

The Stages of the Path

All persons have to pass through the state of bondage, but this period of bondage is not to be looked upon as a meaningless episode in the evolution of life. One has to experience being caged if one is to appreciate freedom. If in the entire span of its life a fish has not come out of the water even once, it has no chance of appreciating the value of water. From its birth till its death it has lived only in water, and it is not in a position to understand what water really means to its being. But if it is taken out of water even for a moment, it longs for water and becomes qualified by that experience to appreciate the importance of water. In the same way, if life were constantly free and manifested no bondage, man would miss the real significance of freedom. To experience spiritual bondage and know intense desire to be free from it are both a preparation for the full enjoyment of the freedom that is to come.

As the fish that is taken out of the water longs to go back in the water, the aspirant who has perceived the goal longs to be united with God. In fact, the longing to go back to the source is present in *each* being from the very time that it is separated from the source by the veil of ignorance; but the being is unconscious of the longing till it, as an aspirant, enters the spiritual path. One can in a sense become accustomed to ignorance, just as a person in a train may get accustomed to the

Bondage adds to value of freedom

Path begins with longing for deeper reality

darkness of a tunnel when the train has been passing through it for some time. Even then there is a definite discomfort and a vague and undefinable sense of restlessness owing to the feeling that *something* is missing. This something is apprehended from the very beginning as being of tremendous significance. In the stages of dense ignorance, this something is often inadvertently identified with the variegated things of this mundane world.

When one's experience of this world is sufficiently mature, however, the repeated disillusionments in life set one on the right track to discover what is missing. From that moment the individual seeks a reality that is deeper than changing forms. This moment might aptly be described as the first initiation of the aspirant. From the moment of initiation into the path, the longing to unite with the source from which he has been separated becomes articulate and intense. Just as the person in the tunnel longs for light all the more intensely after he sees a streak of light coming from the other end, the person who has had a glimpse of the goal longs to hasten toward it with all the speed he can command.

On the spiritual path there are six stations, the seventh station being the terminus, or the goal. Each intermediate station is, in its own way, a kind of imaginative anticipation of the goal. The veil that separates man from God consists of false imagination, and this veil has many folds. Before entering the path the person is shrouded in this veil of manifold imagination, with the result that he cannot even entertain the thought of being other than a separate, enclosed, finite individual. The ego-consciousness has crystallized out of the working of the manifold false imagination; and the conscious longing for union with God is the first shaking of the entire structure of the ego, which has been built during the period of the false working of imagination.

Traversing the spiritual path consists in undoing the results of the false working of imagination, or dropping several folds of the veil, which has created a sense of unassailable separateness and irredeemable isolation. Thus far, the person had clung firmly to the idea of his separate existence and secured it behind the formidable walls of thick ignorance, but from now on he enters into some kind of communication with the larger Reality. The more he communes with Reality, the thinner becomes the veil of ignorance. With the gradual wearing out of

separateness and egoism, he gains an increasing sense of merging in the larger Reality.

The building up of a sense of separateness is a result of flights of imagination. Therefore the breaking through of the self-created sense of separateness and being united with Reality is secured through reversing the false working of imagination.

Gradual reversing of false working of imagination

The act of getting rid of imagination altogether may be compared with the act of awakening from deep sleep. The different stages in the process of ridding oneself of

false imagination might be compared with the dreams that often serve as a bridge between deep sleep and full wakefulness. The process of getting rid of the manifold working of false imagination is gradual and has seven stages.

The shedding of one fold of the veil of imagination is decidedly an advance toward Light and Truth, but it does not amount to becoming one with Reality. It merely means renouncing the more false imagination in favor of the less false imagination. There are different degrees of falseness of imagination corresponding to the degrees of the sense of separateness constituted by ego-consciousness. Each stage in the process of ridding oneself of false imagination is a definite wearing out of the ego. But all intermediate stages on the path, until final realization of the Goal, consist in leaving one flight of imagination for another. They do not amount to cessation of imagination.

These flights of imagination do not bring about any real change in the true being of the Self as it is. What changes is not the Self but its idea of what it is. Suppose in a daydream or fantasy you imagine yourself to be in China while your body is

Intermediate stages on path are creations of imagination

actually in India. When the fantasy comes to an end, you realize that your body is actually not in China but in India. From the subjective point of view, this is like return-

ing from China to India. In the same way, gradual nonidentification with the body and progressive identification with the Oversoul is comparable to the actual traversing of the path, though in fact the different intermediate stages on the path are all equally creations of the play of imagination.

