION TO ILLUMINATION

### 1

*L*et us start with the literal meaning of this word *initiation*: We are initiated into something that is new, something that we have not entered before and that has not been a part of our existence. We are initiated into certain truths or certain modes of behaviour or certain processes of action, and so forth. When this word is applied to spiritual life it has a similar meaning; it means that we are introduced into something we have not reached before. In all religions there is a general assumption that in our quest for spiritual life we arrive at a point where we have to take a definite stand and take a definite step. It is at that time that initiation becomes reasonably possible.

Almost all of us have some religious sense. Of course, in the present times, religion is suspect, and many of us do not care for it, but I have observed that we often accord to something else the same status as religion occupies. For example, we make a political view or an

economic view a religion for ourselves. We become as fanatical about it as some people are about their religious views, and we give it the same devotion. In other words, there is a compulsion in our nature to find something ideal and to devote ourselves to the realization of that ideal. So almost everyone has a religious sense.

But there are some people, we have to admit, in whom the religious sense is more pronounced than in others. And when it is very pronounced, it makes the person restless, because, you see, in the world of the senses in which the average person lives, one does not find the things one seeks. The senses are transient, the body is mortal, perishable; even the mind is not to be counted upon. We know how the mind changes and loses its vigour as time goes on: sometimes an intelligent person with the passing of time becomes an idiot. None of those things can be depended upon; so there is a cry in our heart for something beyond the world of the senses, and this something has often been spoken of as God.

When this craving becomes very strong and very definite, there comes as it were a final choice in our mind. We say to ourselves, if not in so many words, certainly in our feeling, that we shall not seek the world of the senses. True, in spite of ourselves our mind turns towards sense objects, but we deliberately do not to seek them; we seek God. It is at this time that we become serious about religion; we want to find ways and means by which we can absorb ourselves more and more in God. And at that point I think many people find—I should say almost all people find—a certain helplessness. They

do not know what to do, how to think about God, and they wonder if there is not a process, a method, by which one could without wasting time go quickly towards Him. All these thoughts begin to come, and as in learning any other kind of knowledge, in learning about God, too, we try to find an expert guide.

Now in India we always think that it is a very great good fortune when we are able to find a real teacher. In one sense, it is said that teachers are always available. There is a belief among devotees that when a person is ready for serious spiritual practice he or she comes upon a worthy teacher; he does not have to go on helplessly. It is, rather, the fitness called discipleship that is not easy to acquire. There is a saying: "You can find hundreds and thousands of teachers, but not a single disciple." I don't think that saying means that worthy teachers are available on every street corner, but that everybody wants to be a teacher and nobody wants to be a disciple. You see, in order to learn, we have to have certain qualifications—the virtues of discipleship—and we are very unwilling to acquire those virtues.

Well, whatever that might be, there is also the idea that when a person is ready for serious spiritual practice, he will come across a good teacher. The general custom is to search for such a teacher. Spiritual teachers are strange people in one sense. You would think that if they have spiritual knowledge, if they are enlightened, they would go out and help others. That's an altogether wrong idea. It is not true; not true at all. As with the pendulum of a clock, there are two movements in an enlightened mind. Sometimes that mind will swing

towards other people, and at that time such a person is willing to sacrifice himself to help them. But his mind also swings in the opposite direction, and then he or she wants to go beyond the world of relativity, wants to forget all time, space, conditions, different people, wants to forget entirely and plunge fully into the consciousness of God. There are many souls who are like that.

Again, many there are who have not yet attained to the highest state but who, for us, are enlightened enough; you find that they will say, "No, I am not ready to help anybody; I have not found the truth fully yet; I want to find this truth for myself first." And however you might beg them and cry unto them, they won't pay any attention to you. Such people can be very firm about it. That is why it is said that one should search for the teacher. And in India, spiritual aspirants search for years. They go here, go there; they talk with one, beg another, and so on. And of course there is the other difficulty, which is that your spiritual ideal may be one thing, whereas when you find an enlightened person, he or she may be following some other aspect of the divine ideal to which you are not drawn. Then there is that intangible quality—personal affinity. You are drawn to one person, you are not drawn to another. Both are good people. "Yes, oh, yes, I know he is a very great man, wonderful!" But you don't feel drawn towards him.

You have to take all these elements into consideration, and I would not suggest that you wait until you find someone who would be everything that you think your teacher should be. That's asking for too much perfection. But if you find an enlightened person whom,

generally speaking, you like and who follows the same ideal that you are trying to follow, then sacrifice something of your own peculiarities and approach him and say, *adhīhi bhagavo brahma*,<sup>1</sup>—"Sir, teach me about God." This is a quotation from one of the old Upaniṣads, the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, in which a young man went to a teacher, who also happened to be his father, and said, "Bhagavan—O Glorious One—teach me about Brahman, teach me about God."

Even now, that kind of formula is used. The teacher may know you want to receive initiation from him, but he won't take any step until you come to him somewhat formally and ask his guidance: "I want to be your disciple; please initiate me." You have to formally approach him; that is the custom in India. And I think there is a good reason for it. You see, our words, although they are often completely valueless, are also valuable in a sense. When we put something in words, in articulate utterance, then we are somehow committed to it. Suppose you have a poor opinion about a person, until you have expressed that opinion no situation has precipitated. But if you speak out, "Oh, you are no good!" you can well imagine what a terrible situation there will henceforth be. Similarly, on the good side: if you express admiration for a person and declare your loyalty to him, then allegiance to him becomes binding upon you. But until you have spoken it, you can come and go as you please; you are not yet bound to him. Such is the power of words. So I think that is a very good practice, because

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<sup>1</sup>*Taittirīya Upaniṣad*, 3.1.1.

if you want to be someone's disciple, if you want to be initiated by him, you have to think about it for a long time. And when you have expressed this desire and the teacher thinks that you are qualified enough—of course, he, also, would test *you* to see if you are a worthy person or not—then he will give you initiation.

Now, initiation, as most of you know, because you have read about it or have been told about it from this platform, consists in instruction from the teacher. He does not just give you instruction in how to meditate, he will also tell you what kind of life you should live so that your life will be helpful to your spiritual growth. If you try to practise meditation and then live whatever kind of life you choose, that would not do, because if your life is not spiritually favourable, then what you gain by spiritual practice, you lose by unrestrained living. There has to be a harmony in life; so the teacher will give you instruction about your modes of behaviour, your food, and so on. Some teachers will give you such secondary instruction at the time of formal initiation; others will give it at other times. The reason for this variation is that sometimes you may not meet the teacher, who has been kind enough to initiate you, ever again. Maybe he is a wandering monk, or maybe he lives so far off that you would not be able to visit him. If you say, "We could write letters," well, letter writing is a chore, and teachers sometimes don't feel that they have to spend their life writing letters. In any case, letter writing depends upon a good postal system, and in the olden days there was no such thing at all. So the custom arose that the teacher will tell you

everything he has to tell you then and there. And your duty is to follow all those things afterwards. But if you can keep in close contact with the teacher, and if he knows that you are living close by and will be visiting him often, then he will give these secondary instructions from time to time. At the time of formal initiation he will tell you which aspect of God would be suitable for you to think about. That is called indicating the Ishtam.

You see, your life has been built in a certain way so that, although you may not know it, a certain vision of God is what you have been seeking to realize. The object of search is called Ishta or Ishtam. The teacher will tell you what your Ishtam is; then he will give you instruction about your daily spiritual practice—whether you should meditate or whether you should repeat a certain word, and so on. He will give you detailed instruction, and you are expected to follow it. When you have received such instruction, you have been initiated formally and actually into spiritual life.

What is meant is this: when you take initiation your feet are planted on the spiritual path and you are given a big push; you will not be able to stop or to stray away from that path until you have reached the goal where God is, where you will assume a Godlike nature, and where you will become at one with God. That is what happens to a soul who has been initiated by a true teacher. There is a sort of compulsion about it, a desirable compulsion. Just as a hungry person feels compelled to go to the dining room and partake of a very nice, well-cooked dinner, similarly, a hunger rises

in your soul, and you are directed to where this food for the soul can be had, and that food is wonderful. You partake of it to your heart's content, and you become fulfilled. Since God is light, you become illumined. That is how initiation leads on to illumination. And that is why I have titled my subject "From Initiation to Illumination."

## 2

Now, some of you may wonder, as I myself have many times wondered: Is it necessary to go to a teacher or to receive any kind of initiation at all? There is the simple approach to God and spiritual truth: We are His already, we are His children, He has created us. Or, if we want to think this way,—we are parts of Him, He is the Soul of our soul. And it is maintained by all theistic religions that God is the guide and ruler of everyone. He is called *antaryāmin*, the inner controller; that is to say, He dwells within, and from within He controls our whole being, mental and physical. Why, then, should we have to go through the rigmarole of going to a teacher and receiving initiation? Why should we accept the idea that unless we have some such initiation we cannot really realize God? Why should we have this feeling? God is here; why should we not approach Him in the simplicity of our own trust and faith?

The catch, of course, is that simple trust in God is not readily at hand. You see, to surrender to God and to say, "Whatever You make me do, I shall do," is not easy. That state of simple trust comes only after a person has reached a very high degree of spiritual growth.

We find that one cannot reach that state by oneself, and so the idea that we can approach God and that He will do everything for us is not practical. In short, it has been found from general experience that until we are so drawn to God that we feel He is moving our being, that every impulse comes from Him, and that we have no will of our own—until we have reached that state, we should take the help of a teacher. Therefore you take initiation.

Now, if the teacher is qualified, then along with whatever instruction you receive from him, all our sages have said that you will also receive a very subtle power. You should not expect to feel a kind of electric sensation going through you. Don't think about it in a material sense. But a tree is known by its fruit, and just as when you plant a tree, you do not at first see any fruit, but eventually a blossom comes, and after that a little something appears that is very different from what you have been told about the fruit. It doesn't look like the fruit at all, doesn't even taste like the fruit, but later it becomes a fruit with all its fragrance and all its flavour—in the same way this power that you receive begins to work in you and gradually brings to you the highest fruit of the initiation, which is the realization of God. It takes time.

I admit that until you have some indication that what you have received from the teacher is really effective, you will have doubts. And I do not know what answer to give. You see, trust is a state of mind, and as you well know, there are some people who are by nature sceptical. They may be good people, but they just don't have the power of trusting anything, of

having faith in anything. They are always full of doubt. They will ask you again and again, then they will ask somebody else, then they will ask somebody else again, and they become more confused than illumined thereby. But that is their nature. Twenty thousand questions arise in their minds. There are others who go to the opposite extreme—whatever anybody says, they do it. I have heard that that's a very good sign; if a person is spiritually minded and believes whatever people say, that is a good state of mind. But, you know, a devotee of God is not necessarily an idiot. So although there is at first an inclination to believe whatever someone has said, later, discrimination arises. Still, such persons have implicit faith in their spiritual guide and would not do anything unless the teacher has told them to do it or has sanctioned it; so they haven't any difficulty. Now, it goes without saying that in our present state, the middle state, the middle approach is desirable: don't be too sceptical; on the other hand, don't swallow everything without salt. But have faith in the teacher and practise.

Now, you will find in some books, or you will hear from some people that if you have received initiation from a true teacher you don't have to do anything; he or she will do everything for you, and you can go your way rejoicing. Yes, if you have the good fortune of being born at the time the Lord becomes incarnated on earth, and if you have the further good fortune of recognizing him as such and of approaching him with the utmost faith, and, further, if he is inclined to shower his blessings upon you, then you may go

your way rejoicing. Such teachers there are, and if you are fortunate enough to come in contact with them, and if they are so inclined, they will, as we say, take away all your *karma*. They have that power.

*Karma* is that thing, good or bad, which ties you down to your relative self. We are what we are as individuals because we have a history. We have a definition to our being, which has been built up by all the past things we have done or thought or felt and of the ways in which we have done or thought or felt them. That is what makes us, as individuals, different from one another. This past, which forms the peculiar boundary of our being, is, of course, not desirable. As long as we have these bounds, we cannot become infinite, we cannot become eternal; we are creatures of time. Our past acts, which make this definition and limitation, we call *karmas* in Sanskrit. They have to be removed. When, in Christian understanding, you speak of sins, you mean only the bad tendencies that cause you suffering; you do not think the good tendencies are equally bad. It is only from a lower standpoint that good instincts are superior to bad. From a higher standpoint where your objective is to find God and become free of the bondages of body and mind, good and bad are equally binding. As Swami Vivekananda said, good things are like chains made of gold and bad things are chains made of iron, but both are chains. And, in our understanding, we leave both behind. In Christian understanding, generally speaking (I am sure Christian mystics have known better), it is thought that we want to become good, and that God takes away all badness—all our sin. But God

takes away also what you call your goodness; you are neither good nor bad; you are transcendental.

So all *karmas* are destroyed by the power inherent in initiation. First, it destroys the bad *karmas* and strengthens the good ones, the spiritual virtues. It may not strengthen other things that we consider wonderful—musical talent, for example. However desirable such talents and abilities may seem in terms of worldly achievement, spiritually speaking, they are as much a bondage as anything else. But spiritual virtues such as truthfulness, kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, endurance, purity, selflessness—all those virtues begin to grow, and along with them grow the sense of peace and a serenity of mind, which are accompanied by—I may even say, proceed from—the concentration of your being. Your scattered being comes together. We are scattered now all over the earth; that is our trouble. This scattered condition goes, and our whole being gathers together.

The mind that is in the body, behind the senses, coursing along the nervous system, resident in the brain cells—the mind begins to move away from the body and from the lower part of itself. It is then that you find spiritual virtues growing within you and that you feel yourself to be in the serenity of your own consciousness. You begin to perceive the presence of God. All these things happen. Your *karma* has been destroyed. Yes, there is a power in initiation that will gradually remove all the things within you that obstruct your spiritual growth; it will also develop your noble qualities further and further and bring serenity into your mind. In that

serenity the consciousness of God becomes more and more clear. That much is true.

## 3

Now, there are teachers and teachers. Although it is not my subject to speak about teachers, let me mention this much at least. All teachers, all spiritually enlightened persons, haven't got the same power. Divine incarnations have one power, then their disciples have almost the same kind of power, though not of the same intensity. They also can at once take away a person's *karma* and send him off rejoicing. Some, not all, have the power to grant divine experience then and there by a word or a touch. But in any event, the divine incarnation brings to the earth, accessible to man, a tremendous quantity of this redeeming power. True, the redeeming power of God is everywhere, because God is everywhere, but when he becomes incarnated amongst men, that power becomes more easily accessible to us.

You see, God has two different kinds of power: one is His redeeming power, and one is that by which he punishes the soul. You usually call the latter justice. Well, justice or not, we don't know, but we say that God has a binding power called *avidyā śakti*, the power of ignorance. This power, as it were, has put all of us into a state of sleep. We have forgotten our true nature under its impact. But at the same time, God has a redeeming power. In the whole of nature, in our own being, both these powers exist. Some things in nature bring about a release to us. When, say, you look at beautiful scenery, your mind becomes calm, and you

find that deeper thoughts rise up. This is an indication of the redeeming power in nature. In our own nature, too, there are, as we know, good instincts and bad instincts. Good instincts represent the redeeming power, but when we become earnest about religion, they are not good enough, not strong enough for our purpose. So in a condensed and intensified form, as it were, the Lord brings His extra redeeming power. I sometimes think that for practical purposes, the incarnations of God are superior to God Himself, because the Incarnations bring only redeeming power to us; they want only to help; whereas God wants also to bind. Anyhow, the Incarnation brings that power, and for some centuries it works with tremendous force.

Afterwards, of course, like every power, it becomes dissipated; it declines and can no longer help us. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new." (I shall quote Tennyson only that far.) Somehow, we find that religions lose power. We cannot do anything about it. The form remains, practices remain, but they no longer have the same effect on people; the power has gone out of them. Now, if you follow a religion which is very old, you will say, "We refuse to accept such a thing! To say that our religion hasn't any power!" Well, I shall make a little retreat and add this: if a religion, however old, takes care in the course of its long history to produce saints and sages and prophets and Incarnations, then that religion won't lose power. But if it remains a formal religion, not producing any saints or sages, then it will lose its redeeming power; there is no question about it. I won't make any further retreat; I shall stand firm at this point.

Well, however that may be, if you have not found a teacher who is very powerful, then you should practise. I was saying that not all teachers have the same power. Some will at once remove all your obstructions. As for others, the power they have communicated to you will go on working within you, and it may take one lifetime, two, or even three lifetimes before it has liberated you. One very great spiritual teacher said to us, "What I have given will work in your life and eventually bring liberation to you. But if you want to enjoy spiritual life here and now, better practise what I have told you." Then there is another consideration: suppose the teacher's power is such that eventually it will bring spiritual realization and enlightenment to you, so you say, "Then I shall just live as I please." But why do you want to live this low, dirty life of the senses? Why do you want to do that? It is not a question of whether or not the teacher's power will bring about liberation for you; the question is why should you wallow in the life of the senses, having a gross mind, thinking crude thoughts, and feeling awful emotions in your heart? I think that is an uttermost degradation, whether you care for religion or not. No decent person wants to live that kind of life.

So I say that even if you have not found a teacher but have become convinced that in the Spirit is the all and that to live above the forces of the body and the senses and the lower mind is the true life, then go on living that life here and now. Think noble thoughts. Even if you don't believe in God, have not found a teacher, do not even want a teacher, what prevents you from meditating on noble things, great things? Meditate on

the sun which is the brightest thing on earth, meditate on the sky which is the emblem of all serenity, meditate on the vast ocean which is an emblem of infinity. There are so many things we can meditate on, and we shouldn't let our mind dwell on anything that is small. Always think of the great and noble in whatever form, whether you have a teacher or not. But if you have initiation and if you meditate and practise according to the teacher's instruction, then things will begin to happen to you. If you are moving fast, and if the teacher pushes you from behind, you will go faster yet. And he will see to it that you don't stray; you just keep to the road and go ahead.

## 4

These are the changes that take place on the way: Slowly and without any grim effort, a true sense of values grows within you. It is called *viveka*, discrimination. You see that there are certain things that are transient; others that are lasting. For example, in regard to yourself, you shall at once see that this body is the most transient. Illness comes, you say, "Oh, that's the nature of the body: illness will come, health will come. Don't make too much fuss; I shall swallow a few pills and let it go at that. Why dwell on it?" Then your state of mind is transient. Say, somebody treats you badly, you become affected by it; then you say, "Oh, what does it matter? After all, these things come and go, I won't pay much attention." You forget it. That attitude comes of discrimination. Health, name, and fame—all those things that people ordinarily seek and get bound by, these are the things you don't crave

any more, they seem unreal to you—actually so. In itself, that would be negative, but along with it grows the sense that there is this being, God, whom we meditate upon, whom we think about. He seems more and more real. The joy, the beauty, the sweetness, and everything else we have been seeking in sense objects, all these things become transferred from the sense objects to God. I said transferred; I should say, rather, you begin to discover that they do not really belong to sense objects; you realize that all these qualities really belong to the Lord who is seated in the heart of your hearts, and who is also the guide and the controller of your mind and senses. And then of course your mind is drawn further to God, further and further to God. Slowly this change takes place, and out of that comes purity.

I have already indicated that all kinds of virtues grow within you in great measure. You like to think about God, you like to meditate upon Him. Then you find that you like to sit quietly. You like the company of the spiritually minded; you do not like the company of worldly people. You go where people worship God, speak about God, think about God. Sometimes you like to be in solitude. To speak simply, three things grow within you: one is discrimination, *viveka*, another is dispassion, *vairāgyam*, and the third is the development of all kinds of spiritual virtues. And accompanying all this is greater and greater consciousness of the wonderful being of God, and that consciousness is not just a matter of faith.

I have somewhat of an allergy to the word faith, so please don't take offence when I don't speak highly of it. In the West, from the very beginning of Christianity, faith has been emphasized a great deal. In India, too, many people

emphasize faith. "Have faith! Have faith!" Well, I think there is a practical justification for it. If you don't have faith in something, you cannot really practise anything in relation to it very perseveringly. But how to have faith? If faith means that you will never experience God here and have to take Him unseen, then I won't touch it. But if it means that you have an attitude of belief towards God and that you can practise so that you can experience Him, I would say, "Yes, that is very good." But I won't take faith just for faith's sake. I must have experience.

If I am Spirit and not this body and this mind, if I have already condemned as unreal and unworthy the values that rise from my physical and mental being, then it behooves me to realize myself as the Spirit and not to remain dangling in-between in empty space, neither of the body nor of the Spirit. I must experience myself as the Spirit! If this whole universe is only God Himself, I should be able to feel His divine presence everywhere, in every being. I go further, I say that I must realize every being as God Himself. If God alone is, I should be able to perceive Him. It is no use merely praying to Him and crying to Him and believing in Him and having faith in Him. I must be able to perceive Him. True, God cannot be perceived by this mind and the senses, but why should I think that sense perception exhausts all the possibilities of perceiving Him? As a matter of fact, all mystics in every religion have said that there is another kind of perception—seeing with the eye of the soul.

How is God perceived? Not as the senses perceive sense objects, which is a very crude and uncertain thing. It has been found that when you analyse sense perception

you end in utter confusion: you are not sure there are senses, sense organs; you are not sure there are sense objects; how to speak, then, of sense perception? Everything becomes uncertain. In the other kind of perception, there is absolute certainty and utter clarity, and the kind of reality that you perceive is infinitely superior to anything you think you perceive through the senses. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that it is perceiving Consciousness in consciousness. That was an expression he used—perceiving Consciousness in consciousness. Of course, all perception takes place in consciousness; we admit that. But that which you perceive is also conscious Being; that is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by perception of Consciousness in consciousness. It is a very, very definite perception, though it cannot be described. Only when you have your first perception of God and remember the description given by Sri Ramakrishna will you say, "Ah! That's what he meant!"

When your mind has become pure, when spiritual virtues have grown within you, when you have attained to a high degree of discrimination and dispassion, then the being of God appears in your consciousness. That experience is so unexpected and overwhelming when it comes! You feel as if the very centre of your being has melted away. It is such an extraordinary experience that you could not say, "It is just a variation of my own consciousness." No! It could not be, because at that time your consciousness is still suffering from limitation. If that experience were only a variation in your limited consciousness, then it could not be a perception of God. It could not be God Himself. When it comes, it destroys at

the same time some of your present limitations. As I said, you feel that the very centre of your being, as it were, melts away. In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* it has been described in a slightly different way: “*Bhidyate hṛdaya granthiḥ chidyante sarvasamśayāḥ*”<sup>2</sup>—“It rends asunder all the knots of the heart, and all doubts are dispelled.”

Generally, that experience does not come all at once. You meditate, you practise, and gradually these experiences may come—sometimes even when you are not meditating. In meditation there is struggle, then when your mind is at peace, sometimes perception comes. But if you did not struggle in meditation, then these things won't come to you. It is like trying to remember a name. You puzzle and puzzle and cannot remember. Then half an hour later you suddenly remember it. The struggle was the impetus, which has worked and later brings the result to you. Therefore spiritual practices have to be undertaken; the result may come at another time. Sometimes, the experience of God may come suddenly to a person, but usually there is a gradation about it. You have some experience now, then you struggle, and after sometime you have more experience, then more experience, and more experience, until you have the highest experience.

## 5

What is illumination? Illumination is the final knowledge; it is true knowledge. Some of you may say

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<sup>2</sup> *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, 2.2.8

that all knowledge is necessarily true; if it has to be qualified, it is not knowledge. But you see, there is knowledge and knowledge. There can be true knowledge of a relative thing. Suppose we see a tree, we say that we have true knowledge of a tree. Or, say, a doctor makes the right diagnosis of a case, then we say, yes, here is true knowledge of the case. But I am not speaking about that kind of true knowledge. I am speaking of the final knowledge, which will never be abrogated. Only one knowledge gives final satisfaction, and that knowledge is through at-onement with that which you are trying to know. All other knowledge is doubtful; it can be replaced by different knowledge. You see, therefore, knowledge by reason or through the senses cannot be the final knowledge, however seemingly accurate it may appear. True knowledge is where you find everything to be only the divine Spirit and nothing else. When you have that knowledge, that is enlightenment, that is illumination.