The six ascending stages are thus all within the domain of imagination. However at each stage, breaking down the sense of separate-

ness and discovering a merging in the larger Reality are both so strong and clear that the person often has a pseudo sense of Realization. Just as when a person climbing a mountain comes upon a deep valley and is so fascinated by the sight of it that he forgets the real goal and believes for a time that he has arrived at his goal, the aspirant also mistakes the intermediate stages for the goal itself. But a person who is really in earnest about climbing the mountain realizes after a while that the valley has to be crossed, and the aspirant also realizes sooner or later that the intermediate stage has to be transcended. The pseudo sense of Realization that comes at the intermediate stages is like an individual dreaming that he has awakened from sleep although he is actually still asleep. After becoming awake he realizes that his first feeling of awakening was really a dream.

Each definite stage of advancement represents a state of consciousness, and advancement from one state of consciousness to another proceeds side by side with crossing the inner planes. Thus six intermediate planes and their states of consciousness have to be experienced before reaching the seventh plane, which is the end of the journey and where there is final realization of the God state. A plane is comparable to a railway *station* where a train halts for some time, and the state of consciousness is comparable to the *movements* of the passenger after getting down at the station.

After entering a new plane of consciousness, a person usually takes some time before he can freely function on that plane. As there is a radical change in the total conditions of mental life, the person experiences a sort of paralysis of mental activity known as *samadhi*. When the pilgrim enters a new plane, he merges into the plane before he can experience the state characteristic of that plane. Just as a pilgrim who is tired by the strain of a journey sometimes goes to sleep, consciousness—which has made the effort of ascending to a new plane—goes through a period of lowered mental activity comparable to sleep. However, *samadhi* is fundamentally different from sleep. A person is totally unconscious in sleep; whereas in *samadhi* he is conscious of bliss or light or power, although he is unconscious of his body and surroundings. After a period of comparative stillness, the

mind begins to function on the new plane and experiences a state of consciousness that is utterly different from the state it has left behind.

When the aspirant enters a new plane, he is merged into it; and along with the slowing down of mental activity, he experiences a substantial diminution in the ego-life. This curtailment of the ego-life

is different from the final annihilation of the ego, which takes place at the seventh plane.

Each stage on path a curtailment of ego-life

But like the final annihilation at the seventh plane, the different stages of the curtailment of the ego at the intermediate six planes deserve special mention owing to their relative importance. In the Sufi spiritual tradition, the final annihilation of the ego is described as *Fana-Fillah*. And the earlier samadhi of the six planes of duality have also been recognized as kinds of *fana*, since they also involve a *partial* annihilation of the ego.

Through all these fanas of ascending order there is a continuity of progression toward the final Fana-Fillah, and each has some special characteristic. When the pilgrim arrives at the first plane, he experiences his first fana, or minor annihilation

First three fanas

of the ego. The pilgrim is temporarily lost to his limited individuality and experiences bliss. Many pilgrims thus merged think they have realized God and hence get stuck in the first plane. If the pilgrim keeps himself free from self-delusion or comes to realize that his attainment is really a transitional phase in his journey, he advances further on the spiritual path and arrives at the second plane.

The merging into the second plane is called *fana-e-batili*, or the annihilation of the false. The pilgrim is now absorbed in bliss and infinite light. Some think that they have attained the goal and get stranded in the second plane, but others who keep themselves free from self-delusion march onward and enter the third plane. The merging into the third plane is called *fana-e-zahiri*, or the annihilation of the apparent. Here the pilgrim loses all consciousness of his body and his world for days and experiences infinite power. Since he has no consciousness of the world, he has no occasion for the expression of this power. This is *videh samadhi*, or the state of divine coma. Consciousness is now completely withdrawn from the entire world.

If the pilgrim advances still further, he arrives at the fourth plane. The merging into the fourth plane is called *fana-e-malakuti*, or the

annihilation leading toward freedom. The pilgrim experiences a peculiar state of consciousness at the fourth plane, since he now not only *feels* infinite power but also has plenty of occasion for the *expression* of that power. Further, he not only has occasion for the use of his powers but has a definite inclination to express them. If he falls prey to this temptation, he goes on expressing these powers and gets caught up in the alluring possibilities of the fourth plane. For this reason the fourth plane is one of the most difficult and dangerous to cross. The pilgrim is never spiritually safe, and his reversion is always possible until he has successfully crossed the fourth plane and arrived at the fifth.

The merging into the fifth plane is called *fana-e-jabruti*, or the annihilation of all desires. Here the incessant activity of the lower intellect comes to a standstill. The pilgrim does not think in the ordinary way, and yet he is indirectly a source of many inspiring thoughts. He sees, but not with the physical eyes. Mind speaks with mind, and there is neither worry nor doubt. He is now spiritually safe and beyond the possibility of a downfall; and yet many a pilgrim on this exalted plane finds it difficult to resist the delusion that he has attained Godhood. In his self-delusion he thinks and says, "I am God," and believes himself to have arrived at the end of the spiritual path.

But if he moves on, he perceives his mistake and advances to the sixth plane. The merging into the sixth plane is called *fana-e-mahabubi*, or the annihilation of the self (lover) in the Beloved. Now the pilgrim sees God as directly and as clearly as an ordinary person sees the different things of this world. This continual perception and enjoyment of God does not suffer a break even for an instant. Yet the wayfarer does not become one with God, the Infinite.

If the pilgrim ascends to the seventh plane, he experiences the last merging, which is called *Fana-Fillah*, or the final annihilation of the self in God. Through this merging the pilgrim loses his separate existence and becomes permanently united with God. He is now one with God and experiences himself as being none other than God. This seventh-plane Fana-Fillah is the terminus of the spiritual path, the goal of all

Dangers of fourth plane

Fanas of fifth and sixth planes

Fana-Fillah, or Nirvikalpa, the state of conscious Godhood

search and endeavor. It is the *Nirvikalpa* state, which is characteristic of *conscious* Godhood. It is the only real awakening. The pilgrim has now reached the opposite shore of the vast ocean of imagination, and he realizes that this last Truth is the only Truth and that all the other stages on the path are entirely illusory. He has arrived at the final destination.

Arriving at Self-Knowledge

When the time is ripe, the advancement of a person toward Self-knowledge comes about as naturally as the physical body of a child grows into full-fledged form. The growth of the physical body is worked out by the operation of natural laws, and the progress of the aspirant toward Self-knowledge is worked out by the operation of spiritual laws pertaining to the transformation and emancipation of consciousness. The physical body of a child grows very gradually and almost imperceptibly, and the same is true of the spiritual progress of a person once he has entered the path. The child does not know how its physical body grows; in the same way, the aspirant also is often oblivious of the law by which he makes headway toward the destination of his spiritual progress.

The aspirant is generally conscious of the manner in which he has been responding to the diverse situations in life but rarely conscious of the manner in which he makes progress toward Self-knowledge. Without consciously knowing it, the aspirant is gradually arriving at Self-knowledge by traversing the inner path—through his joys and sorrows, his happiness and suffering, his successes and failures, his efforts and rest, and through his moments of clear perception and harmonized will as well as the moments of confusion and conflict. These are the manifestations of the diverse *sanskaras* that he has brought from the past; and the aspirant forges his way toward Self-knowledge through the tangles of these *sanskaras* like the traveler

threading his way through a wild and thick forest.

Human consciousness might be compared to a flashlight that reveals the existence and the nature of things. The province illuminated by this flashlight is defined by the medium through which it

Scope of consciousness and its working

works, just as a person confined to a boat can wander anywhere on the surface of the water but can have no access to remote places on land or in the air. The actual working of the flashlight of consciousness is determined by the accumulated sanskaras, just as the course of the rivulets flowing down a mountain is determined by the channels created by the natural contours of the mountain.

In the case of an average person, the sphere of life and the stage of action are restricted to the gross world because in him the flashlight of consciousness falls on the physical body and works through it. Being

Average person only conscious of gross world

restricted to the medium of the gross body, he can be conscious of anything within the gross world but is unable to establish contact with subtle or mental realities. The gross sphere thus constitutes the arena of the average individual, and all his activities and thoughts have a tendency to be directed toward the gross objects that are accessible to him. During this time he remains unconscious of the subtle and the mental spheres of existence, since the flashlight of his consciousness cannot be focused through the medium of the subtle or the mental body.