Just as when light is thrown fully upon a thing, that thing becomes clearly revealed to us and therefore truly known, so in this state full light is thrown on reality. Everything on which this light dawns becomes fully revealed for what it really is. If you have found that light, and that light is thrown upon another person you will know him as what he is: you will see him as the body, as the mind, and as the Spirit. I should say, that that is not the final knowledge, but it is pretty good illumination. In our present state, we see only the skin; the mind we only infer—and how little we know of a person's mind! But when this light has come, and your heart, your mind, your

senses become saturated with it, then you will know everything in another person's mind, and you will see beyond his or her mind to the pristine Spirit. All these things you will see. Anything on which your eye lights, you will see as it truly is. There is a further experience: everything is found to be light itself. Just as physically speaking, you may say that everything is really nothing but light, pure radiation, so spiritually speaking, everything is living light, that is, the light divine. And when one has seen everything as living light, divine light—that indeed is illumination.

It is maintained that if one has received initiation from a qualified, worthy teacher, then one is bound to attain to illumination. As I said earlier, if the teacher is very powerful, then it may happen in one lifetime. If he or she is not so powerful, it may happen in two or three lives. But in any case, the disciple will gradually move towards this one goal, illumination; he has no other way to go. If the disciple becomes troublesome and rebellious and forgets everything, wants to go another way, he may do so, he has freedom of action. But after he has danced his dance, he will come back to the path. He will never be able to forsake that path for good. Never. He will have to come back, and then he will have to proceed—only he will have wasted time.

You may think that he has had experience and thereby gained some knowledge. Who told you that experience naturally gives you knowledge? It is a fantastic idea that the experience of bad things can make you good. There is nothing special about it. Or, rather, there is something special about it: your mind becomes corroded

and tainted, broken up. Then what will you do? After getting all your bad experiences you say, "No, I have found goodness is the right thing," and you start trying to be good. But you no longer have the means by which you can really practise goodness. You are gone! You have ruined yourself for this life. Of course, we Hindus don't think the case is altogether hopeless; we say, "Well, next life. Do the best you can in this life and next life you will have a new instrument, a new body and mind, and you can go ahead." Of course, in the Christian tradition you say, "We shall take refuge in the Christ, miserable sinners that we are. He is the Saviour, and he will fulfil us." Yes, if you have that much faith, surely you will be fulfilled. But, as I said earlier, self-surrender, utter faith in God or in the Christ is not easy. Just because you have been sinful doesn't qualify you.

But in the long run, you cannot escape; you will come back to the path. Such is the power of initiation. Go ahead, you will become greater and greater, nobler and nobler. And, you know, the life of goodness—not goody-goody goodness but courageous goodness, noble goodness, powerful goodness—is a wonderfully adventuresome life. I invite you all to enter into that life. And I say that if you are ready, if you are willing, then go about spiritual life in a methodical way, and you will find that very little time will be wasted. You see, the wasting of time is a dangerous thing; your mind may be inclined today to spiritual life; you don't know what it will do in ten or fifteen years. So make the best of the opportunity you have now.

## FOUR PILLARS OF WISDOM

### 1

*I*n all fairness, I should point out to you that the word *four* in the title of this talk is my own; I am not quoting here from any scripture or philosophical text. Nonetheless, I consider that the four pillars I have in mind are of great importance and the supports without which wisdom cannot be sustained. The first pillar is good conduct; the second, character; the third, intellectual understanding; and the fourth, meditation and similar spiritual practices. A person deficient in any one of these will find that his spiritual edifice is not being properly upheld, that it is breaking down. But he who has built these pillars strong will find that his spiritual progress is steady and that whatever he gains by his efforts will remain permanent.

Before I speak on these four pillars in detail, I should explain what I mean by wisdom. The word is generally used to indicate the sum total of the understanding of reality that we acquire through study and speculation and

through our own experience in the field of action. But, although such wisdom is very precious and not easy to acquire, it is not this that I have in mind, but rather that wisdom beyond which there is no further knowledge to be gained. In Sanskrit it is called *vidyā* or *jñāna*—terms that indicate not intellectual knowledge but final knowledge. This final knowledge is really the exact meaning of the Sanskrit word *vedānta*: *veda* means “knowledge,” and *anta* means “final” or “end”.

You may say that we can never come to a final understanding of anything; one can know more and yet more of the same thing, and one can know it in constantly changing form and significance. But in connection with the highest knowledge, or *jñāna*, a point comes when one can say one has reached the limit of knowing: there is nothing more to know. If you object that such an attitude is dogmatic, because although a person may think he has attained final knowledge, he may later find that more knowledge is possible, I shall reply that when knowledge is had in terms of eternity and not of time, in terms of the uncaused and not in terms of causality, then you can say of that knowledge that it is final. For how can there be progress in eternity? All progress is in time. Nothing could appear in a different form if it did not undergo change, and change can take place only through time and causality. Most philosophers and all sages and saints have claimed that there is an eternal, unchanging reality and that a knowledge of that reality can be had by some. “By some” does not mean that only a few are entitled to it, but rather that not many try to attain it. We find that only a handful

of people at any specific time have possessed themselves of it, while others lag behind.

It is this highest, unchanging knowledge of ultimate Reality that I have in mind when I speak of wisdom. I do not hesitate to say, however, that between our present state of knowledge—or our present state of ignorance, whichever way you want to put it—and this highest knowledge there are many stages and conditions to be passed through. And after you have made some appreciable progress in the pursuit of wisdom, you will find that your life has undergone a profound change; you will have discovered something, the existence of which had been beyond your imagination. Thus even in the lower stages of acquiring wisdom you will feel a great sense of fulfilment, a great blessedness filling your heart. And so in speaking of wisdom, I would like to keep these lower stages also in mind. Certainly I would not like to belittle them; for even the lower stages of this wisdom must be at least slightly tinged by the eternal.

It is true that many things of time are beyond our reach and those who have acquired extraordinary temporal knowledge are so rare that they always evoke our admiration and respect. But in spite of that, true wisdom does not come to a man until he has been touched by the light of the eternal. When the mind becomes a little pure, a little free from the imposition of sense-knowledge and from the turbulence sense-knowledge brings, when, in other words, the mind has become comparatively quiet and therefore somewhat transparent, then the inner light belonging to the Soul of our soul begins to shine through and to give a sense

of the transcendence of time. Such is the impact of this wonderful experience that some cannot believe it is just the beginning of what they have been seeking; they mistake it for the end and stop there. But a very long journey remains before one becomes established in *vedānta* or the highest wisdom.

True wisdom is not only characterized by a sense of the eternal, it is also marked by a sense of the good and a sense of joy. Even at its sweetest and most beautiful, this universe is nothing compared with what it contains within itself—nothing! Until you really have some insight into that extraordinary beauty and goodness and light that is in the heart of everything, you cannot understand how negligible this surface world is. As a matter of fact, if you catch a glimpse of its inner nature, this surface universe is completely wiped from your eyes; you are not able even to perceive it. Yes, there is an extraordinary world behind the one we know, and it is said that when a person begins to enter into this world, he feels that all over the universe a continual festival is going on. And that is just the beginning!

The condition of the body has nothing to do with that joy. When you begin to decline on the other side of youth, you find how much of the beauty and value of your life in the world depended on a youthful and strong body. Of course, the young do not know this; nor do they believe it when they are told. But when youth is gone, the body is like a musical instrument that has become timeworn; however great an artist you may be, you cannot bring forth beautiful music from it. Even the mind loses its vigour when the body becomes old,

because in our present state our thought is dependent upon the brain. But the joy of which I am speaking is dependent neither on this mind nor on this body. Even when the body disintegrates, and eventually dies, it will make no difference to that experience. In our ordinary state, even the most exquisite thing is subject to destruction; it exists only for a time, and then we try to hold on to it in memory. Isn't it tragic that in old age we have to live on memory because that is the best we have? We go back to the sweetest moments of our life, to the wonderful people whom we have known and loved—but they are gone. Memory cannot satisfy us any more than a picture of a sumptuous dinner can satisfy the hunger of a starving man.

But in that state of wisdom there is no such destruction. Once you gain it, the joy of it will never leave you; it will be forever yours. So also will the good. We are all seeking the good here; yet we cannot hold on to it; what is good today turns out evil tomorrow. But the good that characterizes wisdom is eternally good.

Now, most of us are inclined to think of the ultimate reality as abstract and impersonal. I should remind you, therefore, that our ideal is the Person. Of course, when I say *person* I do not mean a person with a body or a form, I have never considered that one has to have a form in order to be a person. A person is one who is a self-conscious being. He may or may not have a form; form is not an essential part of his being. Suppose I am sitting in the dark, you come and I talk with you. You do not see my form; nevertheless you think me to be a person, because I have self-consciousness—I can understand you and respond to you. The very essence of personality is

this responsiveness to other reality and to the reality of one's own self. And this self-consciousness is the very essence of our ideal: we won't be satisfied with beauty that is dead. You may say you love the inanimate beauty of sky and mountain. Yes, but I can quite well imagine that if there were no living persons, inanimate beauty would not satisfy you. Of course, there always will be a living person; *you* will always be there.

The dualist thinks of this wonderful Person in his God, but the monist thinks of Him in himself. When the monist thinks of himself, he affirms, "I am the Self-conscious Being. I am all Consciousness. There is no touch of unconsciousness in me, no darkness, no ignorance in me; through and through there is just light and light, nothing but light." Yes, our true being *is* shining; that is the fact. And this Consciousness is not merely shining and otherwise empty. Consciousness always demands a content, and the content of this Self-consciousness is Being. I am not speaking very logical language here. How can one speak of that which is beyond speech in a satisfying way? However, I am trying to express an idea that is true: this Consciousness is not empty; what it knows is the infinite Being. Anything that you could dream of as exquisite is infinitely existent in that Being—so you can well imagine how wonderful ultimate reality must be and how wonderful the knowledge of it, or the highest wisdom, must be.

Here I shall tell you that an essential condition of wisdom is discrimination. Even in our present state we recognize that there are many things we should avoid if we want to be wise and act wisely. A wise man is not a

person who is happy-go-lucky or who is careless about things, who hasn't any judgment, who does anything he likes and enjoys or suffers the consequences. No, you will find that a wise person draws a fine line between what he should and shouldn't do. In other words, even ordinary wisdom is always accompanied by discrimination.

In its higher sense, the word *discrimination* means discrimination between that which is temporal and that which is eternal. We can use this term *temporal* for things that are almost unlimited as well as for those that are limited, and discrimination must be applied to both. For example, our existence in this life is very limited. Our childhood days and the days of our youth flit by; the days of our maturity are not very long, and our achievements are not really lasting. Our life is clearly temporal. But it is said that in heaven the souls live for ages and ages. Indeed Christians consider heaven to be everlasting life, or immortality; but according to the Hindus, heaven, by its very nature, must sometime end, and it is therefore temporal. We have to learn to give up even the idea of enjoying life in heaven. Of course, nowadays many people think the idea of heaven is all just nonsense. But suppose you believe in it; then if you are seriously willing to give up the pleasures of heavenly life because they are temporal, that would be discrimination of a very high order.

In the meantime, however, little discriminations have to be practised day after day in every period of our life. It is through these that we build up the stronger and greater power of discrimination, until our mind

becomes so clear that we can see the distinction between the temporal—however long its duration—and the eternal. Eventually we are able to throw off the temporal, because we find the eternal so much superior to anything that time can offer us. And so this discrimination is a basic factor in achieving wisdom.

The wisdom I have tried to describe to you is spoken of in various terms. Those who follow the path of love and devotion will speak of it as the realization of the highest love, or the realization of God as the supreme object of one's devotion and love. Some monists will speak of it as the realization of Brahman as identical with their own being. Other monists will just say it is realization of the Self, with no question of identifying the Self with Brahman, because even in that there is an assumption of duality. Such monists will say that the centre of anything that exists must be the Self. Even though we think a thing is existing outside of us, we nonetheless perceive it in our consciousness; the Self is really all there is. Those are extreme monists, I must admit. But in whatever terms we speak of the highest wisdom, we find that the perception of divine reality—call it God, Brahman, or the Self—is always implied.

## 2

Now, as I told you at the beginning, I believe that four things have to be taken care of if this wisdom is to grow within us and ultimately reach its culmination. I shall not start with the first, conduct, but with the second, character. If I use the word *morality* I think you will

understand better what I mean by character; yet, as I shall point out later, character should not be contained within morality but should go beyond it. Nevertheless, the observance of moral principles is certainly a part of character. Morality can, moreover, be carried much further than we ordinarily think; every moral virtue can lead to the very highest realization. But I am not speaking of this practice here.

Most of us find that our main concern is not the perfection of a moral virtue. Very soon in our spiritual search we begin to realize that there is a Being who is called God, who is the Soul of our soul, who is the Soul of everything that is, who is immanent in this universe and yet transcends it, and of whom ultimately nothing can be said. We begin to feel His attraction; sometimes we feel His sweet touch in our heart. Then, because we are not completely innocent of religious tradition, the knowledge we have inherited comes to our aid and we say, "I would like to practise devotion to God, I would like to meditate upon Him." Thus our main energies are directed towards the realization of God and not toward the perfecting of moral virtues—that is, not consciously so.

Nevertheless, we must cultivate moral virtues to an appreciable degree; we must become established in them. Otherwise we will build our spiritual edifice on a weak foundation. We shall find to our cost that when our mind, through meditation and other spiritual practices, becomes concentrated and therefore refined and capable of perceiving subtle reality, some remaining desires will rise up with tremendous force and disrupt that which we have built.

A friend of mine once told me that through earnest meditation he attained to a wonderful spiritual state. But suddenly this condition left him. He said that in the following months it was as though rain were falling on the clear ground of his mind and everywhere weeds were springing up. In the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* there is a description of creation as coming spontaneously from Brahman, "as on earth all kinds of grasses and plants spring up." My friend told me it was just like that. The calmness of mind in which there had been nothing but the consciousness of God was disrupted, and there began to spring up thoughts of the multifarious things the senses pursue. It took him several years to recover his lost condition.

When you inquire into the cause of such reverses, you find that subtle desires have remained in the mind; not enough self-control has been established. Those who guide us, therefore, take very great care to see that the foundation is laid strong, because otherwise much of our effort becomes nullified. I would not say that it becomes wasted; everything produces some effect. That is the beauty of spiritual endeavour. Even if you lose a spiritual experience, you soon regain it. After you have overcome the contrary conditions you find the original condition has come back to you, and even setbacks have a lesson for us. However, setbacks are painful, and nobody wants to experience even a temporary loss of what he has once attained. So the thing to do is to lay the foundation strong.

You find that almost all religions have laid down certain conditions. In Christianity, for instance, the most essential instructions of Christ have been brought

together in the Gospel of Matthew under the heading of the Sermon on the Mount. In Yoga philosophy, where the practical side of Hinduism is given, you will find an eightfold path. Buddha also taught an eightfold path in which he prescribed physical, mental, and moral disciplines, followed by meditation and similar practices. Now, the essential factor in all these practices is simply self-control; it has nothing to do with morality. For example, if I feel hungry and say "I am hungry; I should have dinner," you would not call the desire to eat immoral. Nevertheless, such demands of the body—the desire for sleep, for food and drink, for physical comfort—must be brought under control. On the other hand, one should not overdo the practice of austerity; there is a certain science about it. Some people practise excessive austerities just to mortify the flesh, to mortify the mind. Such practices can be spiritually harmful, particularly when the motives for them are not honourable. But some austerity *must* be practised, and when the motive is spiritual, and when it is done properly, then it is most beneficial. You will not find a single religion in which the practice of austerity is not prescribed.

One practice is the effort not to look this way and that, as you go along the street. If you have to look at something, you do so; otherwise you restrain the impulse to turn your head continually. That is just a meaningless habit. We do not know whether or not there is anything to see, but our eyes force us to look. We do not want to hear the noises of the street, but our ears force us to hear; we have no control over them. You may say, "That is a normal state; what can one do about it?" My friends,

what do you think is normal? Do you think that we who have so little self-control, so little power, and so little knowledge can call ourselves normal? If we are honest, we shall say we are subnormal or maybe abnormal. We are not normal. The normal state is that in which we are free. It is possible to become free of the demands of the body, the senses, and the mind; and that condition comes under the heading of character.

There are certain essential elements in the formation of character. I shall mention here two or three of them. Some people, of course, like to enumerate all the virtues they should acquire, all the vices they should get rid of. They will consciously practise everything—truthfulness, purity, unselfishness, sympathy, compassion—and they will avoid their opposites. But there are other people who concentrate on only one of these virtues; they know that if they strengthen it, then the rest will take care of themselves.

One such virtue is purity. Purity in the highest sense is that in which we are not aware of any conflicting element within ourselves—our being flourishes and functions in the highest level without impediment. From the viewpoint of that highest level, anything we feel within ourselves as limited will be conflicting. If the gross, limited body should make itself felt, our consciousness would not welcome it. In the practice of purity, therefore, great emphasis is given to controlling the demands of the body. It is not for nothing that everywhere purity has become somewhat narrowly identified with sexual purity; the body makes itself felt most strongly in terms of sex, not so much in terms of

hunger or thirst or the need for sleep. Therefore he who has conquered sex feels that he has won the greatest victory over the body. However, anything limited, when it becomes imposed upon our consciousness, creates a sense of impurity, of bondage, of limitation. So one should practise purity in all respects. Let us call it purity of enjoyment. What are we trying to enjoy? Are you trying to enjoy the Spirit? Then you are pure. To enjoy anything less than Spirit makes you impure, and if you enjoy the body or matter, then you become most impure.

Now, you might say here, "One should not think like that—always hating one's own body and considering it impure." That's not it! You do not have that sense at all. You do not consider that the body is impure, but you know it for what it is. The body of Sri Ramakrishna was spiritually so sensitive that just by touching him people used to have high spiritual experiences. Just by touching his body! There are many records of that. From my own personal experience in respect to the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna I can say that by touching *them* I have felt the same thing, although not to the same degree. The body becomes so spiritually sensitive! Do you think such a body can be an object of hatred or disgust? No! Nevertheless even such a pure body as Sri Ramakrishna's became undesirable to him because it imposed limitation. He once said that we have no idea what sacrifice God makes when He assumes a body; for the Infinite to be shut up in a small, limited body is exceedingly painful. When he would enter into that state of God consciousness which we usually speak of as *samādhi*, he would find it very hard to bring his mind to the relative plane. He would devise all

kinds of ways. For instance, as his mind slowly descended he would utter with great difficulty a few words like, "I want to drink water," "I want to go to such and such a place," "I want to eat such and such a thing." Many would wonder how a person living in God-consciousness could talk about drinking water, eating sweets, and visiting here and there. But that is the way he used to put suggestions of ordinary reality to his mind and thereby bring it down. Even in that process, it would sometimes flit up again.

Yes, when our existence becomes untrammelled, when we have become so free that we do not have to depend on this body and therefore are no longer identified with it, we feel an expansion of our being. Then the body sometimes seems unbearable, because it holds us down to a lower plane. In the practice of purity one tries to become free of that impediment.

As I said, purity is that which is unmixed with anything else; it seems to be the very essence of everything. In other words, it is Spirit. Some have maintained, therefore, that if one has become pure, one has attained to the Highest, because purity is itself the Highest.

A virtue of equal importance is truthfulness. Generally, if we narrate something in accordance with the event, or describe accurately what we have seen, or exactly repeat something we have heard, even taking care not to change the sense by intonation, then we think we have been truthful. But if we are really seized with the spirit of truthfulness, we soon find that nothing we perceive here is certain, and we begin to doubt that we are perceiving things rightly. If I am philosophically or religiously inclined, I will ask: what am I perceiving *really*?

The inquiry becomes extremely broad, and very soon you find that that which began with the observance of a moral virtue becomes a sort of metaphysical inquiry that calls on all your faculties, on everything within you to join in the search for the truth about things. Unless you halt on the way, you soon find that you have become a knower of metaphysical reality. You have become, to use a Western word, a mystic. It is then that you can say you have practised the virtue of truthfulness.

A third essential virtue is selflessness. Selflessness, of course, covers a lot of ground. It is enough to say here that we cannot be selfless unless we have overcome our worldly desires. If we have axes to grind, we are bound to become selfish; only when we possess nothing for ourselves and want nothing can we become truly selfless. See how it happened in Buddhism. Buddha taught the doctrine of *anātmā*: there is no soul, no self. What a strange doctrine! But the practical effect of it was to release a tremendous power for benefiting others. How? Because if we forget our own self, what can we do but become selfless? A person who is not worrying about himself will think about others. And so out of Buddhism a tremendous river of compassion has flowed through the centuries over millions and millions of people. We should practise this forgetfulness of our small selves. We should become nonegoistic; then all our desires, all our hates and loves, our likes and dislikes—all those things will just fall off.

I believe that if these virtues—purity, truthfulness, and selflessness—can be practised, then many other moral virtues will be acquired indirectly. Further, I believe that if a person becomes established in these three virtues he

will find that he has attained a tremendous control over his body, his senses, and his mind. If we want to reduce these three to one, I sometimes think it should be purity. But at other times I think it should selflessness: as long as we remain egoistic, everything that we perceive, everything that we do is limited, and the world in which we live is full of differences and separations; there is no peace or harmony in it. But for the person who never thinks of himself the world changes in a revolutionary fashion within a short time. He who craves nothing in this world, he who has no "I", for him peace has come.

## 3

I shall speak now of the first pillar, which, as I told you at the beginning, is conduct. Conduct is concerned with external behaviour—with our speech and action in relation to ourselves as well as in relation to others. In our relationship with others, there are of course many gradations: we have certain relationships with members of our immediate family, other relationships with friends and relatives, and still others with those who are not so close to us but with whom we are related in some personal or impersonal way. Our behaviour in all these various relationships constitutes a part of conduct.

Now why, in connection with spiritual wisdom, should I discuss something which seems so insignificant as external behaviour? Because it has great value in spiritual life. Remember that you cannot expect your spiritual growth to be continuous; only for a very few

does such a thing happen. Like everything in this relative world, the mind has its ups and downs. Sometimes it goes ahead and brings good results; at other times it goes back upon itself, and you think that everything you had gained has dropped out of your life; the joy you felt has been replaced by misery. Read the lives of the mystics; you will find that almost all of them have suffered in greater or lesser degree from these reversals. No one can altogether avoid them, because everything in the relative world works on the principle of action and reaction. I mentioned earlier that if we develop character, we can prevent severe reactions to a very great extent. Still, from a practical point of view, we must admit that we cannot hope to perfect our character all at once; thus there are bound to be occasions when reactions come upon us.

It has been said that as the soul rises higher and higher, adverse reactions become comparatively serious. In fact, one of the signs of the imminence of God-realization is scepticism. I do not mean that everyone who is sceptical is close to God-realization; we beginners should not be sceptical. But it is well known that a condition comes in which great doubt seizes the soul. You feel that what you have done all these years is nothing, that there is no such thing as God, that you only deceived yourself into thinking He existed and was to be realized. This is, of course, an extreme reaction. Long before that, many periods come when you do not feel like meditating or following a routine of spiritual practice; you just feel like giving up.