At this stage the soul is conscious of the gross world but is completely ignorant of its own true nature. It identifies itself with the gross body on which the flashlight of consciousness falls, and this

Identification with physical body

naturally becomes the base for all the activities within its range. The soul does not directly know itself through itself but by means of the physical body. And since all the knowledge it can gather through the physical body points to the physical body itself as the center of activities, it knows itself as being the physical body-which in fact is only its instrument. The soul therefore imagines itself to be man or woman, young or old, and takes upon itself the changes and limitations of the body.

After several rounds of lives in the setting given by the gross

world, the impressions connected with the gross world become weak through the long duration of the experience of opposites, like great happiness and intense suffering. The weaken-

Identification with subtle body

ing of the impressions is the beginning of spiritual awakening, which consists in the gradual withdrawal of the flashlight of consciousness from the allurements of the gross world. When this happens the gross impressions become subtle, facilitating and inducing the soul's transference of the base of conscious functioning from the gross body to the subtle body.

Now the flashlight of consciousness falls on the subtle body and works through it as its medium, no longer working through the gross body. Therefore the whole gross world drops from the consciousness of the soul, and it becomes conscious only of the subtle world. The subtle sphere of existence now constitutes the context of its life; and the soul now considers itself to be the subtle body, which becomes and is seen to be the center of all its activities. Even when the soul has thus become subtle-conscious, it remains ignorant of its own true nature, since it cannot know itself directly through itself but only by means of the subtle body.

However, the change of the stage of action from the gross to the subtle sphere of existence is of considerable significance. In the subtle sphere the conventional standards of the gross world are replaced by new standards that are nearer the Truth, and a new mode of life is rendered possible by the dawning of new powers and a release of spiritual energy. Life in the subtle world is only a passing phase in the spiritual journey and is far from being the goal; but out of millions of gross-conscious souls, only a rare one is capable of becoming subtle-conscious.

Impressions connected with the subtle world get worn out in turn through, for instance, some forms of penance or yoga. This facilitates and brings about a further withdrawal of consciousness inwardly,

Identification with mental body

whereby the flashlight of consciousness comes to be focused on the mental body and begins to function through it. The severance of conscious connection with the subtle and gross bodies means that the gross and subtle spheres of existence become completely excluded from the scope of consciousness. The soul is now conscious of the mental world, which affords

deeper possibilities for spiritual understanding and a clearer perception of the ultimate Truth.

In this new setting of the mental sphere, the soul enjoys continuous inspiration, deep insight, and unfailing intuition; and it is in direct contact with spiritual Reality. Although it is in direct contact with God, the soul does not see itself as God, since it cannot know itself directly through itself but only through the medium of the individual mind. It knows itself by means of the individual mind and considers itself to be the individual mind, for it sees the individual mind as being the base and the center of all its activities.

Although the soul is now much closer to God than in the gross or subtle spheres, it is still enclosed in the world of shadow; and it continues to feel separate from God owing to the veil created by the impressions connected with the mental sphere. The flashlight of consciousness is functioning through the limitation of the individual mind and does not therefore yield the knowledge of the soul as it is, in itself. Though the soul has not yet realized itself as being God, its life in the mental sphere of existence constitutes a tremendous advance beyond the stage of the subtle sphere. Out of millions of subtle-conscious souls, only a rare one can establish conscious contact with the mental sphere of existence.

It is possible for an aspirant to rise to the mental sphere of existence through his own unaided efforts, but dropping the mental body amounts to the surrenderance of individual existence. This last and all-important step cannot be taken except through the help of a Perfect Master, who is himself God-realized. Out of millions of souls who are conscious of the mental sphere, only a rare one can withdraw the flashlight of consciousness from the individual mind. Such withdrawal implies the complete vanishing of the last traces of the impressions connected with the mental life of the soul. When the flashlight of consciousness is no longer centered upon any of the three bodies, it serves the purpose of reflecting the true nature of the soul.

The soul now has direct knowledge of itself without being dependent upon any medium, seeing itself not as some finite body but as infinite God and knowing itself to be the only Reality. In this major crisis in the life of the soul, there is a complete severance of connections with all three bodies. Since consciousness of the different

Need for a Master

Direct Self-knowledge

spheres of existence is directly dependent upon the corresponding bodies, the soul is now entirely oblivious of the whole universe. The flashlight of consciousness is no longer focused upon anything foreign or external but is turned upon the soul itself. The soul is now truly Self-conscious and has arrived at Self-knowledge.