Well, what should you do at such times? If you have built up certain external habits in relation to your own

life, in relation to others, in relation to your ideal, these habits will act as a bulwark against any kind of disintegration of your spiritual life. You will go on acting in accordance with them. Many people think our external behaviour should be governed by our internal spirit; if we feel something, we should express it; if we don't feel it, we shouldn't express it. These same people also say, "What does it matter how we express ourselves externally? If internally we have the right spirit, that is all that matters." I sometimes suspect that such a plea is made by those who haven't the right spirit internally either. However, I admit that when the spirit is strong, when inwardly you are strong, you can dispense with all external formalities. But, you see, it is for the sake of those rainy days when the spirit is not so strong and when you require protection against your own mind that you should build up the ways and manners that belong to spiritual life.

What are those ways and manners? For example, among all spiritual people any self-assertion, any assertion of this little self, is considered the height of rudeness. However great you may be, it would not be tolerated. Gentleness, modesty, self-effacement, not finding fault with others—these are ways of behaving in spiritual life. If you think that for the sake of truth we should see others as they are, I shall remind you that we are seeing only the half-truth about people. If you see a person truly, you will first of all see the most important truth about him: you will see that he is an embodiment of divinity. If you see that, do you think you will care that he has faults of body or mind? When we see faults in others it is only because

we are not able to see the greatest good in them; so fault-finding is never justified. Do not criticize faults in others; endure them; there is just no place for righteous indignation in spiritual life. No; in spiritual life such feelings are not allowed. Your job is just to cultivate the habits of right conduct.

I shall not catalogue here all the other ways of behaving—respect towards our elders, respect towards the culture we have inherited, and many others. I shall just repeat here that the cultivation of these good habits of conduct is, to say the least, a protective measure against the strange conditions which come upon our mind in our less fortunate days. Also, you will find that by learning this right behaviour—*sucarita* it is called in Sanskrit—you gradually induce within yourself the spirit that should be behind it. Further, you will find yourself in greater peace and harmony with others. Harmony is the beginning of peace, and if we do not know how to behave so that we can be in harmony with all that exists—good, bad, or indifferent—then we cannot begin to have peace. For these reasons, then, right conduct has to be learned.

#### 4

The third pillar of wisdom is intellectual understanding. It is true that through the intellect we cannot realize divine reality, because intellect can give us only intellectual knowledge or ideas. Still, as long as we have a mind, as long as we think and form ideas, and as long as these ideas are sometimes right, sometimes wrong, sometimes guide us, sometimes misguide us, it is very

desirable in our spiritual practice that we have a correct intellectual understanding of our own religion.

Now, I know that most religions have developed intricate systems of philosophy and theology to justify their beliefs and practices, and you might legitimately ask here whether all who want to be spiritual are capable of grasping the philosophy of their own religion. It requires a certain degree of education and intellectual ability to study philosophical systems. A thorough grasp of the principles of the Vedanta philosophy, for instance, requires such high intellectual ability that if a full understanding were a prerequisite to the practice of Vedanta, then, I have to admit, not many would be able to practise it. On the other hand, unless you have some legitimate convictions established by correct thinking, what would you practise? If someone of the opposite opinion asks you what you are trying to realize and tries to prove that your so-called ideals are unreal and not worth your effort, then unless you have built up a firm intellectual basis for your conviction, you will doubt, you will vacillate, and you will give up.

Well, I have thought about both sides of this question, and I have not been able to arrive at a happy conclusion. One conclusion, however, I always come to: this world is a sort of mess; it is too much to expect everything here to be well organized and to take place according to some well-drawn-up chart. We just have to muddle through somehow. And in order to do that, we should at least *try* to understand our religion and know why we are practicing it.

Certain fundamental questions arise, philosophical and also spiritual: What is the nature of our spiritual ideal?

How is that ideal to be realized? What is our own nature? Is there anyone eternal, infinite, and all-satisfying called God? What is my relationship with Him? Have I the ability to perceive Him? Has anybody perceived Him? What are the ways and means by which this perception can be had? And when I have this perception, what will happen to me? Then, since the impulse to be of service to our fellow beings is as strong in the human heart as the impulse to find truth, some will add another question: If I realize God, will my life be a source of well-being to others, or to myself only? In the course of your philosophical inquiry all these questions will legitimately arise, and the answers should justify your faith and your practice. So if you have any intellectual ability at all, then surely you should try to gain an understanding of these points.

Here I should call your attention to an essential element regarding the study of religion that few people consider, though it seems only natural that they should. As in any other study, you should first of all have some *experience* of the aspect of reality you are trying to study. Such experience may be vague, but when you consider it, you find that it has left behind a certain residue of knowledge. On the basis of that knowledge you apply your powers of inference and thereby extend your conceptual knowledge. After that, you try to verify these inferential conclusions by further observation and experience. When you have done that, then your empirical knowledge of the subject is extended and becomes the basis for further reason and inference. You then come to further intellectual conclusions, which you should again confirm by experience. And so you continue.

Now, some of you might think that in intellectual inquiry we do not have to justify our conclusions by direct experience. It is enough for reason to function step by step, arriving at further and further conclusions until a whole system of thought is built up and the intellect is satisfied. I should say that this attitude is not applicable in the study of theology. I would insist that if you are not to be shaken by all kinds of questions and doubts, you must always test your intellectual understanding by experience. You should practise so that you can have some knowledge of God; you should come closer to Him, and then you should reason further. If you proceed in this way, you will find that theological and philosophical systems are no longer a source of confusion to you.

I am often faced with the objection that Vedanta is a fine religion as far as it goes, but that it cannot answer all the questions about ultimate reality. Now I ask, answer to whom? To children? They might be baldheaded and moustached, but they are children. What experience do they have? Sitting in their armchairs and speculating, they want to understand the profound mysteries of reality. No, that is absurd. To such I would say, "The answer to your questions is not understandable to you now, but practise a little more, and your understanding will become stronger." Children, as you know, are always asking inconvenient questions; they are a terror in that respect. All you can do is give them some pacifying answers and hope they will go to school and eventually be able to understand the right answers. In other words, you ordinarily expect the mind to develop before it is able to grapple with certain questions. Why should you not also expect this in the study of philosophy and theology?

You may consider yourself intelligent, and you may be intelligent in certain respects, but if you want to understand the subtlest of all realities, the Spirit, then you have to develop and refine your intellect. Vedanta does not assume that its philosophy can be understood by just anyone. No system of knowledge has ever adapted itself to ignorance. For instance, if you want to understand Einstein's theory of relativity you have to have some training in physics. Why should you think that without any preparation you should be able to understand religion, the subtlest of all studies? So I say that those of you who have brains and ability should study. But at the same time you have to practise. That was the ancient way. One who studied Vedanta had first to fulfil certain conditions. He would be taken through certain disciplines to purify his reason and to make his mind subtle and strong; then he would understand certain principles; then he would practise further, then he would have greater understanding; then he would practise further, and so on. In this way the development of intellect and the deepening of experience become simultaneous. You will find that your understanding becomes clarified; you will not be subject to vacillations of faith, and therefore your practice of spirituality will be unhampered by this risk. Of course, there are some who have no inclination to philosophical study; nor do they have the intellectual ability to understand all kinds of abstruse arguments. To them I would say, at least grasp the general principles.

I should not give you the idea that conviction comes to us only through the process of detailed

philosophical reasoning. No, sometimes it may come from something unaccountable. All of you have read, no doubt, the little book containing the letters of Brother Lawrence, who was a cook in a Carmelite monastery. As a young man he was a footman in a great French family; he had had no education whatsoever. Yet one winter day while he was looking at a bare tree standing in the snow, suddenly the conviction came to him that God was present in everything, everywhere. Never did he lose that sense of the presence of God; all his life he practised it more and more. And it is quite clear from his letters that by the time he died he was highly advanced in spiritual knowledge. Here the sense of the presence of God became a conviction without the help of reason. If he had been asked how he could derive this sense by looking at a denuded tree, he probably would not have been able to explain it either philosophically or psychologically, and a clever reasoner might well have confounded him if his conviction had not been so strong.

I shall mention here, although it is not altogether pertinent to the topic we are discussing, that a pure mind is the source of the greatest conviction. When the hunger for sense objects has been somewhat brought under control, you will find that your mind will flash signals to you of a reality that you cannot even dream of now. From time to time it will seem to you as though someone were rolling up a curtain from the face of the earth, enabling you to catch momentary glimpses of an exquisite Being whose presence had been unimaginable. One such glimpse, my friends, one such glimpse and you will find that forever your heart will cry and cry

for that vision. It will be so real and will impress itself so deeply on your mind that all your life you will hunger for it. The whole world may stand against you and shout at you, "Oh, no, this world is just matter; the realm of Spirit and God-realization is tommyrot, just the invention of priests." But your heart will say, "Let the foolish world talk as it will. I know better."

Yes, when the mind becomes pure, you attain real conviction. But you should not wait for that; you can, and should, become convinced of the teachings of your religion from the very start of your spiritual life. That is why every sect has its scriptures. Even a follower of a narrow sect should understand his own scriptures; if the teachings of that sect have appealed to him, he should understand them. No one should say, "I follow this religion, but I don't know what its tenets are." One's understanding should become deeper and deeper. Further, one should study the lives of those who have followed these teachings and who have attained to that blessed state called God-realization or, short of that, have advanced to a high degree of spiritual development and have justified these teachings in their lives.

To avoid confusion of ideas and beliefs, many religions advise their followers not to mix with the followers of other religions or to enter other places of worship. Some will even say that all other religions are wrong. That, of course, is fanaticism. It is the height of egotism to say, "I follow this religion, therefore it alone must be right." It is a disease of the brain to think that. On the other hand, it is legitimate to give your whole heart to your own religion. You recognize that there are

other paths but that this is the one for you. Just as a woman should remain faithful to the man she marries, in the same way, once you have chosen a path, you should be true to it. I have met many people who have become so confused in their study of various religions that their whole life has become worthless. They will study Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and many other teachings, until all the brain cells have become befuddled. They are good people, but they no longer have the ability to settle down to any belief; they cannot. The moment they start to study one set of beliefs, they remember some other set, and so from one to another they go. They can never hold to one teaching and undertake its practices and rigorous disciplines. If by comparative study you merely want to gather information—go ahead, study everything. But if you are actually trying to experience spiritual truth, then you will do yourself great harm. You see, no practice will ever be smooth sailing. As I said earlier, a point always comes where your mind no longer goes forward. Well, you just have to *push* forward until you have overcome the obstacle—whatever it is. This takes perseverance; and perseverance cannot come without a strong adherence to one path and a clear intellectual grasp of its philosophy.

I shall add something more in this respect. Since we are living in an age where all peoples have come together, for good or ill, and the knowledge of all countries has been pooled together—or at least pulled together—we are bound to know what different religions have said about various things. We can no longer shut out such knowledge entirely. The time is coming when we will all

compare the teachings of one religion with those of another to see which is better, which is worse, which is right, which is wrong. I can quite well imagine that there are many people now, and will be many more in the future, who would like a comprehensive religion. Our hunger is great; we want to encompass everything; we want to be universal. However, I do not think that a universal religion is really possible yet. For a long, long time we shall have to choose a certain path, one that appeals to us most and to which we are most suited. But the ideal is there now; each of us wants to be universal in every respect. And if we want to be universal in spiritual life, then it will be necessary, I think, to propound a religion and philosophy that will embody that universality.

I shall mention here the name of one who practiced religious universality to a very great extent. I am speaking of Sri Ramakrishna. Those of you who have read his life or heard about him know how he tried to practise all the different forms of religion. He practiced a good many of them, and through each he came to the realization of God. It became one of his fundamental teachings that all religions are true and all are capable of taking their followers—if they are sincere and practise earnestly—to the highest truth; there is no necessity for conversion from one religion to another. Although by this teaching he justified the truth of each religion, he did not say in so many words that every one should become the embodiment of *all* religions. His own life, however, became very comprehensive in this respect, and the example of his life tends to make us more comprehensive.

We want to appreciate Christian ideals, Mohammedan ideals, Hindu ideals, Buddhist ideals. We feel we should be able to respond with equal fervour to all the ideals that have been known; we should be able to feel at home with all different forms of worship and in all different places of worship. I think this tendency toward universality will grow, and if it does, it may be that we shall need a well-defined philosophy that will justify it. We believe, of course, that Vedanta already has such a philosophy, though it is possible that some adjustment or elaboration will have to be made in it.

But however that may be, the fact remains that we must have an understanding of our own religion and the conviction that it is true. Whether that conviction comes through faith or through simple reasoning or through intricate reasoning, we must have it, and on the basis of it we must practise.

Now, of the three "pillars" about which I have spoken—conduct, character, and intellectual understanding—character, of course, reaches deepest. It is character that purifies us and develops within us a sense of discrimination, which, as I told you earlier, is an essential condition of wisdom. However, all three are important, and when we have become established in them to an appreciable degree, then we can make rapid progress in our spiritual practice.

## 5

Spiritual practice—meditation and similar disciplines—is, as I mentioned at the outset, the fourth pillar of

wisdom. In Yoga philosophy, three steps of meditation are spoken of: *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna*. *Pratyāhāra* means to withdraw—specifically, to withdraw the mind from something to which it has gone or on which it naturally rests. For instance, you learn to withdraw the mind from your hearing; then even if people shout, the sound will not enter your consciousness. Then comes *dhāraṇā*—holding the mind at one point. When you first try it, you find that in a fraction of a second the mind has gone somewhere else. But when these practices—*pratyāhāra* and *dhāraṇā*—have been established, then the third step *dhyāna*, or true meditation, becomes possible.

Meditation is an effort to feel—or I should say to perceive—the presence of God. In other words, meditation is not thinking about God; it is the recognition that God is present and that one should be able to perceive Him. You are seated before me; what an odd situation it would be if I did not recognize your presence—if I did not perceive you but just thought about you! God is omnipresent; He is within me, He is outside of me. To recognize this fact and on the basis of it to try to feel and later to perceive His immediate presence—that is meditation. And naturally when you try to feel the presence of God you are filled with a sense of holiness and reverence, a great sense of purity and love. In fact, it is only with a mind saturated with such feelings that you are able to feel His presence. Nothing else must come into the mind.

The mind has built up a habit of running outward through the senses; it becomes very difficult to draw it within; it has to be trained to go inward. But if you have become established in the three things I have spoken of,

then you will find that your mind has already acquired the ability to go within and to remain serene. You might say, "Why should I restrict myself like that? Outside of me there is this reality; why should I cultivate this terrible habit of introversion, of turning inward and remaining shut up within myself?" When you talk like that, you are talking like a child. Only those who have not practiced talk all this nonsense. There is no outside or inside. There is only a consciousness that you are a body; when you think you are a body, then you think there is something outside you. When the body no longer dominates you, when you are no longer identified so much with this physical thing, you find the sense of outside and inside diminishes. We speak of divinity within, but when your mind becomes serene, you perceive the same divine reality "outside." And you will find that that state of serenity is not limited, nor is it inferior to your present condition where you are aware of this reality extending outside of you. Rather, it is a superior condition: you become aware of a reality vaster than you can even dream of.

Now, it is true that practice—just the mechanical practice of withdrawing the mind from outside things and concentrating it on one object—has a great deal to do with acquiring the ability to meditate, but to be successful in meditation and not to lose what you have gained by a future revolt of the mind, you should have reached a condition where the mind no longer wants any external thing. So ultimately you come to the principle of renunciation. I cannot emphasize this too much. Unless you have freed the mind from its natural habit

of running out and have brought it fully under control, you cannot make much headway in meditation. But when you have attained to the condition of perfect self-control so that the mind remains quiet in the bosom of God, rests there, then you feel His shining, loving presence. He is a living being, and you will feel like talking to Him: "You are here, my Lord, my Father, my Mother." It is not that you make God human. No, it has nothing to do with that. You directly feel His living presence, and as long as there remains a sense of your distinction from Him, you want to commune with Him. Just as two lovers in the intensity of their love gaze at one another in silence, in the same way the soul comes close to God and a silent communion is established between them. Without renunciation you cannot attain to that state.

Renunciation does not ask you to pluck out your eyes or make yourself deaf. No! Renunciation means to be master of your senses and your mind. But sometimes you wonder why you should open your eyes. At whose face should you look—at the face of God or at the face of Mount Tamalpais? At what should you look? Many devotees decide that there is no use in opening their eyes; they just look within. "Why should I listen to the voices of other people? O Lord, speak Thou to me. May I hear Thy voice only!" Do you blame them? You might say, "Well, in that way they cannot be of any good to mankind." Yes, that's a consideration—the good of mankind. But mankind is such a sorry job: it rises, it falls; civilizations come, civilizations go, and we find that we can do very little about it. Why a civilization rises and why it falls, nobody knows. If you say that it is man's

doing, then how do you explain that through one mistake a whole empire can fall? One foolish mistake, and a whole empire gone! Do you really think that mankind is responsible for it? No, some other power is behind it. Those who have known God say, "Thy will be done, O Lord. Thou art the Doer." In the *Bhagavad Gitā*, Sri Krishna says, "Only a person who has become deluded by the sense of egotism thinks he is the doer."

However, there are some who look upon this universe and find it saturated with the being of God. What they do and what impels their acts of service is not easy for common people to understand. But they work among people, as did Christ, Buddha, and Sri Ramakrishna, and whatever they do benefits mankind. There is no compulsion or planning about it; it just happens. But even then, even when they work in our world, they express only one percent of themselves on the outside and devote ninety-nine percent to the God who is the Soul of their souls and who they find to be the very Soul of everything that exists. We don't see that ninety-nine percent. The one percent that expresses itself on the outside appears so stupendous to us in its effectiveness that we think these great souls are completely occupied with external action. As a matter of fact, it is not so. "Thy will be done. Thou art the Doer, not I"—all illumined souls have taken that attitude. The language may differ, but the essence is the same. Complete renunciation, complete absorption in God, is always there.

But the main point I want to emphasize is that if you want to realize spiritual truth, then spiritual practice

there must be. In the Protestant tradition spiritual practice has become amorphous, and spiritual aspiration has taken the form of vague emotionalism, a vague yearning after something. That's very good, nothing is lost—but it is not spiritual practice. Spiritual practice is a definite art and science in itself, and unless you undertake it, you cannot make much headway. Many people have no idea what is meant by God-vision. They think, "I want to see God; He should certainly reveal Himself to me!" They feel a little sentiment; they like flowers and birds a little more than they did before, and they think they have God-realization, that they have become mystics. What a strange idea! When you feel you have become infinite—not through nervous tension but really and permanently—then you have God, then you have become a true mystic. And that requires long, long practise. The Infinite cannot be caught so easily. You should find out what practices are most suitable for you and then follow them earnestly, regularly, every day. You must give them the supreme place in your life, because they are related to the supreme value and to the supreme reality.

If you develop these four pillars that I have mentioned—right conduct, character, intellectual understanding, and spiritual practice—your ultimate success will be sure. In the beginning you will find you are deficient in all of them. But pursue them earnestly, day after day, day after day. In all of them you will improve, and you will find that you have attained to an extremely desirable condition. Not only will you feel that you are coming closer to spiritual truth, closer to God,

but you will find that your effectiveness in this world has increased a thousandfold. Before my eyes I have seen this happen to many people; therefore I know that it is true.

# HOW TO CULTIVATE LOVE FOR GOD

## 1

If you study the natures of the many spiritual aspirants, you will find that most of them are devotees, that is to say, *bhaktas*, who approach God with the heart more than with the intellect or through action. The word *devotee*, of course, can be used to indicate a person who is devoted to any spiritual ideal and who is a follower of any path. However, it is often used by us to indicate specifically the followers of the path of devotion, or of love.

As you all know, four paths are spoken of in Vedantic books, and I think such a classification is well justified. There are people who can make spiritual progress and eventually realize the spiritual ideal, the Divine Spirit, through mental analysis and control. That path is generally called *rāja yoga*, the kingly path. Why it is so called we do not definitely know. Some say that this path was first discovered and devised by kings. Others have said that it is so called because it is the sovereign path: whatever other path you follow, it becomes effective only to the extent that the mind

is brought under control. When the mind has become sufficiently calm and concentrated, then spiritual experiences spontaneously follow; no further effort is necessary. So *rāja yoga* is really involved in every path and can therefore be considered the sovereign path. However, in itself, it is one of the four paths.

Another path with which you are no doubt very well acquainted is called *jñāna yoga*, the path of knowledge, the philosophical path. There, also, analysis is called for, not exclusively of the mind but of all the reality that is presented to oneself. By such analysis, all erroneous ideas about reality are given up, and there remains only the true idea. And when this true idea has been most clearly defined, it becomes an experience. You see, when thinking, or thought, becomes very intense, it becomes tinged with emotion, and very soon it brings us to an actual experience of reality; it does not remain merely conceptual. That is the path of knowledge, the philosophical path.

Then there is the path of action—*karma yoga*. Here the greatest attention is given to the motive behind action. The motive should be very pure, very disinterested. When such disinterestedness is realized to an extreme degree, one has already transcended one's ego. One no longer has any desires of one's own and becomes an altogether transformed person. So action has also been called a valid path, because when such transformation takes place, even if we had not begun with any kind of religious or philosophical preconception, the truth flashes in our heart, and we become thereby aware of it.

Now, this morning we are concerned with the path of devotion, or of love, in which one approaches the

object of search with the heart. Love belongs to the heart. We may have an *idea* of love, which might belong to the intellect or to reason, but actual love is a part of our heart, and since most of us seem to be full of heart, or I should say, since most of us approach things with a craving of our heart, with the hope that we shall find some pleasure or happiness or fulfilment out of it, when we turn to spiritual life, we find ourselves most fitted and most inclined to follow the path of emotion. And since emotion seems to be the closest thing to most of us, it does not require any kind of explanation; it is already clear to us. Although the object of our emotion or love could be anything—it could be money, it could be name and fame—but more often than not, it is another person, another living being; so this part of the path of devotion is also very clear to us. To put it simply, this path is an effort on our part to love God instead of loving our father and mother, or husband or wife or children, or things such as name and fame, or wealth and possessions, and so on. Our heart delights in these things in this life, which we generally call worldly life, because it is not enlightened. But when the same love is concentrated upon a spiritual object, such as God, then it can be called *bhakti* or devotion.

Now, there is no use saying that we do not have a great deal of love in our heart. If you have any doubt about it, just see with what tremendous tenacity we cling to a thing. We cling to ourselves, to our own comforts, to our own life. We cling to our near and dear ones or to our possessions, and we would do anything to hold on to them. Such love is manifest not only in human beings,

but also in subhuman creatures. It seems to be the most noticeable thing in every living being. So our problem is not how to cultivate love but how to direct this same wealth of love, this same powerful love towards God instead of towards the objects to which it has been going. A process is called for, and I would like to talk about that process or the method by which this redirection of our love can take place.

Since, as I have already pointed out, the path of devotion has been most abundantly sought after, it would follow that a great deal of information about it has been available. Almost every religion has taught it. Even Buddhism, which did not begin with love for God, very soon became transformed into a path of devotion. The Buddhists simply replaced God by Lord Buddha himself. They began to install his image, to sing his glory, to meditate upon him; they did all the things any devotee would do. So in almost every religion you find the path of devotion and, therefore, a good deal of information as to how to practise it. Although this path does not differ very much in the various religions, I shall present to you those methods spoken of by Hindu teachers.

Now, like all other paths, the path of devotion presupposes that we have undergone the necessary transformation called self-discipline. It is no use talking of religion to people who are immersed in the world. They may talk about God, they may hear about God, and they may occasionally discuss God with you, but their heart is wholly in worldly things, in sense objects. Not that we are condemning them. Hinduism never does that, because it believes in reincarnation and thinks that

in every life the soul through its own experiences undergoes change and eventually will realize a spiritually desirable state; all that we say about worldly people, is that their time is not yet.

That's a very favourite expression. Say for some reason a worldly man becomes interested in spiritual practice and goes to a Hindu teacher. The teacher will look at him and talk with him, and if he has insight, he will say, "The time is not yet. Go back to the world, live the worldly life in the best way." You see, even in worldly life there is a method; there are different ways of being worldly. In one way you will go deeper and deeper into bondage. In another way you will gradually become liberated.

It is generally said that those who live in the world performing their duties relative to their position in life—pleasure is not their only motive but also duty, at least both are equally present—gradually overcome sense desires. Most religions have spoken about this. In India we have divided religious teachings into two parts and have left the part of restrained worldly living to the Brahmin priests. They are worldly teachers, they are married and have children, but they are good people, and they have acquainted themselves with the scriptures. They themselves are trying to practise this way of living, and so they can tell others, they can say, "Brother, live like this. If you go too much into the world, you will get burnt up by worldly desires. Live in a restrained way." There is a way by which worldliness can be gradually changed into a real desire for spiritual knowledge, but until that desire has come, you cannot practice religion seriously, no matter what path you might follow.

How are you to know that this condition has come to you? You know it by the state of your own mind. You will find that from time to time your mind moves away from all the things of the world. It wants to become quiet, as if in that quietness it will find something; and from time to time the mind does acquire an inner quietness. Just as on a stormy day when the wind is blustery, from time to time there are quiet moments, in the same way the stormy mind, as it were, reaches these points of quietness. When that condition has come and you try to increase that quietness of mind, you cultivate religion. As a matter of fact, you feel a desire to think about God or to find a person who talks about God. Then you can gradually rise to a better and better condition of the mind, and you can practice religion much more seriously. In the path of devotion that is considered necessary; there has to be a desire to know God, to love Him. The heart craves to know Him; the heart likes to think about Him. Maybe again, after an hour or so, the mind goes back to material things; nevertheless for one hour the mind has dwelt on God: it *wants* to dwell on God.

It is said that when a person has reached that stage and starts the practice of devotion, his progress can be divided into two parts. One is called formal devotion, and the other, the higher part, is called the path of pure love. In other words, after you have followed formal devotion, you reach a state when spontaneous love of God has become very strong in your heart and becomes the motive force; your practices follow from this spontaneous love that has filled your heart.

## 2

In the first part of devotion, which is called formal devotion, *vaidhi bhakti*, there are certain prescriptions, *vidhi*, and also certain prohibitions, *niṣedha*. To speak of the prohibitions first, you should give up all those things that are apt to take your heart away from God. If you are still in the world and have not become so overwhelmed by love for God that you are free from worldly responsibilities, then you perform those duties as an offering to the Lord, but you do not do more than is necessary. Further, if, say, you are working in an office, you could do your work and you could also indulge in lots of gossip with your fellow workers. But that latter part you will find you cannot do; you may not indulge in gossip.

It is not only as an example that I am mentioning this, it is also an important prohibition. All teachers of devotion have said that indulging in gossip is one of the greatest obstacles to spiritual progress. As a matter of fact, it is an obstacle along any path, but teachers of devotion have particularly emphasized it. What then are you to do? You are to talk with your friends about God. Of course I understand that in America to talk about God is somewhat indecent; you must not do it openly. Well, there is a good side to that. If something is close to your heart, you do not want to speak about it; you rarely give expression to something very deep in you. On the other hand, if you do not speak about God, even with devotees, then what will you speak about?

You *should* speak about God with fellow devotees, but you have to be sure that they are devotees. At first, you

might get acquainted with a person on the basis of spiritual contact. Afterwards, unless you are very cautious, the friendship will turn to just a worldly association. At the very first opportunity a woman, if she is married, wants to speak about her husband or about her children. Well, men also have their wives and children. They don't speak of them so much, but a man will carry a picture of his baby in his wallet and show it to everyone. That is the nature of men and women both. But since you are a devotee, you are neither man nor woman; you are a child of God, and your behaviour should be different. You must not indulge in those things unless it is necessary. You should consciously make a point of speaking about God alone, and expect that others would speak of God with you. Thereby you can avoid lots of gossip.

In other words, anything that takes your heart away from God and makes you forget Him you should avoid. Doing unnecessary things, going to unnecessary places, remaining lazy without doing anything—all these things are to be avoided, because they are all obstacles to spiritual growth, particularly to the growth of devotion in one's own heart.

As regards *vidhi*, that which we should do, many practices have been prescribed. One practice is to continually exercise self-examination. "Self-examination" does not mean any kind of psychological analysis, but, rather, an examination of the mind with a very definite purpose. For instance, after the day is over, you pass the whole day in review and see whether everything was done right. By "doing right" two things are meant. One is that you have done your duty in the right spirit and in the right

way. Another, much more important, meaning is that you did those things in the spirit of detachment—which is called *karma yoga*—and that you remembered God as much as you could, that you were alert and did not allow time to be wasted or let yourself become too much involved in your work. That kind of self-examination is very desirable. Of course, it goes without saying that on such examination we shall always find that we have fallen far short of our expectations. So we should determine that the next day we shall avoid wasting time or doing things in the wrong spirit or in the wrong way.

Another kind of self-examination is philosophical and can be undertaken whenever one has a little time. It is to ask oneself, Who am I? What am I? Where have I come from? What am I doing here? Where am I going? What is the object in my life? And so on and so forth.

At first these questions might appear to be artificial efforts on your part, but *all* spiritual living—as a matter of fact, all self-improvement—consists in consciously and deliberately practicing those things which will be natural to us only when we have reached a higher stage of our growth. Self-improvement does not mean that we behave spontaneously according to our present nature or instincts.

If we were to do that, then we could not make any progress, and believe me, many of us would appear much worse than we are. But while we know that we have a lower side (and a stronger side it may be), we also are aware of a higher side, and we try to live up to that. There is an artificiality about it, but that does not mean that it is not sincere. In spiritual life also, we do that. It may not be natural for you to ask these questions, “Who am I?” and so

on. But you *should* ask them of yourself, and you should try to find clear answers to them because when you have reached a higher state of spiritual growth, these questions will come spontaneously to you. You are only anticipating what is going to happen, and by such anticipation you are pushing yourself forward. So that kind of philosophical self-examination is very necessary.

Another thing that is prescribed is this: in everything we should try to cultivate nonegotism. Since at present we do not know what our self is, we should not give importance to our ego. In our unenlightened state we think our ego *is* our self, which, of course, is not true, and since we have not found the answer to what our self really is, we should at least try to abolish this ego—this false self. When we work without attachment, disinterestedly, we are dealing a blow to the ego. At the same time we should try to see greatness in all others. If we do not see greatness anywhere, neither within ourselves nor in others, then there is danger to us, because the food of our soul, or of our mind and heart, is greatness. If we do not recognize greatness in others in one form or another, our inner life will become blasted; it will dry up.

Of course, thinking of God is thinking of greatness, but since we cannot think of God, let us surround ourselves by the greatness in others, particularly in the people with whom we are in constant contact. Yes, in everyone there is greatness, and if you cannot see any greatness in their mind or in their behaviour, you can at least remind yourself that God dwells in the heart of every being. At least that much we can do. But if we are intent upon it, we can really discover true greatness in almost everyone. Everyone has

a door of his being through which God continually comes and goes. But you see, I know of only my own door, so I do not search for *your* door, where you have kept it open. I search where *my* door is open, and I think everybody should have his door open *there*; so I think, "Oh, he has all his doors shut." Well, that's only according to my own poor brain. But believe me, everybody has a door open; otherwise, nobody could exist here. So we look for it. All these practices are very desirable.

There are also specific practices of formal devotion. Sri Chaitanya, who was a great teacher of the path of devotion, I should say one of the greatest in all religions, said there were five practices one should undertake. But first let me tell you that according to Hindu understanding, Chaitanya manifested all the signs of supreme love of God within himself. You see, in India they have made a science of it: they say that only three people—one was Radha, whose name is connected with Sri Krishna, another, a historical figure, was Chaitanya, who lived in Bengal, and the third, another historical figure, Sri Ramakrishna—only these three have manifested the signs of supreme devotion, or love. In India they have given that supreme ecstasy a special name: *mahābhāva*. You read of many mystics and saints in different religions who have followed the path of devotion, and in all of them you will find signs of ecstasy, but the signs of *supreme* ecstasy, they have said in India, has been found only in three. The first, Radha, is mythical. (But perhaps you will not say she is so mythical when you find that all these signs were also manifested in two *historical* figures. How did the savants recognize those signs if the so-called mythical figure never existed? So some say

there was probably some historical core to the legend of Radha.)

In any case, they say that an ordinary person, however highly advanced spiritually he or she might be, is unfit to express the manifestation of supreme love. The body would not be able to stand it. Just consider—not only is there knowledge of God, awareness of God, but tremendous emotion has been evoked, and the two together have such a powerful impact on the brain that the brain might just explode.

Let me tell you a story. The devout think that Sri Krishna appears at night in one of the holy groves of Vrindavan. So in the evening the priests close the gates of this grove or garden. They do not allow anyone to enter. Well, a man who lived in Vrindavan, heard about the nightly appearance of Sri Krishna, and he thought "Let me go and see what happens." There were no guards, so he easily went into that grove, and in the dead of night Sri Krishna came. The man was seated there, and Sri Krishna put His foot on his chest and pushed him. As a result of it, there came such a tremendous ecstasy in him that in the morning they found him unconscious with blood coming out of every pore of his body. They brought him to our hospital, and when he regained a little consciousness, our monks asked him what happened. He told that story. Now, I have not seen that case; so in this scientific and sceptical age I will say, "I won't vouch for it", but if you like that story, you can take its lesson. It is quite believable. That the man saw Sri Krishna, you can doubt, but it is true that when this ecstasy comes, unless the body and mind have been prepared for it, they cannot stand it. Well, let us not talk about supreme ecstasy, because it

would not be practical for our purposes; one does not have *mahābhāva* easily. But we can talk about ecstasy, or *bhāva*.

Ecstasy, as you all know, is a condition where one transcends one's normal self. This cautious, stupid, utterly cunning, and clever (so it thinks) "normal" self of ours, is a prison house of the soul; the soul cannot get out of it to reach God. But when you have ecstasy, you get out of this prison house, you get out of the senses, you get out of the limiting ideas you have; you get out of everything that you think is normal and you go beyond this lower self, this accustomed self of ours, which is completely inane. The world thinks that many things are great and good. Let the world think what it will. You who know there is something else should learn to think differently.

It is said of Saint Thomas Aquinas—one of the great lights in the philosophical firmament of the West, whose theology is really the foundation of the Catholic religion today—it is said that one day he had a mystical experience, and he found that all this theology, on which he had spent years and years writing many learned books, was just trash—nothing. He was so great that he stopped writing then and there; he didn't do anything further. Of course, you read that story and then you go back to the things he rejected. These things *are* nothing. When you go beyond them, the world of wisdom opens before you. It does not come suddenly; it has to be gradually entered into.

### 3

I was telling you that Chaitanya said there are five things one should practise. Sometimes he spoke of only

three things. You see, it is natural for teachers, particularly world teachers, to simplify matters. They come to the essentials and the things they tell you at once appear convincing to you; so you are able to practise them.

He said if one practises three things—*jive dayā*, *nāme ruci*, *vaiṣṇava sevā*, then one will gradually attain to a state of high devotion and have a vision of the Lord.

What is *jive dayā*? Compassion for *all* living beings. Be compassionate. Don't harden your heart. Don't worry about whether a person is good or bad; that's not your job. Be kind. Be thoughtful. Kindness is not just a shallow, superficial impulse. A doctor who is very kind does not, when a patient comes, at once get the nearest bottle of medicine and pour it down his or her throat. He takes his time, diagnoses the trouble, and then he thinks of the right medicine and prescribes it. That is part of his kindness. If compassion is genuine, it goes very deep.

Second, *nāme ruci*—repetition of the name of God and the singing of His praises. You feel a natural desire to do that. And the third practice—*vaiṣṇava sevā*—is service of the devotees of the Lord. These practices Chaitanya prescribed, and he said that anyone who would follow them would gradually become free of worldliness: the heart will become purified, the mind will become quiet, and a tremendous ecstasy will gradually build within; eventually he or she will have the experience of the Lord.

Now, when Chaitanya spoke about five practices, he further elaborated these three. He said, *satsaṅga*, *kṛṣṇasevā*, *pratimā*, *bhāgavata śravaṇa*, *vraje vās*—*pañca sādhana pradhān*. These are the five principal practices in the path of devotion.

What are they? *Satsaṅga*—association with the good. Who are the good? Those who are not worldly. In the world, also, you will find good people, but for the purpose of attaining devotion it would not help you to associate with good people who are addicted to worldly ways. You can appreciate their goodness from a distance, or by coming in contact with them for a little while. But if you keep company with such good people, the danger is that their worldly ways might strengthen *your* worldliness. You are apt to be less cautious.

You might ask, “Where am I to find unworldly good people?” Well, one way to find them is to associate with devotees, with this proviso, that you don’t allow them to talk about their wives or children or husbands and cousins and sisters-in-law or this condition or that condition and their operation and things like that. You have a clip and the moment they want to open their mouth about such things, you clip their lips. Then you find that the society of such people becomes stimulating, even if they are your equals, no better than you. It is said that in the path of devotion a person who tries to live a spiritual life is an inspiration. Of course, that is true in every path—although in the path of knowledge you do not get as much benefit, because that path is rather the path of silence. You want to go within, and the self-analysis that goes on is so subtle that you have to be by yourself.

But the path of devotion has this speciality—that if you keep the society of a devotee, even of the same calibre as yourself, you will benefit, provided you do not lapse into worldly talk. And the more devotees the merrier. You can associate with them, talk about God, sing His glory, and so

on and so forth. It is very stimulating. You see, if you fall in love with somebody, you at once call up your friend and gossip about it. That's the *nature* of love, to speak about it—not to anybody and everybody, but to someone who is very close to you; thereby you find your love grows more intense. In spiritual love the same thing is true, and that is called *satsaṅga*, association with the good.

Let us say, for the purpose of this discourse, that “the good” is really a spiritually advanced person with whom you can sit and feel better for it. You will find that in his or her company all the good things in you are coming out. That is one effect of *satsaṅga*. Remember, the most important thing for us is to have a taste of the bliss of God, because once we have tasted that joy, all lesser joys will fail us; we shall find them falling short of what we want; they will appear as insipid, and we won't go after them anymore. But you have to have a taste of spiritual joy first, and one of the ways in which you can have it is through another devotee. *You* may not have it, but you see it in another person, and gradually you will find it within yourself. Once that has happened, you will go on making your own self-effort until you have possessed it. Another effect of association with the good is that the opposite things within ourselves, evil tendencies, unspiritual tendencies, become moribund; they die out.

Then there is *kṛṣṇa sevā*—that is to say, worship of the Deity. I think almost all religions believe that there are valid symbols of worship and images of worship. In India we have two names for them: one is *pratīka*; another is *pratimā*. *Pratīka* is meditation on a symbol of God. For example, the sun is a symbol. The sun is all-effulgent, life-giving, and so on. One can meditate on the sun as God

Himself—not as the sun. When you meditate on a thing, thinking of it as you ordinarily know it to be, then such meditation will not help you. But when you give that thing a symbolic turn, and *then* meditate on it, it becomes equivalent to meditating on God.

*Pratimā* is worship of the Deity in an image. Say you have a painting or a statue of Christ, and you worship that painting or statue. That also is a valid practice. But you must not think that the image is dead stone or canvas and pigments. You should not think that. Although it may be just a painting, you must not think of it as a painting. All you should think is that it is the appearance of the Christ. That the Christ is here! Just as in ordinary talk we say: "Here is the founder of this institution." It might be just an oil painting or a photograph of him, but we don't say, "Here is the photograph of the founder." You may think it is understood as such; no, it is not *always* understood as such. A representation of a thing very soon becomes the thing itself in our mind. Anyhow, in the paths of devotion prescribed by different creeds and religions, there is always an object of worship, whether it be a cross or the crucified Christ, or the Madonna with the Child in her arms, or whether it be Lord Buddha, or a Jina or whether it be the image or a symbol of a Hindu Deity;\* wherever there is a practice of devotion, there has to be this kind of thing.

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\* The Jains do not believe in God but erect temples to their *Jinas*, or Teachers, who have attained to self-mastery.

So you could go to a temple, but you could also have a shrine of your own, a chapel where you have installed the object of your worship. You actually feel the presence of your Deity in this image. And if you say, "That is merely deluding myself; I *know* that the image is made of stone or of metal or of wood. How can I think it is God?" Well, you'd better exercise greater wisdom. Haven't you always said that the God whom you are seeking, whom you are loving and worshipping exists everywhere? Why should He not be in this wood or in this metal or in this stone? You think that the moment you erect something on your altar for worship God vacates the place? How could the infinite, all-pervasive God vacate *any* place? Don't you see you have got Him where you want Him? You have got Him by the hair? He cannot get away from you.

We all say, "Oh, God is almighty, He is all-powerful", all the time forgetting that He is quite helpless in our hands. He cannot get away from us. He is forever within us, in the heart of our hearts. If He were a finite creature, He could get away. I can run away from this hall, but God can't do that. You have got Him. For your own convenience just set up an altar and say, "Lord, here You are. I am offering You some nice flowers. Be good to accept them." Force Him! You have Him where you want Him; why should you not exercise some force upon Him? Those who have known God say that He likes being forced in this way. He likes the tyranny of love. Of course, if you have a tender heart and don't want to feel tyrannical towards God, at least you know that He is there, and you offer things to Him.

You see, since devotion is a matter of heart, it is always personal. And in a personal approach, when the heart

approaches someone, it wants to serve. Have you ever loved someone without feeling a desire to serve him or her? No. If you did not feel a desire to serve, then it means you did not feel any love for him. You cannot get away from it. A mother loves her child, and however fond of luxury and comfort she might be, when the child comes, all these things are forgotten—at least mostly forgotten—because the object of love is also an object of service to the extent of complete self-abnegation.

How do you serve God? There is a universal attitude about it: by offering things. These desires come: you want to offer light, you want to offer flowers. These seem to be the usual things devotees want to offer. But when you offer candy to God, many people don't like it, although the same people will give candies to their friends or to someone they love; they think it is quite legitimate. They say, "I know that my friend likes to eat candy." How do you know God does not like to eat candy? Some people have the idea that because they are of the West, only those things to which the West is accustomed should be spoken of. On the whole, I like that idea and I try to observe it, but I also think the West could learn a few little new things from the East.

Our philosophers continually tell us that in all enjoyments the enjoyment is by the Lord seated in your heart. You have heard beautiful music? It has gone through your ears and has communicated itself to the brain. But it does not really stop there; it goes further inward and inward and inward until it reaches the very centre of your being, where God is, and there the music is presented. When you have eaten some nice candy and have enjoyed it, that enjoyment has not stopped with

your mouth or your tongue. It has gone further on. It has gone to the mind, and then through the mind it has reached the Lord seated in the heart. Therefore, anything and everything that we think is enjoyable, we can offer to the Lord. The Lord will Himself also enjoy it. That's a new thing the West could learn.

Now, I won't insist that you offer candy; I am just giving an illustration. Whatever you like—you offer it to the Lord. You like flowers? You like the fragrance of incense? You offer them. Light? You offer it. Anything you like you offer. And of course you offer yourself, offer your heart, offer your love. You regret that you do not have enough love, or the purest love. You pray to Him that you can have it, and you offer it. This kind of worship is very enjoyable once you learn it.

You see, everything has to be learned. You might say, "That would be, then, an acquired taste." All improvement is an acquired taste. Whenever you learn a new way, it first seems artificial, but as a matter of fact, it is proceeding from your higher nature, and once you have become established in it, you find that it is more natural than your earlier way.

Let there be no forcing of it; nor, on the other hand, let there be obstruction to it, no unnecessary prejudice against it. It may take many hours of the day; if it is according to your nature, you will get a great deal of benefit out of it. But you choose what you can do. That is *kṛṣṇa sevā*.

Then comes *bhāgavat śravaṇa*. *Bhāgavat* means study of the scriptures. By *scriptures* is meant not only the holy books of all religions, such as the Bible, the Koran, the Vedas,

and books like the *Bhagavad Gītā*, but also philosophical literature, and the lives of saints and sages, and so on. Our teachers have laid great stress on such study for two reasons. One is that it gives intellectual conviction. In order to make a determined effort, you have to have true conviction behind your desire to make that effort. If conviction is not there, confusion or doubt will prevent you from pursuing your practice in hours of weakness or disinclination. So in every path you have to have a philosophy.

In India this attitude has been so pronounced, that even when the ancient scholars wrote a book on grammar, they always would try to prove in the beginning how a study of grammar can take one to the realization of Brahman. They thought they had to prove it; otherwise, why should anybody undertake the study of grammar? You probably will say, "I study grammar for the sake of learning the language better. I am not concerned about whether it gives me Brahman or not." No! A spiritual aspirant cannot be satisfied with that. Why should he be? Amongst the Vaiṣṇavas—they are such clever people!—there is a Sanskrit grammar in which the rules were written in words that were synonyms of God. Every word was a synonym of God. Well, that certainly required intellectual gymnastics on the part of the writer, and you must admit that it was a superb achievement. You see, when the students were learning the rules of grammar, they were also repeating the name of God. Don't you think that's nice? Anyhow, there has to be a philosophy; you cannot get away from it. That is one of the things the study of scriptures gives you. And at the same time, you also learn a great deal about the

path itself, the process and the method and the devotees. All scriptures are full of such knowledge.

Another reason for scriptural study is that it is itself a spiritual practice. Say, for example, you read the *Bhagavad Gītā*. You may not find philosophy there, but everything in it will create vibrations of spiritual thought in your mind and heart. Scripture does that. There are many devotees who will recite the *Gītā* every day from beginning to end. They have committed it to memory, and you hear them reciting it while they are bathing or while they are making preparations for worship. They will complete the recitation of the *Gītā*, which takes more than two hours even if it is done rapidly.

So for these reasons study of the scriptures is very, very necessary. Moreover, if you want to occupy your whole day in spiritual practice, you have to have variation. You cannot just meditate, or just worship. The study of the scriptures is a wonderful variation. It may not be as intense as meditation, but nevertheless it will keep your mind on the track towards God.

Then there is *nām*, the name of God. This is one of Chaitanya's first three practices, but I shall elucidate it here. It is the practice called *nāme ruci* or *japa*. Devotional singing is also included in it. There are songs that consist in just a string of the names of God; you sometimes sing these. Or sometimes you sing of the glory of God. God's nature is so soul-satisfying, to remind oneself of it is itself a great spiritual elation. Just to think that all is one, that God pervades everything; He is the One; just to think of those things makes your heart leap up, and so you think about God's nature, sing His glory.

But the specific practice under this category is *japa*, that is to say, repetition of the name. It is done in either of these three ways: You can repeat it loudly, as I am talking now, articulately; others would be able to hear it. Or you do it whisperingly—only those close to you can hear; or you do it mentally. This last is, of course, the best way, but if the mind has a tendency of wandering around, then better you do it whisperingly, but you should be very careful that you don't do it where others can hear it. And if you find that even then the mind is not controlled, then do it loudly, but you should also be careful that others don't hear it. Generally, it is done mentally.

Now, the beauty of *japa* is that a word produces within you its associated idea, and an idea, deepened, produces the sense of its reality. That's the philosophical basis of it. There are different opinions about that philosophy, but as regards the *effect* of *japa*, there cannot be any doubt about it. As you repeat the name of God, the consciousness of God becomes clearer and clearer within you; eventually it becomes vivid.