The process of arriving at Self-knowledge throughout the three spheres of existence is attended by the acquisition of *false* self-knowledge consisting in identification with the gross or the subtle or the mental body, according to the stage of the process. This is due to the initial purpose of creation, which is to make the soul Self-conscious. The soul cannot have true Self-knowledge except at the end of the spiritual journey, and all the intermediate forms of false self-knowledge are, as it were, temporary substitutes for true Self-knowledge. They are mistakes necessary in the attempt to arrive at true Self-knowledge.

Since the flashlight of consciousness is turned throughout the journey toward the objects of the environment and not upon the soul itself, the soul has a tendency to become so engrossed in these objects that it is almost completely oblivious of its own existence and nature. This danger of utter and unrelieved self-forgetfulness is counter-balanced by the self-affirmation of the soul by means of the three bodies, which happen to be used as the focal points of the flashlight of consciousness. Thus the soul knows itself as its own bodies and knows other souls as their bodies, thereby sustaining a world of duality where there is sex, competition, aggression, jealousy, mutual fear, and self-centered exclusive ambition. Hence self-knowledge of the soul by means of any external sign is a source of untold confusion, complication, and entanglement.

This form of ignorance may be illustrated by means of the famous pumpkin story referred to by the Persian poet Jami in one of his couplets. Once upon a time there was an absentminded man who had no equal in forgetting things, even his own identity. He had an intelligent and trusted friend who wanted to help him to remember himself. This friend attached a pumpkin to his neck and said, "Now listen, old man, one day you might completely lose yourself and not know who you are. Therefore, as a sign, I tie this pumpkin around your neck so that every morning when you wake up you will see the

False self-knowledge a temporary substitute

Pumpkin story

pumpkin and know it is you who are there.”

Every day the absentminded man saw the pumpkin upon waking in the morning and said to himself, “I am not lost!” After some time, when he had become used to self-identification through the pumpkin, the friend asked a stranger to remain with the absentminded man, take the pumpkin from his neck during his sleep, and tie it around his own neck. The stranger did this; and when the absentminded man woke up in the morning, he did not see the pumpkin around his neck. So he said to himself, “I am lost!” Then he saw the pumpkin on the other man’s neck and said to him, “You are me! But then who am I?”

This pumpkin story offers an analogy to the different forms of false self-knowledge growing from identification with one of the bodies. To know oneself as the body is like knowing oneself by means of the pumpkin. The disturbance caused by ceasing to identify with the gross, subtle, or mental body is comparable to the confusion of the absentminded man when he could no longer see the pumpkin around his own neck. The beginnings of a dissolution of the sense of duality are equivalent to the man’s identification of himself as the stranger who wore his pumpkin. Further, if the absentminded man in the story were to learn to know himself through himself independently of any external sign, his self-knowledge would be comparable to the true Self-knowledge of the soul-which, after ceasing to identify with the three bodies, knows itself to be none other than infinite God. Arriving at such Self-knowledge is the very goal of creation.

God-Realization

To arrive at true Self-knowledge is to arrive at God-realization. God-realization is a unique state of consciousness. It is different from all the other states of consciousness because all the other states of consciousness are experienced through the medium of the individual mind. Whereas the state of God-consciousness is in no way dependent upon the individual mind or any other medium. A medium is necessary for knowing something other than one's own Self. For knowing one's own Self no medium is necessary.

In fact, the association of consciousness with the mind is definitely a hindrance rather than a help for the attainment of Realization. The individual mind is the seat of the ego, or the consciousness of being isolated. It creates the limited individuality, which at once feeds on and is fed by the illusions of duality, time, and change. So, in order to know the Self as it is, consciousness has to be completely freed from the limitation of the individual mind. In other words, the individual mind has to disappear, but consciousness has to be retained.

Throughout the past life history of the soul, its consciousness has grown with the individual mind; and all the workings of consciousness have proceeded against the background of the individual mind. Consciousness has therefore come to be firmly embedded in the individual mind and cannot be extricated from this setting into which it has been woven. The result is that if the

**Consciousness and
mind intertwined**

mind is stilled, consciousness also disappears. The intertwining of the individual mind and consciousness is amply illustrated by the tendency to become unconscious when there is any effort to stop mental activity through meditation.

The everyday phenomenon of going to sleep is not essentially different from the lull experienced during meditation, but it is slightly different in its origin. Since the individual mind is continuously confronted by the world of duality, it is involved in ceaseless conflict; and when it is wearied by its unrelieved struggle, it wants to lose its identity as a separate entity and go back to the Infinite. It then recedes from the world of its own creation and experiences a lull, and this lull is also invariably accompanied by the cessation of consciousness.