You usually get a name from a teacher. Indian languages are very rich in the names of God, and each name represents God in a special way. The name the teacher tells you to repeat represents the way you want to think about God; and is just the right thing for you. So you repeat it and repeat it. It is said that if you don't do anything but practise the repetition of the name of God, spending hours and hours doing it, your mind will become purified and calm, your senses will lose their appetites, and God will come nearer and nearer to you. Chaitanya said:

*Cetodarpaṇamārjanam*  
*bhavamahādāvāgninirvāpaṇam,*  
*Śryreyaḥkairavacandrikāvitarāṇam*  
*vidyāvadhūjīvanam.*  
*Ānandāmbudhivardhanam*  
*pratipadam pūrṇāmṛtāsavādanam;*  
*Sarvātmasnapanam param vijayate*  
*śrīkṛṣṇasaṅkīrtanam.<sup>1</sup>*

“Such is the effect of the repetition of the name of God, it purifies the mirror of your heart, so that God becomes reflected in it, and this terrible fire of worldly existence, which has engulfed us, becomes extinguished. It emanates the light of goodness all around and knowledge comes alive through repetition of the name.”

If you have philosophical knowledge, it will remain dry knowledge. The knowledge of God will come alive through the repetition of the name.

“And the ocean of joy begins to heave high. From time to time you begin to have upsurges of spiritual joy within. At every step you find more and more joy comes, and then you feel as if you have been bathed in the ocean of nectar. Victory be to such repetition of the name of God!”

That is what Chaitanya said. And every one of these expressions is to be taken literally. You practise this and you will see that these things happen to you.

In another verse Chaitanya describes the spirit in which you are to repeat the name of God. There has to be a way to do it rightly. He says:

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<sup>1</sup> Chaitanya, “Eight Ślokas of Instruction,” verse 1.

*Tr̥ṇādapi sunīcena tarorapi sahiṣṇunā,  
Amāninā mānadena kīrtanīyaḥ sadā hariḥ.*<sup>2</sup>

*Tr̥ṇādapi sunīcena*—you should repeat the name of the Lord with the attitude that “you are humbler than a blade of grass.” The grass is lying low, beautiful to look at. People walk over it; it doesn’t protest; rather, it cushions their feet, and when they leave, it is the same as ever. No complaints. That’s the idea. Let all the troubles of the world come upon you, let people insult you, do anything to you; all your concern is for the comfort and happiness and good of others—not for yourself. If somebody insults you, feel sorry that the person lost his temper and went into such an ugly mood as to be abusive. Your natural feeling should be that you don’t want anybody to get into that condition; but that *you* were insulted, let there not be even the slightest thought about it, not even an acknowledgment of it to yourself.

*Tarorapi sahiṣṇunā*—you should be “more patient than a tree.” When the woodcutter cuts the tree, the tree will even then cast its shadow over him and give him shade. Even when a person hurts you, you do good to him, that is the kind of patience you have. Don’t complain, as the tree doesn’t complain.

*Amāninā*—you do not have conceit; you do not have any pride or egotism, none of that, but you “honour everybody else”. That’s the attitude you have to have. Just as in the path of selfless action, you have to be constantly alert that you do not become selfish in any way, that no

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., verse 3.

element of self-interest enters into your action, so in the path of devotion, there must be alertness that your ego does not find any scope. You say, "Not I, but Thou, my Lord. Who am I? I am nothing, I am nothing, Lord. *You* are the all."

Why is it so? Because that is the nature of love. There is a kind of love in which you give me ninety-nine percent, and I may give you one percent. Well, that's a most terrible thing. Whether you should call it love, I don't know, but you must admit that there is love on one side, at least. Another kind of love is fifty-fifty. You love me, I love you; you don't love me, I don't love you. But spiritual love cannot be like that. No. It will have to be one hundred percent on my side. Whether God gives anything to me or not, it doesn't matter; I give Him one hundred percent. I don't ask for anything. You have to make sure that the ego does not seek anything for itself—that it does not raise its head. That attitude is the very basis of the practice of devotion.

If you say, "I think that is too humiliating. I think I should have some self-respect," I will reply, "Self-respect is bunk!" For which self are you seeking respect? If you really mean the Self—the true Self—that Self, of course, is worthy of respect. That is God Himself. But to seek respect for your lesser self is just stupidity, one of those things which is good for worldly life. In worldly life a person should have that kind of self-respect, but not in spiritual life.

When you repeat the name of God with this attitude, you will find gradually your heart will be purified, worldly desires will leave. Some have said that if you have worldliness, if you have defects in your nature, you should pray to God and repeat His name, and everything will become just right. Have patience, and gradually you will find

the thing has happened. But you have to have patience. It may not happen overnight, but it *will* happen.

Then, as the fifth ingredient in his five methods, Chaitanya prescribes *vraje vās*, that is to say, you should live in a holy place. That, of course, is hard in America. But all old countries have such prescribed holy places—cities like Benares or Vrindavan—where the important functions going on are worship and meditation. There are many such places like that. If you do not have them in your country, then create them. In a place where many people have thought about God, searched for Him and found Him, the very dust of that place, the very air becomes surcharged with spirituality. That is how holy places are created.

I think that nowadays there is a great desire in the West for retreats—places where people can go and think about God. It is very necessary. You see, we have to fight constantly against other influences and prevail against them. And in this fight, we lose a great deal of our own positive spiritual energy. If we did not have to fight, then we could use this energy in our further progress; our meditation would be better, our spiritual growth would be quicker.

#### 4

Now, when we become established in the practices that Chaitanya prescribed, the Lord has taken His seat in our heart. We feel the radiance of His being; His joy, His peace, and His goodness fills us. We have reached the beginning of the higher kind of devotion called *rāgānugā bhakti*, that is to say, the path of pure devotion, or pure love. Our love has become now the hunger and thirst of our soul; we cannot

live without loving God and without tasting His love and His joy. Who cares then for food, who cares for sleep, who cares for comfort? Our longing becomes so keen that the senses cannot perceive anything else. Such a person looking at the world finds it hazy, like a drawing drenched in water; it has become smudged and very faint, you do not recognize much of it anymore. You find that all the details of the external world have somehow become dulled; they are disappearing, and in their place you feel the loving presence of God. Your heart has found its comfort.

By now, the sense of time has gone. You no longer feel that you are being swept away by time. Today is coming, today is here, today is going, tomorrow is now becoming today—this sense of time leaves you. In other words, the same transformation takes place in you which would take place if, by following the path of knowledge, you were to become aware that the reality of everything is the formless, timeless Brahman and you were beginning to perceive Him. Time and space are becoming now more and more attenuated, disappearing, as it were, and in their place is the eternal, all-pervasive Being. Everything, instead of being found different from God and from one another, is found to be part of God, or God Himself. Just as in the path of knowledge, so in the path of devotion, that perception comes. And that is the beginning of ecstasy.

A person who has reached that state becomes the purest of the pure. Therefore, he becomes the source of the greatest well-being and greatest good wherever he goes. And he is a most enjoyable person. "All the world loves a lover." If that is true from a human point of view, it is more true from a spiritual point of view. To see the face of a person

who is harbouring divine love in his heart is a benediction, an upliftment. I may say that if we are fortunate enough to see such a face, the sight itself is an ecstasy, because there is so much beauty there.

I had the good fortune of seeing some people of that nature. I oftentimes remember the face of one of the younger monks in our monastery. I was not a monk at that time; I was studying in Calcutta, and when I visited Belur Math I always used to notice him. After he took his final monastic vows a great change came over him. I went one day to the Math and saw that his face, his eyes were changed. One could see that he was looking at something which was not there to our ordinary vision and which was the source of great joy, great peace, and great power to him. Such a face is itself a revelation. After you have read all the books and listened to all the arguments about God and His nature and so on and have remained still sceptical, all you need to do is to find such a person and look at his face. That is the greatest argument for the existence of God.

What is it that transforms a person in this way, giving such light, such peace, such purity and such power to his appearance? There must be something that has brought about this transformation in him. Whatever name you may give it, it is something that you have not found in your own experience. Find it! Ask him how he found it. He will tell you, "Transcend, transcend, transcend!" Rise above everything that is small. Spiritual progress is a great staircase; you are continually climbing up and up. Throw everything down. Whatever you experience, just reject it and seek a higher experience. Do not remain on the same level of experience, taking note of every little thing and delighting

in all the new things that you find in your miserable, miserable mud puddle. That does not help you. It may be to the delectation of unhappy creatures like yourself, but if you do not go on to a higher category of existence and yet higher and yet higher—if you do not do that, you have become stagnant, and you should be unhappy about it.

Yes, such transformation comes, and wherever such transformed people go, others feel their presence as if it were a day of festival. There is wonderful auspiciousness and beauty about them; they create an atmosphere of goodness, and you participate in that atmosphere. All evils, internal and external, disappear from people in their presence. Such is the consummation of this effort at devotion.

Our philosophers, writing about this path of devotion, say that one does not have to discourse on the *result* of the practice of love. Why? Because love is its own fruit. Love is not for something else; love is for itself. If you have found love, you have found everything. It doesn't matter what path you follow; unless in your heart there is that crying day and night for Him, He who is the truth, who is the Infinite One, the Eternal One, the only One that exists—if there is not tremendous longing, which is of the very essence of devotion or of love, then you cannot make any progress. Therefore, make your heart dwell upon Him. It doesn't matter what path you think you are following; think of Him being the source of all attraction, all love, all joy, all goodness, and all peace. Remembering that He is within you and that He is everywhere outside you, just let your heart dwell upon Him, and you will find you have become a pilgrim on the way to Him.

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

## *For Beginners*

### 1

*I*n speaking on the subject of spiritual practice for beginners, I think I should make one or two points clear at the very outset. First of all, what do I mean by beginners? It is a fact that all beginners are not really beginners: souls are born on this earth with different qualifications, and those who start spiritual life seriously do not all begin at the same point. Therefore spiritual practices cannot be the same, or even similar, for all beginners. So for the purpose of our discussion, I should say that by beginners I mean those who genuinely feel the call of the Spirit, who feel devotion to God a little, who feel they should think about Him and make some effort to gain more and more devotion to Him, but who, at the same time, find themselves drawn towards the world—they cannot reject the world as unreal, as uninteresting. It is this kind of beginner I wish to discuss here.

Now, the difficulty in the case of such beginners lies in the fact that spiritual interests and worldly interests are

so diametrically opposed that they cannot be brought together by any effort. Therefore, the kinds of beginners whom I have tried to define should at the very first tell themselves that from time to time their position has to be changed. I am mentioning this because I have found that people are not ready to change: some will say, "Oh, I can go only so far. I cannot go any further." Or, when a conflict arises between these two interests—worldly and spiritual—some would rather give up their spiritual than their worldly pursuits. But there should be readiness in the very beginning to accept the changes that are bound to come within oneself if one's spiritual practice is effective or fruitful. If no change comes, then I must say that one's spiritual practice has been more or less formal and mechanical; it has not been much of a spiritual practice at all. However, I do not forget that merely by will one cannot push oneself away from one's present position to a higher position in order to resolve this conflict. That also is not practical.

We don't have many things under our personal control. So many things are working in our own individuality and there are so many circumstances—our environment, our relationships with other people which we cannot violate or change merely at will—that it is too much to expect that our beginner will just break all these bonds and bring about a revolutionary change within himself. I myself don't expect that of him or her, and I should say further that often it would be harmful. If you bring about quick changes within yourself, you are not able to make the necessary adjustment, and because of this lack of adjustment, you find you have lost control over your own being,

over your own mental states, and over your relationship with others. It is not a very happy situation.

Therefore, spiritual practice has to be so designed and so carried out that this very necessary change within oneself is brought about in slow and gradual measure, particularly in the early stages. A certain change has to be brought about also in the quality of the relationships that we have with other people and in our relationship with the world. We shall have to read more and more meaning, spiritual meaning, into those things which ordinarily appear to be rather worldly, and opposed to spirituality. In order that this can be accomplished, I have found that one thing is vitally important, and that is the building up of character.

Morality is the very core of character and, as is well known, is absolutely necessary for spiritual growth. Man is moral. Morality is not something imposed upon us by religious or social conventions; it is a part of our inner constitution. A person does not feel well if he tells lies. Very soon he finds that his whole being is disintegrating because of his habit of falsehood. If a person is impure, he feels the same kind of degeneration and continually struggles against it. If moral observances were merely conventional, just imposed by the community or believed in because some saints or prophets prescribed them, we would not feel bad about breaking them. I know some of you will say, "Why, nowadays people believe that these things are more conventional than natural, and like other conventions, they change. Furthermore, many people find that if they throw off all these moral obligations and observances, they feel better for it. If we can throw off that tremendous pressure, that heavy burden, we feel lighthearted."

Now, I admit that some people may have to struggle very hard in order to live up to moral principles; there are inner conflicts, and so on. So if a person is told that he does not have to observe these things, he will feel relieved. Having admitted that, I shall add that it is only a temporary relief. Very soon he finds something within him resists this kind of concession; he finds he has become shallow, he has become weak and exceedingly vulnerable. If moral observances do not do anything else for us, they at least build within us an independent individuality so that we can live in accordance with some requirements of our own inner being, and to that extent we are able to resist incursions from the outside. I do not think I have to mention that one of the things most needed at the present time is the ability to resist the external world. In these times we have become so identified with externals that whenever things do not go well, we go to pieces. In individual, national, and international affairs we are continually subject to this kind of invasion. People cannot live long in this way. It is just a question of time before we find that a large number of people are going to pieces—literally going to pieces.

Moral principles are really just manifestations of our own inner integrity—our own Spirit. I am assuming this without argument. You see, you would not have come to listen to a talk about spiritual practice if you did not believe in spirituality and in the existence of the Spirit as yourself. So I do not have to argue here that we are really Spirit and not body and mind. Some of you might say that we are Spirit, but *also* mind. I won't try to dispute that; I shall accept it. But the mind that is associated with the Spirit

has to be a mind strong enough and elevated enough to commune with God, the universal Spirit; it cannot be the ordinary mind. Well, let us say that such a mind is also a part of our being. But the central core of our being is Spirit, which is a very different substance than the mind even at its highest. In this discussion I shall assume you understand that.

Now, as I was saying, Vedantins hold that moral principles are expressions and manifestations of the integrity of the Spirit. Truth, for instance, is the very essence of the Spirit; therefore God has been called Truth. In the Upaniṣads the idea is continually emphasized that the Spirit or the Atman or the Self is *satyam*, "truth" and *jñānam*, "knowledge," which also is truth. (Any knowledge must be true knowledge; so knowledge is of course bound up with truth.) We are truthful not because social life would otherwise become impossible, but because our very nature is truth, and when we violate our own nature everything goes to pieces—and then, of course, social life also becomes disrupted.

But I may say that character contains something more than mere morality. For example, you may be a very moral person, but you may not believe that loyalty is necessarily a part of morality. Some of you would say that renunciation, detachment, strength of mind, confidence in oneself are not moral virtues. Although I admit that these qualities can probably be related to some of the cardinal moral virtues, let us make this distinction. For instance, if a person has no confidence in himself, you would not call him immoral. Character, then, is made up of the cultivation of moral virtues plus some other virtues. And all these

virtues are very necessary in order that we can grow in spiritual life. Very, very necessary! And this from the beginning.

I sometimes think that even if people do not admit the existence of God, if they build up all these traits of character, they will be much better people than if they believe in God, frequently go to churches, pray, and so on, but haven't a strong character. I sincerely believe that. But I also admit that life does not become full unless we have embraced the Infinite; that is where the claim of religion comes. So I would be dissatisfied with merely following or being asked to follow the ideal of character; I would want something more. If, however, you are not inclined to believe in God and if you could be persuaded to build up your character, you will find that you have become a very fine person indeed. I may almost say that if belief in God does not come naturally to you in the beginning, it is not necessary; you can go ahead.

The fact is that without character spiritual growth is impossible. I think many of you have considered this problem of religion: you find people go to churches, but they do not seem to be any different from the people who do not go to churches. Some would even go further: they would say, "Churchgoers probably are on the whole hypocrites; at least *we* are not hypocrites. We are honest people; we live good lives; we don't pretend things." Some will also say, "Churchgoers just mumble this and that; they are full of superstitions. Superstition is not strengthening; it is not good for people. *We* don't have to subject ourselves to these superstitions. We are better." Yes, there is a great deal of truth in this kind of stand. But the reason people

do not change through religion is because character has not been formed; it has not been considered necessary to build up a strong character.

Now, as I said above, in the development of character there are other things apart from the practice of moral virtues that should be practiced. What are those things? I myself have thought that whatever denies the true nature of my own being is against the formation of character, and whatever brings to me the sense of my own true nature is an essential element of character. In my opinion, strength, the cultivation of fearlessness, the eradication of all kinds of weaknesses are essential factors in the development of character. The Spirit cannot be fearful. If you think you are Spirit you could not at the same time be full of fear. Unselfishness is also a necessary ingredient of character, because to be selfish is to think of oneself in terms of the body and the mind, in terms of this narrow being, and that is a denial of our true being. Therefore, selfishness, by undermining one's true nature, would also destroy character. Selflessness is therefore an essential part of true character.

You may say, "Yes, a person may be selfless, but does he shed tears in the name of God?" My friends, assuming that some of you here are beginners, I shall tell you that to feel a spirit of selflessness is much better than shedding tears in the name of God. Shedding tears can be very easily done. I have seen people crying jugfuls of tears in the name of God, but I would not count them as spiritual at all—not at all.

If you have studied the history of religion in India, you will know that in the Puranic age—the age following

the first period of Buddhism—all kinds of devotional religions were taught, and people at once responded to them. In a sense you could say that the Puranic age is continuing in India up to this very day. The more philosophical and mystical teachings of the Upaniṣads do not seem to appeal to people. I might say that even amongst you, who profess to be Vedantins, there are many who would rather go in for a devotional religion in which you can take refuge in somebody and cry your heart out whenever it suits your mood. But after you have shed all your tears, you do not seem to have changed very much; you are where you were. The tremendous change which is absolutely necessary in order to grow spiritually has not come into your life. Yes, there is a wonderful fascination in devotional religion: to call oneself a miserable sinner and then expect that some compassionate Saviour will take you to heaven by the hand so that you won't have to climb all the stairs—that is very appealing, and that is what this wonderful religion of love has been reduced to because of our own weakness!

Another point I should mention here is nonegotism. Probably many of you do not think that is important. Of course, you don't want to be egotistical in an obvious way; you think that is insufferable. But you want to have egotism in some things. You do something good, say, then you want to be praised for it; you help someone, you expect that person to be grateful to you, and so on. You see, unconsciously we seek approbation, gratitude, honour. We are continually thinking of those things. And the ego is so subtle that even when you are thinking that you are nonegotistical, in this very thought you are egotistic. One

has to learn to give up the ego. One has to learn to shift one's own being from the ego to those broad universal truths and realities which are nonegotistic. They are within ourselves; even now they are more or less within our apprehension. Therefore, I do not accept the view that unless you have advanced very far spiritually, you cannot shift yourself from egotism to nonegotistic principles. I would not accept that. We *have* those principles within us; it is because we ignore them that we cannot take advantage of them.

Now if I have to say what spiritual practice should be undertaken by a beginner, I would say, give your utmost attention to the building up of your character. I am not saying that this is all you should do, and that only after your character has been fully built should you start other practices. No. In spiritual life, as in everything else, we undertake many things together. Although we know that unless some fundamental conditions have been fulfilled, our other practices will not be very fruitful, we also know that as we build up our character, our devotional or other practices will become more and more effective. Therefore, many things can be started simultaneously. We should, however, recognize which practices are the most essential, and we should pay a great deal of attention to them. In other words, we should give a great deal of attention to building up good traits of character.

## 2

At the very start I mentioned an inherent conflict between our two interests—spiritual interests and interests

in worldly things. Naturally we love our own people—our mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, our children, uncles, aunts, cousins, friends. Now, when I am speaking of beginners, I would not do violence to these natural loves and affections. If some of you have an idea that Vedanta asks us to forget all human loves because all such things are unreal, let me state that one of the troubles with learning any religion or philosophy merely from lectures and classes, or even from books, is that your own personal problems are not dealt with. How many different viewpoints exist; how many variations there are in the application of certain principles in life! If a person cannot know what to apply to his or her own personal case, he or she should take the advice of someone who knows all those things and who would be able to give unselfish and enlightened guidance. You take advice in so many other things, I do not see any reason why you cannot take advice in spiritual things.

Say a beginner hears that one should have nothing to do with worldly relationships. He follows that teaching, and he becomes hardhearted, dry; he develops certain bad traits of character. It is most unfortunate! So much so that I sometimes think Sri Krishna was the wisest of all teachers. In a class Swami Vivekananda held on the *Bhagavad Gītā* in San Francisco he said that Sri Krishna did not believe in too much self-discipline, that he would rather people grow naturally, and that he did not believe in formal renunciation. Although the word *sannyāsa* is generally translated to mean formal renunciation of the world and the embracing of monastic life, when the word occurs in the *Bhagavad Gītā* that is not its meaning. Swami Vivekananda was right

when he said that in the *Bhagavad Gītā* there is no mention of monastic life, or of renunciation of the world. That is a fact.

Now, when you consider the situation of most beginners, you probably will agree with Sri Krishna in this respect. At least within my own limited experience, I have found that if you interfere with some people's lives, if you try to change their emotions and their likes and dislikes, you find that yes, you can, because your word will carry weight, but after a few months you find that their mind has gone to something else, which is probably worse than the former thing. There has to be a natural change. Sri Ramakrishna himself used to say, "Turn the direction of all these worldly instincts." That was his advice. What is the harm, for example, if a wife loves her husband?

In one of the Upaniṣads, a sage gave a wonderful discourse—so wonderful, in fact, that it is customary for those who have embraced monastic life to read it after they have taken their final vow. It was given by Yajnavalkya to his second wife. He had two wives, and evidently he was fond of the younger one, Maitreyi, who was a most extraordinary person. He said to her, "Dear, come. I want to divide my property between you two, because I want to go away from the world." And Maitreyi said, "What shall I do with this property? Will it give me immortality?" "No." "What shall I do with something by which I won't realize my own immortal Self?" When the husband heard that he said, "You were always dear to me, but for having said that, you are now dearer to me." And then he gave this most wonderful discourse, in the course of which he said that it is not for the sake of the husband that the husband is dear

to the wife, but for the sake of the Self that the husband is dear to the wife.<sup>1</sup>

Commentators have given two different explanations of this passage. Shankara, for example, has given a rather matter-of-fact explanation. He has interpreted it as meaning that it is for her own sake that the husband becomes dear to the wife; the husband serves some purpose of the wife, therefore he is dear to her. And, of course, of the husband you could say the same thing. Well, that's a most matter-of-fact and, I must say, a very cynical explanation. But Swami Vivekananda gave another explanation, which also follows literally from the text. He said, "It is because of the Self in the husband that he is dear to the wife." Why are we drawn to anything? Because the most attractive thing, the Self, is in everything. Why are we drawn to the husband or to the wife or to the children or to our parents or friends or to earth or to air or to money or to anything? Because somehow we feel the presence of the Self there.

Now, what prevents anyone from thinking his father or his mother to be the divine Self? Your relationship with your parents becomes all the sweeter and deeper when its meaning is transformed. Just consider how sweet the relationship is between a husband and a wife when the one looks upon the other as the divine Self and not merely as a nice and good-looking person, which every ordinary spouse thinks—and of course unthinks after some time. The real beauty is not in the skin; everybody knows that. There is something within oneself; even when the body

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<sup>1</sup> *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.5.1-6.

shrivels in age, even then, something shines out. If that thing can come out or if you can reach it, the attraction of it will be so strong that it will be completely inviolable. You would not be able to resist it; it is so satisfying and fulfilling. What prevents you from realizing it? As a matter of fact, when you begin to catch a glimpse of the all-pervasive Self, of this existent Self everywhere, even the dung heap becomes glamorous. There is nothing in this universe which does not shine in glory. Why can you not transform everything that way? That is called deification or spiritualization of life.

For beginners, I would advise this practice of the spiritualization of everything. It's a long process. Some people have said that unless we realize God we cannot spiritualize things or see God in others. I don't believe that for a moment. I just don't believe it. This is a very great teaching which has not been taken advantage of by people for ages and ages: Everything is the everpresent God; God is present before our very eyes. Can you deny it? Can you deny that everything is just *filled* with God? Earth's crammed with heaven, as it has been said. Can you deny that? The reality of everything is God, and since this is the simple fact, acceptance of it should not be difficult. Yes, I admit that to see God face to face is a difficult proposition, but there are many stages between our present ignorance and perversity and that highest experience. And as we realize stage after stage, our life becomes sweeter and nobler.

Somehow we have got to get out of the clutch of worldliness. Worldliness is egotistical; worldliness is limitation. It has, as it were, congealed us into a kind of

rigid position, and we cannot get away from it. We try very hard, but after all our efforts we find that we are the same person: there is no change within us. There has to come a sort of thawing; then a fluidity and flexibility has to be attained, so that we can give to our own being a new and more glorious form. This is very necessary. And how can you do it? The secret is to transform your world through spiritualization. This is not just a device through imagination, although the first efforts might appear to be only imagination. For example, when you are first trying to learn a song, you are not really singing it; you are making an awful noise, but you *imagine* that you are producing the right notes; then eventually you succeed. Imagination is our first effort towards actual realization. Such efforts are very clumsy and flimsy, I admit; nevertheless they are movements towards reality. You will begin to feel the presence of God everywhere. At first you imagine it; afterwards it becomes real.

Connected with this spiritualization there are, of course, other practices that should be mentioned. Sri Krishna strongly emphasized the practice of offering the fruits of one's action to God. There is not a single religion in which this has not been taught in one form or another. Whatever you do, offer it unto God. Say to yourself, "I am not the doer; I cannot really control this body. The energy, the intelligence, all these things are Thine, and so I offer everything to You." Make it a regular practice to offer everything to the Lord at the end of the day, and throughout the day remember that the power and the direction behind your activity is coming from a deep source, even from God Himself. You have to remind yourself of this: Be prayerful that you be guided by Him.

Some of you may want to remind me here of the self-confidence about which I was becoming so eloquent a little while ago, but there is no contradiction. Even when you feel you are being guided by the Lord, even then the *doing* depends upon *you*. When the master says, "Go, my servant, do this," the doing of the thing is dependent upon the integrity of the servant. He could neglect it or do it in a slipshod way, or he could put his whole heart into it and exert himself to his utmost. So although we know that many things are not under our control here, and although we say, "Guide us, O Lord," at the same time we shall do everything with full fervour and call up our own strength from within ourselves. We shall say, "Yes, surely I can do this"—not in an egotistical way, but knowing that there is infinite knowledge and strength in the Spirit.

Even if there is a contradiction here, let me tell you this—and I think it will be better that you pay heed to what I am saying: In your spiritual life, do not expect a well-organized scheme. I may tell you, "Have faith in yourself. Infinite strength is within yourself." Then I tell you, "Pray to the Lord to guide you." You might say, "These two things do not gibe; they are contradictory. I can take one or I can take the other. I cannot take both." I don't believe that. You can accept both; but you don't have to organize them into a united whole. As long as each is true of your being, you can practise one or the other according to your mood and according to the situation. You see, you do not have full control over circumstances nor over your own mind or senses or energies; therefore you pray to the Lord, "Guide me rightly." It is quite legitimate. On the other hand, when you have to do something where you need your own

strength—then call up your own strength! Tell yourself, “There is infinite strength within me; I shall not give up; I shall do my very best.” I don’t see any contradiction.

But if you still feel a contradiction, don’t try at the very first to become absolutely perfect in a certain scheme; you will land yourself in difficulties. When you try to practise one thing, your intellect will at once remind you of the opposite. You try to be a devotee; then suddenly your philosophy tells you to be a *jñānī*, that is to say, a philosopher, and you don’t know how to reconcile the two. No reconciliation is really necessary now. You see, there is a deeper level in our being where these apparently unrelated practices become related. So in the beginning, just pray and offer the fruits of the action to the Lord—just as Sri Krishna said, “Whatever you do, offer that to Me.” The Lord Himself has said that He is the receiver of actions and of the fruits of action. He recognizes these as a legitimate offering, and He accepts them.

Of course, bound up with this practice is that of nonattachment. Nonattachment doesn’t mean that you should be indifferent, that you act in a mechanical way, your heart not in it. Some people think that is what nonattachment means; they think that wherever the heart goes it has to stick like glue. I don’t believe it. The heart might be like Scotch tape, but it need not stick like glue so that you cannot take it off. Generally, we get so attached to people, to things, and to actions that when a change comes we are lost. You should not be like that; but while you are doing something, put your whole heart in it. It is strange, but it is psychologically true, that if you do something with wholehearted attention, then alone can you practise

nonattachment. Conversely, if you do something with attachment, you can never put your whole heart in it. Your attachment brings out your ego, and your ego chokes the flow of your own being; so only a little of your being goes to what you are doing. Your whole being requires free flow; there can be no constriction by a sense of ego or of narrow attachment.

In the beginning you should practise all these things; such practice will also strengthen your character, and a strong character will, in turn, strengthen the right way of practicing. It will also make it possible for you to offer all you do to the Lord and to spiritualize all that you see.

### 3

Now, I should emphasize another aspect of spiritual practice for beginners which is very important. In your pursuit of spiritual achievement, *never* neglect the duties pertinent to your position in life. Never, never do it! Nothing is so disintegrating and disorganizing as the neglect of one's own duties. But I should add here that you must continually examine what your duties are. Swami Vivekananda said of this sense of duty that it is like the midday sun, just scorching us. He was against that sense of duty, and some people, reading those things, have been confused by them. His view seems to have been that we often glorify our own attachments and inclinations into duties. For example, a person may be very much attached to his children. He will say, "Oh, I must look after them. I must do this and do that for them. It's my duty." Nothing of the kind. He has not even thought about it. His natural

inclination has been to dote upon his children, to give his whole heart and soul to them, and he now glorifies that inclination as duty. This doesn't mean, however, that there is not genuine duty. For everyone, in any position, there are certain things which are one's duty and which one cannot neglect with impunity; one has to perform them. I strongly emphasize this, because it is through the performance of duties that your life becomes deeper, your spiritual efforts become more serious, and you grow in maturity. If you neglect your duties, your spiritual life will become superficial. But when you perform your duties and at the same time try to live your spiritual life, then you will deepen.

But let me repeat: continually examine what your duty really is. You will find that many things which you think to be your duties are not really so, and then you must give them up. You say, "No, that is not my duty. Why should I waste my energy and time on it? I won't." But some things are genuine duties. If you are a student, for example, you must not neglect your studies in the pursuit of spiritual life. Must not! If a person is married, then he should earn a living, or if he has already plenty of money he should manage his affairs: he should take care of his wife and children and relatives as far as his duty calls; he should also give to charity. All people know that a person's duty is not restricted to his immediate family but extends to the whole community in all its aspects. You should perform all those duties pertinent to your position, and you should do everything with a cool brain, not neglecting one thing for another. A cool brain combined with the heart is a very wonderful thing. Mere cool brain becomes cold brain, you see.

Now, in extension of this topic, I may say that there are people—young or middle-aged—who wonder whether they should marry or not. Some people think it is their duty to marry. I myself don't think that. Once a man asked Sri Ramakrishna, "Sir, shouldn't all people marry? Otherwise how would the Lord's creation continue?" Sri Ramakrishna was very much annoyed. "How do you know," he said, "that the Lord wants you to continue His creation? Who told you that?" We are so concerned about God's creation that we marry and beget children and most of them are no good anyhow; they just add to the burden of the earth. At best they are a mixture of good and evil and very commonplace, very commonplace. Anyhow, Sri Ramakrishna then went on to explain. He said, "God likes it much more that we become devoted to Him and come closer and closer to Him than that we just go on maintaining His creation." So when I discuss this problem, my advice is that if a person does not feel a compulsion to marry, then he or she should not marry. Unmarried, you will have more opportunity of building up your character, of doing good to other people; you will also have more opportunity to practise spirituality.

On the other hand, we in India have always frowned upon the state of spinsterhood or bachelorhood for its own sake. We have always considered it to be a highly irresponsible life. Unmarried people earn money, live in comfort, and have no responsibility. They are like cankers in the body of the society. Unless a person is devoted to an ideal, he or she should take the responsibility of worldly living; he or she should marry and have a family. That's our approach in India, and we think it contributes to the health of the society.

But we are not talking about irresponsible people. So I say if you do not feel a compulsion to marry, do not marry. Devote yourself to an ideal life—a life of service, of doing good to people. You may not be ready for a life of meditation, but you are ready to do unselfish service. Anybody and everybody can do that, and the world will always need the service of unselfish people. If you are married already, do not regret it. That is my advice: do not regret it, but try to live up to the ideal of married life. In this regard I shall draw your attention to a small book by Swami Vivekananda called *Karma Yoga*. You really cannot do any better than to read this book for the guidance of your life. It is all very good that you want to attain to *samādhi* and have meditation and shed tears in the love of God and all that sort of thing. But, you know, as you get older you begin to get more and more serious, and you come to certain definite conclusions. Yes, to think of God alone and nothing else—that's wonderful. But what is the reality of your life? The reality of your life is your family: your wife or husband, your children, your relatives and friends. So live in such a way that you can become a source of good to them, and you will find the practice of spirituality will not be in conflict with the performance of your duties in the most loving sense to your own family. Do not think it is against your spiritual growth.

But lest you think that I am trying to hide facts, I must say that if a person is married and if he is living a physical life with his wife, or wife with her husband, then they may not undertake strenuous spiritual practices. They must not. Generally speaking, their spiritual practices should be of a different kind than those that can be

undertaken by people who live a life of complete chastity and continence. What should be the nature of their practice? It has been found that the majority of spiritual aspirants are devotional. This is not just because religion has been taught in the name of devotion, but because most people are devotionally inclined. You will find that many of them do not like to undertake hard practises of concentration, or they may not be in a condition for it. But they can surely practise devotion, which is the approach to God through the heart. There is a great satisfaction in that, and it is also a very natural process. Yet it is a practice in itself and has its own special ways.

In Christianity you have lots of books on the path of devotion, and if you are inclined to those modes of practice, you will certainly find those books of very great help. But if I am to speak of our own religion, there is a very good book called *Nārada Bhakti Sūtras*—"Aphorisms on Devotion." Some say that the ancient sage Narada, whose name occurs in the Vedas, composed these aphorisms. I have great doubt that he did, but however that may be, this book contains a very nice description of what devotion is, how to cultivate it, what to avoid, and so on. You will find it a very great help.

As a part of the practise of devotion, I would suggest that you learn to do a little ritualistic practice. Now, I know there is a great reluctance to go back to ritualism. I do not think I am wrong in saying that the abundance of rites and ceremonies in the Catholic Church has been too much for Christian people for many centuries; there has come, therefore, a sort of revulsion against ritualism. I find that many people go to the other extreme; they like to dwell on

abstractions. Even when they are devotees, they rather would be devotees in a thin, abstract way. They want to reduce God to a colourless abstraction and reduce worship, also, to a sort of mental effort. A very thin business altogether. Of course everything along the line of devotion is good, but in order to be sufficiently good, all these things have to be substantial. Therefore, I would say that a little ritualism would be very good for everybody. I am myself not ritualistically inclined, but I have enjoyed doing ritualistic worship. For a long time in one of our monasteries in India I performed ritualistic worship. I have also done it in the West for years, and I have always found it very helpful. When ritualism is in accord with the higher truths of your being and the truths of God, it becomes highly symbolic and is an open path for spiritual growth. You really can climb higher and higher through these ritualistic practices, of which the larger part is meditation. Learn to enjoy God. My advice is, even if your progress is slow, learn to enjoy your spiritual life and your spiritual practice. Do not undertake it in such a way that it becomes strenuous and hard labour for your mind and soul. Enjoy it!

If you find that you have not done very well in your meditation or that today your mind is not so high as it was yesterday, do not tear your hair and beat your breast. Be happy and be grateful that today you have been able to remember God even once, however faultily. It is not given to everyone even to remember that God exists. How fortunate you are that you can think that He exists and that you remember Him at least once a day! The mind could be so turned that even with the greatest effort you would not

be able to remember Him. So do not minimize this great good fortune. Say, "I am very fortunate indeed that I have been able to make an effort at meditation and worship this morning." Be glad and happy about it. Don't be crabby about everything. The Spirit moves up and down, up and down. Sometimes it stands still; other times in a spurt it goes. Is the Spirit like a kind of engine that goes on rolling at fifty miles an hour? No! It is too subtle to be so mechanically determined; you cannot expect that. And, remember that while it is all very good to look upwards and say, "I am nothing." Look downwards, too, and feel how blessed you are.

My motto is: everyday do your best. Everyday one's best; the Lord will do the rest. You cannot be better than your best, can you? So do your best, and even if that best amounts to very little, be happy about it. Let not any sense of misery enter into your spiritual life. Do not associate these two things. You might say, "Oh, how can I do it!" Oh, this and oh, the other thing. That's sheer madness, a disease of the mind. Just do your best. Just say, "Yes, today my mind was able to think this little bit; I am satisfied. Next time in meditation I shall try to do my best again." Out of that, good will come; I am quite sure.

Another little thing I would like to tell you: In the early stage particularly, before habits have been formed, you must beware that you do not waste any time. You bring your mind under control by consciously directing it so that it cannot think for itself. Make a schedule for the whole day. If you want to rest for two hours, let that also be part of your routine. Make your mind go consciously and deliberately from one occupation to another occupation,

until the time comes for you to fall asleep. Do not have time on your hands to daydream. You must *not* dwell on things which are unnecessary. You must not gossip. You must not take interest in things which are not part of the truth. You must not get interested in other people's affairs just out of curiosity. Those things are all deadly to spiritual growth. These restrictions can also be considered a part of character-building.

Then, before I close, I shall mention this: when your mind has become very determined and clear about a spiritual objective, that is the time to go to a spiritual teacher. In India we believe that spiritual practice is impossible without proper guidance. As I mentioned earlier, your inclination is to listen to lectures, hold conversations, read books, and on the basis of those things undertake spiritual practice. I would not be so dogmatic as to say that all these things are absolutely ineffective or wrong, but I do say that the area of your indecisiveness and ignorance is so large that even after reading a lot of books and listening to a lot of lectures, you cannot on that basis undertake safe and effective spiritual practice. For one thing, there are so many variations in spiritual practices that you *have* to have personal, enlightened guidance. What practices you should undertake depend upon your own nature and your present condition. These conditions might undergo a change, and then the practice has to be changed.

But teachers are not plentiful or easily available. Don't for a moment think that teachers are just standing on the street corner waiting for you to give them five dollars for a set of lessons. No spiritual teacher worthy of the name will sell his teaching. Even if you were to lay billions of

dollars before him, he would not give you anything. His spiritual knowledge is the very soul of his soul. It is for that that he lives; it is for that that he has given his whole life. He would not sell his soul for any amount of money or any other earthly advantage. But if he sees a person has the right qualifications, he will go out of his way to help him or her; he will take care of him in every way so that he becomes fit to undertake spiritual practice. If he sees a person is not ready, then for no inducement would he utter a single word.

On your side, you come to him with full trust. Your only obligation is to be dedicated to that which you are going to receive from him. This implies your trust in him, your respect for him, and a determination to practise what he will give you. Search for him. There is no rush about it. We believe in India that if *we* are ready and seeking spiritual things, we shall somehow come in contact with the teacher who will give us the right instruction. And when with faith and devotion you receive an instruction from the teacher and practise it with reverence, it will act like magic in your life. Like fire, it will burn all obstructions. It may not work immediately. It may take years before it is done. But before you have left this life, you will find that indeed it has brought about miraculous changes in your life.

I need not tell you that to change the character of the mind is a very, very difficult thing. It is literally true that a soul may come to this earth life after life, be born again and again, again and again, and remain in about the same condition. You probably don't believe it. You are all optimistic people. You think a quick change should take place, but it doesn't. You find that at the end of his or her

life a person is the same person he was at the beginning of his life—the same traits of character, same idiosyncrasies, same weaknesses, same strengths are coming up in him. He has exercised some inhibition during his life; he appears different to other people, maybe he, also, thought he had changed; but inhibition is gone now, and all of those traits have cropped up again. That is the mind for you! No wonder that even such wise people as the ancient Greeks believed in fate. Muslims also believe in fate or *kismet*; Hindus believe in *karma*. All over the world you will find a belief that there is something so inexorable that nothing can change it.

Well, Vedantins don't take that view. We say that if you do not take recourse to the right method, then changing the mind is indeed very difficult, but when you go to a right teacher, you get something by which a real, substantial change takes place. That's the magic of it. But you have to go to a teacher, you have to follow his instruction, and you have to practise regularly.

In sum and substance, this would be my instruction for a beginner: form your character; try to spiritualize your life; do everything as an offering to the Lord. Along with that, you should practise charity to other beings. One very great teacher said, "These three things should be observed: Be kind to all beings; be devoted to the name of God; serve the devotees of the Lord." All these things should be practised. Then go to a teacher, find what the right practice is for you. Then do it.

After some years have passed, you are no longer a beginner. The truths of religion are becoming real to you. You directly feel the intervention of God in your life. You

feel from time to time the touch of His grace in your own heart. And you find that what the teacher has taught is not just a matter of faith alone but is becoming real. He whom you have been seeking all your life is no longer so distant; He has come closer to you. I am quite sure that by the time such a beginner ends this life he will find that he has put all the negations of his life behind him and has now entered into a life of spiritual fruition. He will feel that God has become real in the centre of his being.

# SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

## *For the Advanced*

### 1

As you may remember, when I spoke on spiritual practice for beginners, I tried to define the term *beginners*. I think I should now try to define the term *advanced* in connection with the present subject, spiritual practice for the advanced. It is no doubt clear to you that the word *advanced* has a sort of flexible meaning. After we have gone through the primary stages of spiritual practice and have become established in them, there remains a very long way to travel before we reach our spiritual goal, which is God-vision. And of course in reference to the primary stages, the stages still before us can all be called advanced.

Now, it would not be practical for me to dwell on the very advanced stages of our spiritual growth. Those of you who have read the lives of saints and sages have no doubt noticed that after a person has gone through a

period of struggle he goes to a quiet place, or if he remains in his own home or community, he somehow retreats from the ordinary way of life and the doings of ordinary people. Generally speaking, such people retire from the world. The majority take to an avowedly religious life: they enter a monastery or live the wandering life of a mendicant or retire to a mountain or a forest or some such secluded place. When they do that, the spiritual practices they undertake and the experiences they have are not always clear from the outside. We find such people rather self-absorbed, but what they think and what they inwardly accomplish in that self-absorption we do not know. I am not speaking here of the *karma yogins*; I am speaking of the followers of the other paths, who generally are inactive. Their need for food, physical comforts, sleep, and all such things has diminished a great deal. Sometimes we notice that they manifest extraordinary powers. Of course, people who are truly spiritual do not indulge in occult or psychic accomplishments, but these things do come to them, and there is scarcely a saint in whose life we have not seen some such manifestation of power. In any case, they are a class apart, and I may assure you that in that state, spiritual life is something so different from ordinary living that only those who are in it can appreciate it.

But lest I leave you with a negative feeling, I shall just add that such people live so close to God that often you find them immersed in profound peace and joy. Sometimes they manifest states of ecstasy. I have often told you that we will all reach a condition where the limitations imposed upon us by our body and our mind and the outward circumstances in which we live fall off. It is as

though our being had become unfrozen; its rigidity gone. What happens at that time is very hard to describe. In the Upaniṣads the soul's reaching for God has sometimes been described as a river flowing towards the sea. It is said that just as a river forsakes its two banks and loses itself in the illimitable sea, even so a soul, giving up name and form, becomes one with Brahman. Yes, the finite becomes infinite, and the process is sometimes fearful. Some people in that state may go astray—yes, even in *that* state may go astray. But their story belongs to a high bracket, and we small people need not bother about it here.

In this lecture I shall first of all try to dwell on the stages just ahead of those I spoke of in last week's lecture. Those whom I called beginners last week have in the meantime become established in some of those practices and will be able to appreciate what I shall tell you about more advanced stages. Well, anyway, not all of you are beginners; I should not do you that injustice.

Now, if I rightly remember, in the last lecture I laid a great deal of emphasis on character. I said that character is the very foundation of spiritual growth; and without that, even if we indulge in emotional orgies in the name of God, shedding lots of tears and beating our breast and tearing our hair and all those things, we will not be making any spiritual progress. I may add here that sometimes such emotional expression—even if we are established in character—is spiritually debilitating. It is continually stressed that emotion should not be given expression in the form of tears or all kinds of sounds and gestures. There are some people, particularly amongst women, who easily cry. You think you must

have hurt them a great deal; you have made them weep, which is a terrible thing. But if you analyse it, you find they rather like to weep. They rather seek for occasions when they can really have some emotion and give outward expression to it. In spiritual life that desire comes, and unless you control it, you will find the moment you have any intensity of feeling, it will express itself in the form of tears; and you will find that that intensity has gone.

Well, however that may be, I was saying that I mentioned in the last lecture that character is the foundation of spiritual life. Now, let me assume that those who have reached the advanced stage of which I am now speaking have become established in the basic ingredients of character, such as truthfulness, purity (purity is essential), and all other moral virtues. Let me assume that you have cultivated these qualities, have now acquired them and are living according to them. Further, you have cultivated nonegotism; you are now fully convinced that the ego is not yourself, that it is really an instrument of something or someone else.

Here I should caution you. It is all very good to say, as we do in monistic Vedanta, "I am not the body, I am not the mind, I am the Spirit." We further say that we have infinite power within ourselves, infinite wisdom, and so on. "Why should I be weak? I am strong; I can accomplish anything and everything!" Well, that is a nice attitude to take, but from there you might come to this: "Then it is *I* who am doing all these things. I can do even more than I am doing. After all, I have infinite power!" You see, from the Self, from the Spirit, you are stepping

into the ego. The Spirit does not do anything. Spirit is infinite and divine; It is not the doer of anything. So, although in order to conquer our weakness and lack of self-confidence we sometimes say as a practical measure, "I have infinite power within myself. Why should I be afraid? Surely I can do these things," when it comes to conquering the ego, it should never be forgotten that the Self is not the doer or the accomplisher of anything. Similarly, you may say in monistic Vedanta, "I am the Perfect One. I have nothing to do"—but don't you have something to do? Suppose you are chased by a tiger, shouldn't you run? Of course, if you want to be legalistic about it you will say "Let the body run; I won't run. I am not, after all, the body." That is one kind of reasoning. You are hungry; so you say, "No, I am not hungry; the body is hungry. Let the hand take food and put it into this body. I am not the eater." That is not bad—if you mean it. But it must be admitted that it is a sort of compromise. If you are a true *jñānī*, you would not bother about whether a tiger comes and eats up the body or not, or whether or not the body starves. Who cares? You are not the body, anyhow.

Those who have read Sri Ramakrishna's conversations in that great book *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* will remember that he often used to speak of a man named Krishnakishore who lived in the neighbourhood. He was a devotee, but sometimes he would also practise *jñāna* or philosophy. He would say, "I am *kha*." *Kha* means the sky—that is, infinite, without any movement, without form, without limits. One day Sri Ramakrishna went to visit him and found him seated on his porch looking awfully concerned. He asked, "Krishnakishore,

what is the matter with you? You look very much worried." Krishnakishore said, "The tax man came, and he said if I don't pay the taxes he will take away all my furniture, all my plates, and everything!" Well, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Krishnakishore, let the rascal take everything from you. After all, what can he do to you? You are *kha*, the sky." He gave a little prod to him, you see, teased him a little. We, too, can *say* things like that: "I am the Infinite One, the Eternal One. Who cares whether the body is eaten by a tiger or not?" But you see, not all of us have reached that state.