The quiescence of mental activity in sleep entails the complete submerging of consciousness; but this cessation of mental life and conscious functioning is only temporary because the impressions stored in the mind goad it to renewed activity. After a while the stimuli of the impressions result in stirring the mind and reviving the conscious functioning that is performed through its medium. So the period of sleep is followed by a period of wakefulness; and the period of wakefulness is followed by a period of sleep, according to the law of alternating activity and rest. As long as the latent impressions in the mind are not completely undone, however, there is no final annihilation of the individual mind or emancipation of consciousness. In sleep the mind temporarily forgets its identity, but it does not finally lose its individual existence. When the person awakens, he finds himself subject to his old limitations. There is a resurrection of consciousness, but it is still mind-ridden.

The limited mind is the soil in which the ego is securely rooted, and this ego perpetuates ignorance through the many illusions in which it is caught. The ego prevents manifestation of infinite knowledge, which is already latent in the soul; it is the most formidable obstacle to the attainment of God. A Persian poem says truly, "It is extremely difficult to pierce through the veil of ignorance, for there is a rock on the fire." Just as a flame cannot rise very high if a rock is placed upon it, a desire to know one's own true nature cannot lead to

the Truth as long as the burden of the ego is placed on consciousness.

Success in finding one's Self is rendered impossible by the continuation of the ego, which persists throughout the journey of the soul. In old age, an aching tooth can give untold trouble because it is not easily uprooted, although loose within its socket. In the same way the ego, which might become feeble through love or penance, is yet difficult to eradicate. It persists till the very end. Though it becomes looser as the soul advances on the path, it remains till the last stage, which is the seventh plane of involution of consciousness.

The ego is the center of all human activity. The attempts of the ego to secure its own extinction might be compared to the attempt of a person to stand on his own shoulders. Just as the eye cannot see itself,

the ego is unable to end its own existence.

**Difficulty of
overcoming ego**

All that it does to bring about self-annihilation only goes to add to its own existence. It flourishes on the very efforts directed against

itself. Thus it is unable to vanish altogether through its own desperate activity, although it succeeds in transforming its own nature. The disappearance of the ego is conditioned by the melting away of the limited mind, which is its seat.

The problem of God-realization is the problem of emancipating consciousness from the limitations of the mind. When the individual mind is dissolved, the whole universe relative to the mind vanishes

into nothingness; and consciousness is no longer tied to anything. Consciousness is

**Parallel between sleep
and God-realization**

now unlimited and unclouded by anything and serves the purpose of illumining the

state of infinite Reality. While immersed in the bliss of Realization, the soul is completely oblivious of sights or sounds or objects in the universe. In this respect it is like sound sleep, but there is an infinite difference that distinguishes God-realization from sound sleep.

During sleep the illusion of the universe vanishes, since all consciousness is in abeyance; but there is no conscious experience of God, since this requires the complete dissolution of the ego and the turning of full consciousness toward the ultimate Reality. Occasionally, when the continuity of deep sleep is interrupted for brief intervals, one may have the experience of retaining consciousness without being conscious of anything in particular. There is consciousness, but this consciousness is not of the universe. It is consciousness of *nothing*.

Such experiences parallel those of God-realization, in which consciousness is completely freed from the illusion of the universe and manifests the infinite knowledge that was hitherto hidden by the ego.

In sleep, the individual mind continues to exist, although it has forgotten everything including itself; and the latent impressions in the mind create a veil between the submerged consciousness and infinite

Difference between sleep and God-realization

Reality. Thus during sleep, consciousness is submerged in the shell of the individual mind; but it has not yet been able to escape from that shell. Though the soul has forgotten its separateness from God and has

actually attained unity with Him, it is unconscious of this unity. In God-realization, however, the mind does not merely forget itself but has (with all its impressions) actually lost its identity. The consciousness, which was hitherto associated with the individual mind, is now freed and untrammelled and brought into direct contact and unity with the ultimate Reality. Since there is now no veil between consciousness and the ultimate Reality, consciousness is fused with the Absolute and eternally abides in it as an inseparable aspect, promoting an unending state of infinite knowledge and unlimited bliss.