So you should cultivate nonegotism by remembering that you are not the doer. This is not only for *jñānīs* but also for *bhaktas*, or devotees. The devotee says, "It is not I, but Thou who art doing everything. He who is the Lord of all phenomena, including this body and this mind, which I erroneously call mine, He is the doer. He does everything, not I." In the *Bhagavad Gītā* you find the Lord says, *Guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā no sajjate*<sup>1</sup> — "One does not become attached, knowing that it is the *guṇas* that dwell on the *guṇas*." That is to say, the *guṇas* in your body and mind are dwelling on the *guṇas* that are the objects of the mind and the senses: *you* are nowhere in it. You cultivate that attitude; you say, "Not I. Thou art the doer of everything, not I." And you get rid of egotism in this way. In this stage you should practise this in *every* respect. When you have become established in the primary stages and are now trying to go ahead, you should continually emphasize nonegotism and purity.

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<sup>1</sup>*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.37.

I am here speaking of the virtues to be practised. I should also tell you what to avoid, lest nonegotism leads on to cowardice or timidity. You have to be very alert and awake to that possibility. Mind is a very tricky thing; it will think in one way and convince you that that is the right thing; then after some time you will find that it has led you astray. That is the way of the mind. For the first half of the journey, the mind is your enemy; yet with its help you have to go ahead. It is like riding a tame tiger: however tame it may be, you can never trust it; you must be very watchful. For the second half of the journey, your mind has become a nice little horse. You can well depend upon it; it will not throw you off or lead you astray; it has become your own instrument and your friend. It is in relation to this stage that Sri Ramakrishna said that your own mind becomes your guru. It will tell you almost in so many words: don't do this, don't do that. But that is a state of great purity of mind, and until you have reached that condition, you should never fully trust your mind; you should continually examine its ways and see if there is a trick hidden somewhere. Be very alert to avoid egotism; and on the other hand, be equally alert to ultrapassivity, which is another name for cowardice and is degrading.

So these two things you cultivate. This practice will naturally bring in you a dependence on God. If you are a devotee, you will say, "The Lord knows what will happen. It is my duty to do this; therefore I shall do it. If illness comes, that is His will." If you are a *jñānī*, or pre-eminently a follower of the path of knowledge, that dependence will take the form of indifference. You will say, "Both health and sickness are conditions of the body. Let the body be

sick or be healthy as it pleases. Who cares about it? *I don't care; I am not the body.*" That's the *jñānī*; he likes to take a very strong attitude; He *has* to; otherwise his shining instrument of pure reason becomes rusted and corroded. He cannot allow any defect in his reasoning; it has to be pure; no error can be permitted. Therefore he says, "I am not this body. Whether it is healthy or ill, old or young, who cares?"

But only a very small minority follow this path. The vast majority follow the path of devotion and also, of course, the path of action. And if they are contemplative in nature, they also follow the path of concentration, which is called *rāja yoga*. There is another subsidiary, or, rather, auxiliary, path, which is called *mantra yoga*—the practise of *japa*. I shall have occasion to speak about it later on. The vast majority follow a path that is a mixture of them all: the path of devotion, of action, of concentration, of *japa*, and so on, and they say, "I surrender unto God. Not I, but Thou, O Lord."

Now, I would like to draw your attention at this point to the change that has come over a person when he has reached this stage. In my previous lecture I said that even householders should do everything as an offering to God when they serve their wives or husbands, or children, or parents, and so on. They do not look on others as their own. At this stage they have to make a strong point of this attitude. Since this is an intellectual age, and everybody wants things to be based on philosophy, it should be quite clear to you that if man is Spirit and if our destiny is to be united with the Divine Spirit, God, if everything else is false or unreal, only existing for a time, and if we have to

transcend all those things, then it follows that we have to look upon everything in a very different way than we do in our ignorant state. A married man, for example, finds that he is surrounded by people: one he calls his wife, others he calls his children, others he calls his parents, and so on. It doesn't require much philosophy for him to recognize that none of them are his own in the sense in which an unenlightened man calls them his own. Who is the wife, who are the children, who are the parents?

I do not have to make it too unpleasant for you in order to convince you that we know very little of ourselves. How much does a father know of his son? How much does a son know of his mother, or husbands of wives, parents of children, and so on? They have a skin-deep acquaintance of one another—that's all. Rarely do we feel the mental states of others. Parents sometimes feel their children's mental states, but deep down every person is a profound mystery. How much do we know of each other? How much? No one is your own. There is a very crude way of illustrating this: death comes and snatches a person away. We cannot keep even one fraction of his or her life for our own. A devotee in the advanced state I am speaking of fully realizes this, deep in his heart of hearts he realizes it.

Sri Ramakrishna advised people to live in the world like nursemaids. A nurse in a rich man's home takes care of his children and speaks of them as though they were her own. She calls them "my children," "my Harry," "my Jane," and so on. But in her heart of hearts she knows that they are not hers at all. If for some reason she displeases her mistress and master, they will give her notice and send her packing. She would not really be able to remain a single

moment in the house. Similarly, death comes and gives us notice; we have to go away; all our dear ones are left behind. They are not ours. So Sri Ramakrishna said, "Live like a nurse. Do everything for others out of a sense of duty, but realize that they belong to your Master, the Lord." This was not only advice: all spiritual advice or instruction will become a reality for you. That is the beauty of it; it is an anticipation of reality, an anticipation of states that will come into your life in the future. You anticipate them and try to practise them, and thereby you accelerate your progress. Yes, this condition comes. You no longer think that those who are near to you are your own; on the other hand, you think the whole universe is your own, *all* people are your own.

In some of our scriptures a description is given of the different kinds of spiritual aspirants. The lowest just worship the Lord; they don't care for others outside their family. They honour the devotees, but nothing more than that. That's the lowest stage. In the middle stage a person feels drawn toward all devotees of God; *they* are his own, not his relatives, not worldly people, however rich and famous they may be. He will go out of his way to serve a devotee. He feels a natural friendship for all good people—whether they are devotees or not; and towards bad and inimical people he is indifferent; he is not vengeful, he maintains a state of neutrality. Then it is said that in the highest state a person feels that every being is his very own. In telling how to ascertain how far a person has advanced in the path of spirituality, one of our sages has described these three states: If you find that a person feels friendship and compassion for all, then you can know that he is a

devotee of the highest type. But of those in the middle state, with whom we are here concerned, it is said that only the devotees of the Lord become their very own.

Now, how do such people act? What do they do? You find they become more and more quiet—that is one sign of this middle state. But when the sages speak of signs, they are also giving instruction. For example, they have said that those in the middle state are full of forgiveness. Forgiveness is one of the qualities continually emphasized in our books. Even in a text devoted to monistic Vedanta it is said that forgiveness should be cultivated. Do you understand why it is emphasized so strongly? It is because we are tied to the world by our reactions. Either you are unduly attached to someone or you hate someone. Both these reactions bind you. Only when you say, “No, I have no feeling in the matter,” can you free yourself. Say somebody has insulted you or has done you harm; perhaps at the time you felt unhappy but the next moment that reaction was wiped out of your heart, as if nothing had happened to you. That is called *shānti*, forgiveness. It is said that attitude of mind should be cultivated.

But it is another quality with which I am concerned here. It is said that a person in the middle state never wastes time. That is to say, he does not give his time to anything except God. That is *very* important. Everybody recognizes that time is life; but time is also mind; the way you spend your time will determine the condition of your mind. And if you want to make your time fruitful, then every moment should be dedicated to God; if it is dedicated to anything else it is wasted. Life is wasted, time is wasted. So you dedicate yourself to God. How do you do it, since you have

other things to do? In the beginning stage you offer your work unto God. In the second stage, you always keep vividly in mind that you are doing everything unto Him.

Now, if you are a devotee, you will naturally think of the Personal God. He is kind and compassionate; He answers our prayers, and so on. That is the Personal God. And of everything you do you say, "It is willed by God. I am doing it at His will." If you are taking dictation, or typing, or keeping accounts, or leading a vast army into the battlefield, or guiding the destiny of nations—whatever you do, you see as enjoined upon you by God, and you take the attitude that you are doing it for His pleasure.

Or you can think in this way: Suppose you are doing some work for the manager in an office. Just think that within his heart there is the Lord, and when you bring your finished work to him, think, "I am offering this to the Lord who is in this person." If a housewife has prepared dinner for her family, then at dinner time she thinks, "The Lord dwells in the hearts of all these people, and I am offering this dinner to Him." Even when she is cleaning the house, she will think that. If a sweeper were to clear the street, and if he were a devotee in this second stage, he would say, "He who will tread upon this street is the Lord Himself." The Lord Himself! That is the greater truth, isn't it?

When we have some understanding we see that in men and women is God Himself. But afterwards we know that there are no people at all; it is always God who is blinking through all these eyes. We in our ignorance interpose a third entity called man or bird or beast, and we say, "The Lord dwells within this being." That is also our ignorance. However, you can start with that. Throughout the

course of whatever work you do remind yourself that it is being done unto the Lord and by the Lord. Once Swami Vivekananda, who, as you well know, was a great speaker, was asked about his lecturing. He said, "It is God who speaks and God who listens." God is the speaker; He is seated in this instrument, and from there He produces these words. And the Lord Himself, seated out there, receives these words through all these ears and hears them. Where is any person? Where is the person to speak and the person to hear? You see, everything can be thereby transformed. It is a very, very fruitful practice.

You may think, "Oh, that is just indulging in imagination!" I must admit that a great deal of spiritual practice is imagination. I read somewhere that a man had infantile paralysis; slowly, slowly he learned to move a toe. He said he learned by willing it. You will that your toes are moving; you *imagine* they are moving, and afterwards you find that your imagination has become reality: the toes are really moving a little. Imagination is not an insipid thing; it is powerful. If you imagine realistically—that is, if you imagine something which is real—then imagination becomes very effective indeed. It *is* real that God is the only being that exists; it is He who is before us in all these infinite forms. Therefore, if I think I am speaking unto God, I shall be. Even though in the beginning it might be imagination, it is realistic imagination, and I shall eventually come to the true fact; I shall actually feel that the Lord Himself is speaking and the Lord Himself is hearing.

You might ask me, "Why bring God into it? God, God everywhere! It is becoming too much of a bore." Well,

you see, spiritual growth consists in retreat from the manifold and advance towards Oneness. Sri Ramakrishna put it in a very simple way. He used to say, "To know many is ignorance. To know One is knowledge." If spiritual awakening takes place within you, you find you do not like multiplicity; you like unity. Your whole soul craves for the One. Division and differences you cannot tolerate. You want to transform this whole multiple universe with all its manifoldness to just one homogeneous unity. There comes a tremendous urge to do that. Therefore you *like* to think that everything is done unto the Lord. That is how you arrive at a state in which your time is never wasted.

As I have already mentioned, an auxiliary practice is *mantra yoga*, or *japa*, repetition of a *mantra*. You learn a *mantra* from a teacher, and you repeat it all the time. At first you cannot repeat it during your sleep or when you are busy. Say, if you are beginners, my advice is to repeat it whenever your mind is unoccupied. When you are not doing anything that requires your full attention, when you are doing mechanical work or walking, or sitting in a car, or just resting—at once start repeating the *mantra*. At first it may be tiring; afterwards it becomes a source of great relaxation. You find the moment you repeat the *mantra*, your whole being cools down. Sri Chaitanya said it is like the scattering of moonlight. It is exactly like that. You repeat the Name, and your being becomes relaxed, cooled. At first, of course, you have to master it. After you have mastered it, then this wonderful result comes to you.

When you have become established in repeating the *mantra* in your spare moments and don't allow any time to

be wasted, then you find that even when you are busy, your mind is still repeating the *mantra*. Your whole attention may be in some work; still one part of the mind is repeating the name of God. The explanation is that we really give only a part of our mind to work, however important that work may be, because only one part of our mind is at our disposal, and it is adequate. There is a vaster portion of the mind lying inactive, useless, and it is that part of the mind which undertakes the repetition of the *mantra*. Even when your body and your surface mind sleeps, a part of the mind will continue to repeat the *mantra*. So you find there is not a single moment in twenty-four hours when your mind is not repeating the name of God. And through that you are becoming aware of the existence of God. You find in this stage that whenever you have an opportunity you try to be contemplative.

Therefore, in order to become well established in this middle state, you should make an effort to meditate. It has been found that it is good to have regular times. The advantage of this is that when the hour of meditation approaches, your mind will quiet down. Such is the nature of habit. As you all know, mind is prone to habits: it doesn't matter what kind of habit it is, it likes to form them. So when your mind forms the habit of meditating at a certain time—at first through compulsion, it is true—you find the moment that hour comes, your mind quiets down; you don't have to make any effort; the mind becomes more and more easily meditative. Afterwards, you find that in addition to these accustomed hours, whenever the opportunity comes you feel like closing your eyes and diving deep within. You begin to feel the consciousness of

God within you, and you try to be contemplative about it. You like to do it.

As you proceed along in this way, as you become established in character and in all kinds of virtues, you become purer and purer. A pure person is one whose body and mind do not want to indulge in anything except God. In Chaitanya's "Eight Ślokas of Instruction" it is said, "Lord, I do not want the approbation of people. I do not want wealth. I do not want beautiful women. I do not want poetry. I only seek You in every life. Every time that I am born on earth may I feel a reasonless, causeless devotion at Your feet. That is my prayer." That state comes naturally.

Out of that attitude rise two extraordinary conditions of mind which are the means as well as the ends of spiritual attainment: *viveka* and *vairāgya*. We should consciously practise them. *Viveka* means discrimination, and *vairāgya* means dispassion or renunciation. Of course, we all have discrimination; the very common person discriminates in this way: "Is it in my interest or is it not? What will it give me?" If he gets something out of it, he will pay attention to it; if he doesn't get anything, or if he finds it dangerous, why should he bother about it? The more cultured person asks: "Is it right or is it wrong? Is it moral or is it immoral?" Then afterwards the sense of discrimination becomes concerned with the real and the unreal. *Real* means that which is lasting, permanent; *unreal* means that which is impermanent. When you come right down to it, you find that all worldly things are unreal and all spiritual things are real. Or if you want to pinpoint it still further, then you say Spirit is real, Atman is real, Brahman is real; the world is unreal, the body, the mind—these

are false or unreal. You discriminate this way in your life. You say, "I shall give myself only to the real."

I have often mentioned that you cannot define truth unless you start with the idea that truth has to be permanent. If you say that is a dogmatic approach, let me remind you that those who find truth always do so in terms of eternity. We students of philosophy who want to define truth cannot disregard those who have actually found it; we have to follow in the wake of their procedure. However, really spiritual people do not have to be convinced that the impermanent is unreal. Even if they doubt that there is a permanent reality, they still have a keen sense of what is impermanent and will have nothing to do with it. A Buddhist, for instance, will contend that everything is an aggregation of sense forms; there is no substance to anything. You may say, "Well, if that is all there is, then Buddhists should embrace those empty aggregates of sensation." But they don't. That's where Buddhists differ from modern sceptics. Modern sceptics are jellyfish, talkative jellyfish. Nothing is in them. They will prove that everything is nothing and then run after all those things with might and main. What kind of creatures are these, we don't know! When Buddha realized that this world is nothing, insubstantial, he would not have anything to do with it, and thereby he found what is called *nirvāna*. You see, spiritually minded people always have that discrimination. Even if they don't feel there is God, they will not touch the world.

When you have developed this *viveka* within yourself, you find that in thinking about a person you will

at once go to that which is permanent in him or her. You won't get excited because the person has done such and so; that's not the permanent thing. If a person insults you, he insults the impermanent in you; so why should you get excited about it? A friend of mine once said to me, and I have always remembered it, "If people criticize me or abuse me, I ask myself whether he has told the truth about me or not. If he has told the truth, then I am grateful to him, he is a friend. And if he has not told the truth, then it has nothing to do with *me*; so why should I get excited?" I thought, that is right. Who is this being that is insulted? It is not the real I, not the real person. If he finds satisfaction in abusing this body and mind—let him. I am glad; let him have a moment's happiness. In other words, nothing that is impermanent or that proceeds from the impermanent can touch me anymore. My friends, as you get even a little established in this, a new vision comes to you.

There is a legend that a swan will drink the milk from a bowl of milk and water, leaving the water behind. Once Sri Ramakrishna said, "The swan has an acid in its mouth and when he drinks this mixture, the milk becomes converted into curd; he takes that and throws the water out. This acid is *viveka*, discrimination." When this *viveka* becomes alert within us, then whenever anything comes before us, at once a separation takes place in our vision. Just as when you don't have to have a special argument to see that a person's clothes are not a part of his body, in the same way, you *see* the real person—the Self or Spirit—as separate from his body and mind. You actually see this distinction. This is why I said a new vision comes; your ordinary vision is transformed.

Of course, as you can well understand, the net result of this is dispassion. Your mind turns away from things that are impermanent. Who would care for anything which will last only a few moments when there is something infinitely more wonderful and eternal just there? Once Sri Ramakrishna asked one of his disciples, "Tell me, what is dispassion?" The disciple answered, "The mind turning away from worldly, impermanent things." Sri Ramakrishna said, "Yes, but you will find that dispassion always has two sides. The mind turns away from the impermanent and becomes attached to the permanent."

Now then, if this discrimination and dispassion have grown in a person, then what does he do? Being attached to the Spirit or to God, or to his real nature, according to the path he follows, he knows that that is the only reality, and he becomes more and more absorbed in it. So, as I said, he becomes more and more meditative. I think it is clear enough that I have, as it were, divided this advanced state into two parts or stages. The last stage belongs to the people I referred to in the beginning—those who take to a silent life. There are practices—profound forms of meditation, which are meant for those very advanced people. Sri Ramakrishna taught all these things to Swami Vivekananda. Once the Swami said in relation to the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, "Of course, these are his preliminary teachings; these are not the teachings his close disciples heard from him. We learned exalted practices from him." I may tell you that not all the close disciples heard those exalted practices from Sri Ramakrishna—not even all of *them*. And of course, as I said, we are not concerned with such practices here.

So let me dwell further on the first half of the advanced state. In this stage there has come a unification of being. You see, we are ruined because we are scattered; our mind and senses go in infinite directions. Our heart goes in one direction today, another direction tomorrow. Everything remains on the surface, and our being never comes together. When it does come together, it becomes a very powerful thing. If you could dig a ditch in marshy land and make all the scattered trickles of water flow in that ditch, you would find that they make a very good-sized stream, which flows swiftly and gradually deepens the channel. But until then, the water created a kind of marsh; it was itself stagnant; it had a bad odour; you could not drink it; you could not go into it. But now the land is dry, and beautiful things are growing on it, and the water itself is flowing clear and pure. In the same way, all the energies of our being have been going in infinite directions, and we are altogether a mess. But when unification takes place, then the real fun of spiritual life begins.

What is that unification? In that state the senses have literally withdrawn from their posts. It has been said, therefore, that one should deliberately practise control of the senses: practise sitting calmly, quietly, not listening to all kinds of noise; while walking along a street practise not looking this way and that way. Why do you want to see things? What is there to see? There is only a conglomeration of different kinds of people, same shops, same residences—same things everywhere that you have always known. Actually, it is a compulsion to look around; it is our nature to be drawn by outside things; our senses have become enslaved to them. So learn to walk looking down; it is a

wonderful practice to walk like that when you can. Senses are thereby brought under control. Or sit quietly; why do you have to listen to the noise going on outside: Is there any reason for it? You may say, "It is unscientific to expect that noise will not be heard by me." Well, let science take care of itself; *you take care of yourself*: withdraw your senses.

As you know, the senses have an inner centre and an external counterpart. The external organs are the *seats* of the senses, but the senses themselves are made up, you might say, partly of mind and partly of vital energy; they are in the outer limits of the mind, as it were. They have become located in certain areas in the brain and are tied up with nerve endings. Your sense of vision, for example, has become mixed up with the optic nerves, and if your eyes are open you are bound to see things and bound to be aware of them. Now, when you learn to withdraw the senses, you at first feel tugs in your optical nerves; slight shooting pains, little light pains come, as if something is trying to be detached from the optical nerves. You will begin to feel the same thing with the senses of action—for example, you will feel consciousness moving away from your fingers. When your mind is centered within, you will find the senses, whether of action or perception, gradually moving away from the outward posts they command. Through continual practise you find that the senses have been released and a unification of consciousness takes place thereby.

Sometimes I think this practice is not so much control of the mind as control of the senses. Probably you would say, "Yes, but control of the senses requires control of thought." True, but what are our thoughts anyhow? Ninety-nine percent of our thoughts are products of sense

perception: memories of sense perception, imaginings about them, images and fancies following from them, thoughts about them, regrets about them, anger about them, cupidity about them, attachment, detachment, likes and dislikes, hunger for them, rejection of them—all the things that take place in our thought have followed from our sense experience. And when our senses are withdrawn from their positions, an odd thing happens: sense objects lose their value in our estimation. You see, *we* contribute glamour to sense objects. You now think the glamour is existing outside, but when you have brought the senses under control, you find it was contributed by *you*; outside of you there was not much at all. That is why sense objects lose their hold over you—they lose their glamour.

When you bring the senses under control, you thereby bring a great many of your thoughts under control. Many of them become nullified; they no longer have any value for you; therefore they do not agitate your mind. The mind becomes calm, inactive. There is the inactivity of sleep; but there is this other quietness and inactivity of the mind in which the mind is serene and highly awake—highly awake. You become aware of a higher reality reflected in that mind and your idea of yourself becomes changed.

Our history tears us to pieces; the way we have been brought up, the things we have experienced, the relationships we have formed—all those things tear us into pieces. Some of them are happy, others are unhappy; but they all pertain to the body and the mind. It is the body that was born, and thereby the fiction of a father and a mother is built up. It is in relation to the body and the mind that we

did good things and bad things, that we lost and that we gained. When we have withdrawn from those things, that history drops to the ground as meaningless. Just as a person discards his dream experience as soon as he wakes up, in the same way, when the soul reaches that higher state, it at once rejects the history of its ignorant life. What does it matter whether you did wrong things in that state of ignorance or right things? What does it matter when and where you were born, whether you suffered or didn't? All of that seems as though it were related to the story of another person; they have no relationship with you. You have begun to perceive yourself as Spirit—a luminous entity, perfect and pure. That is the net result of this unification of your being.

If you are devotionally inclined, you will say within yourself, "Lord, You are my eternal Master, and I am Your eternal servant. Everything that I am is Thine." If you have to be aware of anything except the Lord, you will feel as if life is being choked out of you. You will say, "Lord, You are my Friend from eternity to eternity. Oh miserable creature that I am that I forgot You! Forgive me that I have forgotten You for so long!" These are the cries that rise from the soul.

And it is these cries that make the soul plunge deeper and deeper into spiritual practices, so that even the fine mind can be removed. Often we speak of the lower mind and the higher mind; we are now on the fringe of the higher mind, but the higher mind is still mind, and in that, also, there are phases, the lower of which are not pure and transparent enough. The light of God percolates through them but becomes, as it were, a little dimmed. We want to get rid of this dimming, or this impurity, and so we push

ourselves forward. But that is the second, or the last, stage of advanced practice.

## 3

Let us review what you have to do in the early advanced stage. You have become established in the preliminary stages; you find that your mind now likes God and wants to become more and more absorbed in Him; you have found a proper teacher, and you have started to follow his instructions. You now find there is a regime: the regulation of food and activity is called for. It is said that when you are becoming established in this state, it would be spiritually helpful if you could reduce your physical activity. On the other hand, if your mind has not been alert, and you have not learned to withdraw your senses voluntarily (and there are signs by which a person who knows those things will be able to tell by looking at you whether you have learned it or not), if you have not achieved this and have just become inactive, then your mind will betray you; you will have all kinds of troubles. In that case, activity is called for. But if you are able to direct your energy within, then that is a very wonderful condition, very wonderful. It is said that one should not be too active intellectually either. If you have reached that desirable stage and do not intellectualize too much and are not physically active, then you will be able to move your whole energy towards the spiritual objective, and you will make good progress.

So you regulate those things, and you have a routine. As I told you in my previous lecture you have to have a

schedule. You make sure that you are dedicating yourself to God, that every hour is an hour of spiritual practice. Sometimes you worship—ritualistic worship can become a form of spiritual contemplation; sometimes you sing—singing the praise of God is looked upon as one of the major spiritual practices. Close your doors and windows and sing; no one will bother you. Study of the scriptures is also a spiritual practice. Not, of course, intellectual or controversial study, but contemplative study. You want to absorb what is in the scriptures, and that becomes a sort of meditation. As a matter of fact, there are some who make scriptural study a major spiritual practice. Then there is meditation. Meditation, as you know, is the complete withdrawal of your attention from everything else and the concentration of it on spiritual objects: maybe on a form of God or of a Saviour, or on a symbol. Your teacher will tell you which form is suitable for you. Then there is the practice of *japa*, the repetition of a *mantra*. And if you need relaxation, then grow flowers for the Lord; do things for Him. Or serve others—that's a very fruitful practice. Find others who need service and serve them as if you were doing it unto the Lord.

You see, already you have become a little special in the mode of your living. People will recognize it. Of course, you try to hide it as far as you can, but I am afraid you cannot hide it altogether. You cannot go with the same friends or indulge in the same enjoyments however innocent they had seemed. Your friends find that you are no longer any fun. At first they get very much annoyed with you—spoilsport! Actually, they get angry with you; they ridicule you and so on. If you still persist, they just

throw you away; they don't want a friend who is no source of joy to them. But then, of course, you make other friends. You find that there are devotees where you live, or maybe you go to a place where there are lots of devotees. You may go to a holy place: you feel a great desire to live in a place where the Lord Himself lived, or lives, where there is a great temple or church where the Lord is worshipped and very much manifest.

More and more, more and more you withdraw from an ordinary kind of life. Then a time comes when you say, "No, I don't have to do anything." Yes, at the end of this stage you feel a desire for silence and solitude. You give up everything; you just search for Him and search for Him. You may ask me here, "What about *karma yogins*?" In their case the nature of their work changes. Their approach to people has already changed, and even if they do outer, external work, they do it with a consciousness of a profound depth. If they believe in God, they think, "This is God. God is already before me. 'Thousands are His feet, thousands are His hands, thousands His heads, thousands His eyes; and He covers this whole universe with His visible form.'" But even *karma yogins*, when their work is over, like to close their eyes and plunge into that deep abyss where the eternal truth shines.

That's a most wonderful state, and to reach that state, or even to find a person who has reached it, is a profound blessing.

## THE WORLD OF INFINITE LIGHT

### 1

All of us at one time or another have thought of a world of infinite light and also of infinite joy; ordinarily we call it heaven. There is not a single religion which has not taught of the existence of heaven. True, in modern times many people have lost faith in an afterlife and therefore in heaven and its opposite, hell. Many think that our present existence is a fortuitous combination of those unthinkable things called atoms. By some chance, or mischance, these atoms combine in a certain way and spring to life, and having sprung to life they behave in a rather peculiar fashion on the stage made up of time and space. Scientists have been seeking some method in their crazy behaviour, but they have not yet fully succeeded. They are pretty sure, however, that when these living particles or cells disintegrate, the sense of identity, the sense of one existence which we individuals severally feel, is terminated—and there, so far as the individual is concerned, is the end of the story.

Of course, religions don't say that. Religions say that this identity, or individuality, survives physical dissolution. This physical reality is admitted to be made up of many particles, but after it has dissolved, the true person, the true individual is left behind. Religions have called that person the soul. If some of you are thinking here of Buddhism, which does not admit the existence of a soul, I should remind you that Buddhists *do* admit the existence of souls, only they explain them differently. They call them momentary, but they say that the individual souls feel there is a continuity; they have a sense of identity. Buddhists go so far as to say that there is such a thing as reincarnation. In other words, Buddhism grants that we feel a sense of continuity and identity not merely in this life but also in many lives to come. In this respect, they are only affirming the same thing that theists and positivists in religion affirm—that there is such a thing as a soul which defies death: body comes, body goes, but the soul continues.

Nor do religions stop with this affirmation of the soul; they are also very optimistic in forecasting its future. Although some religions take the soul through many changes—some fortunate, others unfortunate—the end is generally beautiful. For example, the popular belief in some parts of India is that the soul has passed through eight million births before it reaches this human birth! And how many incarnations the soul will have to pass through in this human existence, there is no knowing. So they drag the soul through all kinds of happy and unhappy experiences. Nevertheless, all Hindu beliefs are quite clear in stating that the soul will eventually realize its union, sometimes even its identity, with God.

Such a consummation is the most beautiful, most perfect, most blessed thing to be conceived of, because by definition God Himself is full of infinite blessedness. When Hindu philosophers and religious teachers speak of God in the briefest terms possible, they call Him *sat-cit-ānanda*—that is to say, infinite Being, infinite Consciousness, and infinite Joy. He has been spoken of as infinitely merciful, infinitely compassionate, infinitely loving. His beauty knows no end. He is of course eternal and infinite, and human imagination cannot go beyond this—or if someone is capable of going beyond such a description, even *that* description would be true of God. Thus when the soul realizes its identity or unity with God, it has reached the most desirable, most blessed goal. Not the slightest trace of darkness or sorrow is there; there is only infinite peace. If some of you are afraid that uninterrupted peace will become boring, I assure you that that is one kind of continuous thing which would not bore you. It does not contain any possibility of bringing about a satiety of itself: infinite peace is infinitely enjoyed.

Now, in describing this ultimate goal, religions have made two different approaches to it: one is subjective, the other is objective. When they speak of it objectively, they say that the soul goes to live in eternal fellowship with God in His heaven. Those who cannot think any better, think of this heaven in the same way as they think of other objective realities. Just as we think of planets and stars as being located in space, they also think that heaven is located somewhere. Usually it is thought that it is above this earth; you find that some people have a tendency of raising their eyes when they pray. Of course, that's a crude way of thinking.

In Hinduism, and also in Buddhism, they have conceived of different kinds of objective heavens, which are, in a sense, better worlds than ours; they are made up of finer material and are more enjoyable from the standpoint of the senses and this so-called normal mind. It has to be admitted that to most people this miserable world doesn't bring much happiness. You can think of worlds which could be somewhat better, where people can live a comfortable life and enjoy things which they cannot enjoy here. Hindus seriously believe that there are such worlds. It is not that they think of heavens as allegories of a higher existence. No, they think that *objectively*, just as we perceive this earth objectively, there are those good places—and also for that matter, bad places. But long, long ago, even several thousand years ago in the days of the Vedas, they came to the conclusion that one should not make too much of heavens or of hells. Why? Because they found that both these places come to an end.

Well, we shall forget the unpleasant places, but in regard to the pleasant places, it is of course a very serious disadvantage that they come to an end. They come to an end in two ways: first, we ourselves, the souls that go to them, are later removed from them. Just as death takes us out of our earthly existence, there comes a natural change which takes us out of these heavenly worlds. Second, there comes a termination of the heavens themselves. It is said that the creative process is like the movement of waves: just as water rises and falls in waves, so things come and go. From the unmanifest they come to the manifest, and the same force will take them back into the unmanifest. In the unmanifest all things, as it were, will be covered over

by intense darkness. Or, to put it more correctly, just as plants bear fruit and die and become unmanifest in seeds, which bide their time in the earth until the proper season, so all things in this universe go into the unmanifest. There is a period of manifestation which we call creation, and there is an equal period of dissolution balancing this creation, when everything lies hidden in subtle form. Heavens also, and all the forms and things that are in heaven, enter into the state of dissolution. All become unmanifest, and if you happen to be in some heaven at that time, you, too, will be reduced to seed form, and you will remain in that condition, unknowing, like a person asleep. So in the Hindu conception, heavens come to an end in this objective way.

Then the Hindus found another thing: there is something in man which is seeking achievement, accomplishment. However hard this accomplishment might be, whatever severe struggle it might entail, we want it. True, we like to play; we want enjoyment for enjoyment's sake. Of course, if you have some fun, your body and mind behave better, but you do not play because of these ultimate benefits; you play because you *like* to play. It must be admitted, however, that all play and no work is really terrible; after some time you cannot bear it. One can stand continuous work better than one can stand continuous play. It may truly be said, therefore, that primarily we want accomplishment, and then we want a little enjoyment to season it—no more than that. But the kind of heaven I have been speaking of is not the world of accomplishment; there you only enjoy, and very soon you get tired of it. No doubt this is a good reason for thinking, as Hindus and Buddhists

do, that human beings are superior to the gods. In Buddhism, for instance, you find that the gods came and rendered homage to Buddha when he attained to *nirvāna*. The gods themselves openly acknowledge their inferiority to a human being who has attained to illumination. And rightly so. The men and women who have gone to heaven and have found that heavenly joys do not give knowledge, that no accomplishment is there, don't care about it anymore. They want to find something which not only will be of infinite joy, but will also embody infinite accomplishment; they want to attain something beyond which there is nothing more to be attained.

*Yam labdhvā cāparam lābham manyate nādhikam tataḥ*<sup>1</sup> —  
 “That, having attained which one knows there is nothing superior to be attained.” That is how the Hindus speak of this accomplishment; it is not the attainment of mere knowledge, because merely to know is not to possess. Higher knowledge is also possession; it is a knowledge through oneness with the thing known. Spiritual knowledge is both knowledge and possession of the highest reality. People who have attained to illumination have found that reality, and that, of course, is the highest attainment.

Now, of course, my purpose is not only to speak of heaven; my purpose is to impress upon you the existence of a world of infinite light. I have used the word *world*, but you should not take it literally. As I mentioned earlier, the ultimate goal can be approached from two different points of view: subjective and objective. And a point is reached

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavad Gītā*, 6.22.

where subjective and objective blend into each other; what remains is neither subjective nor objective but transcendental perception. Since it is not objective, there cannot be a world in our sense of the word; and since it is not subjective, we cannot speak of it only as a state of mind. In fact, when we speak of the subjective in the sense of a state of mind, we imply the objective. If I speak of subjective conditions, I imply that I have a body and a mind: these things are rising inside my mind and not outside where there is another body and supposedly another mind. Our idea of subjective always implies our idea of the objective. But neither "outside" nor "inside" can be true of that of which I am speaking; it is transcendental. I shall tell you how it is so.

## 2

In their theory of creation, Vedantins speak of five original principles, which they call ether, sky, air, fire, water, and earth. They say these five principles come from that which is the very origin of the creative impulse and creative force, which they call *māyā*, or *avidyā*, or *ajñānam*. *Ajñānam* means ignorance; *avidyā* means nescience. Of course, it is rather an odd thing to say that the creation of this universe originates in ignorance. But it is true; it is a negation, like a shadow.

You know in Bengal we sometimes have terribly bright moonlight, terrible moonlight; it almost hurts. There is a little frightening quality about it. Anyhow, one winter or early spring night I was walking along a street of our small town. A bare tree was standing there, and the shadow of

its branches was cast on the street. I forgot that it was moonlight, and instinctively I looked at this shadow as a positive thing; it was so beautiful. But you know what it was: it was the absence of moonlight; it was not a thing in itself; it was really a negation. Hindus believe that the whole universe, teeming with residents in all its different parts—not merely this visible universe, but also the part which is invisible to our senses—they believe this whole creation is the negation of infinite Divinity. Because we have forgotten to see God, we see the world.

Generally, unthinking people say God created the world. But they never make any inquiry into what "God created the world" means. Philosophically speaking, you cannot say that God created the world out of nothing and that it then became something. If the cause is nothing, the effect is also nothing. If God made this world out of nothing, then nothing it must be; it could not have any reality or substance. Moreover, those who do not think these things out, who think that God created the world out of nothing, that it became something and is existing side by side with God, do not consider that if you affirm the real existence of anything besides God, you thereby limit God. You cannot put something side by side with God. So Vedantins say that this creation is not real; it is a negation. God alone is real. As long as we suffer from this terrible tendency of not seeing God, not recognizing God, we shall see this universe. The moment we suddenly become willing to see God, this world will just vanish into nothingness. Therefore we do not say that when creation takes place God is limited by it. Since actually speaking, this universe is negation, God cannot be limited by it at all. Even while we mistakenly

think that all these things are positive—even then, God is interpenetrating everything here. That should not be forgotten in thinking about creation.

Now we say that out of this original ignorance—*ajñānam* or *avidyā*—the five principles come serially. The first evolute is ether or sky; out of ether comes air; out of air comes fire; out of fire, water; and out of water, earth. Although our philosophers use these familiar terms, they do not use them in the familiar sense. In our present state we can never perceive these original principles or elements by themselves. There is a stage of inner growth in which one *can* perceive them, but not in this state. The earth, air, fire, and so on that *we* see are composite things; the five original principles become mixed up together, they become compounded, and out of that mixture the gross elements evolve. But I needn't go into those details here.

Now, this universe which we perceive as real, has a preponderance of the earth element. You might call it the earthly world, where everything is made up of "earth". *Earth* here stands symbolically for gross matter, which is the opposite of consciousness and mind. It has an outside existence. That is to say, it has the uttermost objectivity you can now think of. That is the earthly existence, and its characteristic is that everything here seems to exclude everything else. I am excluded by you, and you are all excluded by me. If one thing is in one space, nothing else can be in that space. This is objectivity in its crudest form.

You can well understand that if exclusiveness is the characteristic of earthly existence, then knowledge becomes awfully limited. A knowledge of things which are excluded by me, which are outside of me by their very existence,

must be very rudimentary and absolutely uncertain. It could not be much of a knowledge. Therefore there is a determined effort to know, to relate oneself to others. You see, we who are really God, have not been deprived of our true nature or true Self. It has become buried deep by our preoccupation with earthly things, but it is still trying to assert itself. Out of the continuous self-assertion of the spiritual being which we are, which everybody is, and which, as I said, is interpenetrating everything, there is a ceaseless effort to understand things rightly, to gain more knowledge, to become unified. That is why we want to know one another and to be related to one another; we want to find everything to be all peace and all joy. There is a continual affirmation of the buried truth of our whole being. But this earthly existence, although it cannot altogether kill the sense of wanting to know the truth, succeeds in making that knowledge exceedingly difficult.

It is not that true knowledge cannot be had on this earth. It can be had. But he who would have this knowledge must get away from this earthly existence. How does he do it? If any individual can get away from *his* or *her* part of earthly existence, he can transcend it as a whole. For instance, my portion of earthly existence is represented by my physical body. If *I* can transcend this physical existence of mine, if I am not enslaved by the body and by the senses, which subserve the purpose of the body, then I will become free not only of this body but of all earthly existence, and I will be able to go to a higher existence.

From an objective standpoint, Vedantins say there is a higher order of reality of which the characteristic material is the water principle—not the water we know, which is

part of the earthly existence. Why, then, do they not invent some other term for it? Because this familiar term makes that principle easier for us to understand. Water is not so rigid as the earth; one body of water can easily blend into another body of water. It is not easy to make one piece of earth blend with another piece of earth unless you pour water into it. Moreover, water is translucent, so it does not obstruct knowledge so much; water also can reflect more light than earth. In these ways water is an improvement upon the earth—that much we can say of this water principle. We who are earthbound and whose thinking process itself is therefore bound by the consciousness of the earth principle cannot think of the water principle as it is in itself. Even if we have transcended the earth principle, human language is incapable of describing the water principle. Well, whatever that might be, you will agree from what I have said that that higher world must be made up of much finer material. Knowledge is not so obstructed; there is not so much discord and rigid exclusion of one thing by another; and things are altogether finer and more luminous than here. They generally have spoken of that higher world as the world of the fathers. But let us not stop with that.

A still finer world is the world of the gods, the *devas*. *Deva* literally means “those who shine.” Naturally they would shine, because that world is made up of the fire principle, and everybody knows that fire shines. Whether it *burns* there, we don’t know. But, after all, fire cannot burn fire; so anything that exists in that world cannot burn anything else. The *devas*, therefore, are all right in

themselves, though they are probably not so safe for us earthly creatures.

Now, this earthly world is called *bhūrloka*; then comes *bhūvarloka*, the world of the fathers, of the departed souls; then *swaḥloka*, the world of the gods, or *devas*. Then they speak of *maharloka*, the world of the great, which is also made of the fire principle. It is admitted that all these worlds, except the earth, which is considered to have a character of its own, are more or less unspiritual if you look at them objectively. These heavenly worlds are finer than the earth; there are finer enjoyments there and finer people; but there you cannot have spiritual knowledge. Therefore, those who have in this life attained to spiritual illumination to a certain extent don't stop even at *maharloka*, the world of the great. After they die here, they go through all these intervening worlds and find their stability in what is called the world of man—*janarloka*. There for the first time man comes into his own; he begins to know what he really is. Although even *janarloka* is made up of the principle of fire, that is where the spiritual world begins.

Then come other worlds. There is *tapoloka*, the world of meditation; that is the real spiritual world. Then comes a still higher world, called *brahmaloka*—the world of (Saguna) Brahman. *Tapoloka* is made of the principle of air. We all know that air is so clear and transparent that it does not obstruct our vision. That gives us a clue to that world. There our knowledge is unimpeded and unobstructed. We know things rightly, and also there is no exclusion of one by another; there is a sense of unity with all. That is what spirituality gives us. Those who have become very highly advanced in this life have become so full of truth that they

do not see this untruth. The clue to such advancement is that they like to be meditative—not necessarily to sit in a posture with closed eyes and so on; rather, their heart is always on God. Wherever they look, the thought of God comes to them, because everywhere the reality is God. They become free of the tendency to negate the existence of God. When they look at a person they do not first of all perceive his body or his mind; they perceive the higher mind, which is always perfect in everyone. They also have a definite perception of the true person, which is Spirit, which is neither man nor woman, which hasn't any form.

They actually *see* the Spirit. You must admit that if the true person is Spirit, not to see him as such is a sort of disease. Not to see things as they really are is sickness. Man is Spirit! And all the time you have seen him as a bundle of flesh. Your vision has stopped with the skin of the person. You are not even able to see his mind; you are caught by his bodily appearance. We do not see things rightly at all. Spirit we see as a bundle of flesh. What an odd thing to happen! But one who has gained an advanced state of spirituality actually perceives everyone as Spirit. Whether he talks or whether he walks or whether he meditates, he is aware of this one divine existence, one blessed Spirit everywhere, one real Being. There is nothing else; that alone exists. He becomes aware of it, and when he gives up this body, he goes to the world of *tapoloka*.

That world is luminous. You may wonder how it can be luminous, since it is made up of the air principle. Air is not shining; it is transparent. But air does not obstruct the luminosity of shining things, and Spirit, as everybody knows, is luminous; it is all light. One who goes to that

world perceives everyone, every *thing* as luminous Spirit; therefore everywhere it is light. In the lower worlds the form—earth form, water form, fire form—may be shining, but the substance is hidden. You cannot see what is on the other side of a wall of fire: you will see the luminous form, but not the reality. Only when you reach *tapoloka*, where the form is transparent, almost invisible, does the reality, which is Spirit, shine in all its glory.

It is here that you first enter the world of infinite light—and, of course, of infinite joy. And it is said that souls who have attained this degree of illumination may never come back to this world; many will remain in *tapoloka* throughout the rest of this creative period. That is heaven in a divine sense. But even here there is still a *world*; there is still form. Although that form is made up of an airy substance, relativity has not yet been transcended.

So there is a yet higher world—the world of Brahman, *brahmaloka*. It is made up of the ether principle, finer still than air. The word used is *ākāśa*—“sky.” But think of the sky as without colour, without anything in it. It is in that sense they speak of “sky.” Souls who in this earthly life have almost reached the highest illumination go to that world, which is the last of all worlds, and they never come back. After having stayed there, they become Brahman. Even the little relativity that remains melts away, and the soul realizes its destiny—its identity, or at least unity, with God.

### 3

That is the journey of the soul. We think we are fixed in this earthly world for good. In one of the Sanskrit texts

it is said that those who are bound by ignorance think of this world alone; they are not capable of thinking there are other worlds, a continuity of existence. This world is only a passing phase, one of the places through which we are going. Suppose a group of you are travelling, and one among you thinks that every town he stays in overnight is where he is to remain for good. He never thinks that in the morning he will have to go forward. He has lost his memory; he does not know where he is going. Most of us are in that condition. We do not know where we came from; we do not know where we are going. If some of you are saying, "No, it is not that; it is just that we are too enlightened to believe in these fairy stories of heaven and hell and going from the watery world to the fiery world and all that. We are wiser than that!" You are wiser than that? Then how is it that you cannot perceive any of the subtle secrets beyond the body? If you say, "There are no such secrets. The body is all there is to it," I say, "Who is saying that?" *You* are saying it—*you*, the thinker, the knower, the boaster.

Investigate the thinker. Have you the ability of turning your attention upon yourself and studying yourself? We say that true knowledge comes when you investigate the *knower* of things and not the things to be known. That's the great difference between objective knowledge and subjective knowledge. And that is where subjective knowledge is superior to objective knowledge. We spend a great deal of time analysing our bodies and the states of our mind, but we who make these investigations do not make any investigation of ourselves. That's the defect. Investigate your own self first.

It won't do to say, "There is nothing in that." After all, that 'I' seems to be the central thing. If a nice dinner is not prepared for you, you become grumpy and say, "Take it away! I don't like it." The 'I' is important. I may ask you to kneel before the altar in every church and temple. You will say, "Oh, I don't like those religions!" Again, 'I' is the important thing. I am the gloater, I am the boaster, I am the grumpy person, I am the satisfied person. But when it comes to finding truth, you do not want to face that 'I'.

Vedantins say that when a person has grown within himself, he instinctively learns to investigate the knower of things, not the knowable. Knowledge of the knowable, whether it comes through science or philosophy or anything else, belongs to the smaller, undeveloped person. Cows have knowledge of the knowable, dogs have it, human beings have it. But a person has started his higher career when a natural tendency comes to him to know *himself*. Another kind of research, another kind of knowledge comes to him, and another world opens before him.

Whatever the reason for it, it is a fact that we have been reduced to the status of lower creatures by modern tendencies. We see the consequence of it: we have emptied ourselves into the outside. We haven't any depth anymore. Even scholars have no depth; they are never satisfied with themselves alone. Either they have to scribble or they have to type or they have to lecture; they have to organize, they have to talk. They have to be preoccupied with the outside; otherwise they feel so empty within: nothing is there; all gone, emptied out. That's the sign of approaching spiritual death. So I cannot really say that you modern people are

even as wise as a superstitious religious man. But however that may be, I won't accept your claim that you are too enlightened to believe in worlds other than this. Rather, I see a greater truth in the idea that when a person has become free of his preoccupation with the outside, then he learns to look within. And then comes the subjective approach.





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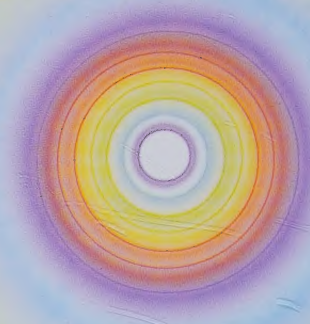
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