The manifestation of infinite knowledge and unlimited bliss in consciousness is, however, strictly confined to the soul that has attained God-realization. The infinite Reality in the God-realized soul has explicit knowledge of its own infinity.

God-realization a personal attainment

Such explicit knowledge is not experienced by the unrealized soul, which is still subject to the illusion of the universe. Thus if God-

realization were not a personal attainment of the soul, the entire universe would come to an end as soon as any one soul achieved God-realization. This does not happen because God-realization is a personal state of consciousness belonging to the soul that has transcended the domain of the mind. Other souls continue to remain in bondage, and they can only attain Realization by freeing their consciousness from the burden of the ego and the limitations of the individual mind. Hence the attainment of God-realization has direct significance only for the soul that has emerged out of the time process.

After the attainment of God-realization, the soul discovers that it has always been the infinite Reality that it now knows itself to be, and that its regarding itself as finite during the period of evolution and

spiritual advancement was in fact an illusion. The soul also finds out that the infinite knowledge and bliss it now enjoys have also been latent in the infinite Reality from the very beginning of time, and that they merely became manifest at the moment of Realization. Thus the God-realized person does not actually become something different from what he was before Realization. He remains what he was; and the only difference Realization makes in him is that previously he did not consciously know his own true nature, and now he knows it. He knows that he has never been anything other than what he now knows himself to be, and that all he has been through was but the process of finding his Self.

What was latent in Infinite becomes manifest

The whole process of attaining God-realization is just a game in which the beginning and the end are identical. The attainment of Realization is nevertheless a distinct gain for the soul. In general there are two types of advantages: one consists in getting what one did not previously possess, the other in realizing fully what one really is. God-realization is of the second type.

Two types of advantages

However, this creates an infinite difference between the soul that has attained God-realization and the soul that has not. Though the God-realized soul does not possess anything new, its explicit knowledge of all that it really is, has been, and will ever be, makes God-realization all-important. The soul that is not God-realized experiences itself as being finite and is constantly troubled by the opposites of fleeting joys and sorrows. But the soul that has Realization is lifted out of them and experiences the infinite knowledge and the unlimited bliss of being God-conscious.

In God-realization the soul drops its separateconsciousness and transcends duality in the abiding knowledge of its identity with the infinite Reality. The shackles of limited individuality are broken; the world of shadows is at an end; the curtain of Illusion is forever drawn. The feverishness and the agonizing distress of the pursuits of limited consciousness are replaced by the tranquility

Value of God-realization

and bliss of Truth-consciousness. The restlessness and fury of temporal existence are swallowed up in the peace and stillness of Eternity.

True Discipleship

When an aspirant becomes voluntarily affiliated with a Master, he is said to have become a disciple. But if this affiliation is merely formal, it does not constitute true discipleship. The relationship between disciple and Master is utterly different, for example, from the legal relations that create rights and liabilities through verbal transactions or formal agreements.

Discipleship a vital bond

Discipleship is one of the fundamental features that characterize the life of the advanced aspirant, and it does not come into existence through any artificial procedure. It arises out of the basic laws of spiritual life. It is therefore much more significant than the mundane relations that arise within the context of ordinary social life as a result of incidental associations or temporary contracts. Many of these mundane relations do not enter into the spiritual fabric of the life of the aspirant but remain superficially attached to his being.

Thus it is not of any great consequence whether you purchase a thing from one shopkeeper or another as long as you pay the price for it; and it is immaterial whether you travel by one ship or another so long as you arrive at your destination. Even such transactions are no doubt inwardly determined by sanskaric ties and karmic laws, and therefore are not entirely devoid of spiritual significance. But these relations are in their very nature provisional and superficial, and are in no way comparable to the vital bond of discipleship, which gives

substance and direction to the life of the aspirant.

The relationship between Perfect Master and disciple is an inevitable outcome of intrinsic conditions in the life of the aspirant. It is primarily a relationship between the lover and his divine Beloved.

Love constitutes core of discipleship From the spiritual point of view it is the most important relationship into which a person can enter. The love that constitutes the core of discipleship stands by itself among the different types of love that prevail in ordinary social relations. Mundane love is an interplay between two centers of the God-unconscious; whereas the love implied in discipleship is the love of the God-unconscious for the God-conscious. Everyone is God; but some are unconscious of their divinity, some are partly conscious of their divinity, and a few are fully God-conscious. Those who are unconscious of their divinity can have no idea of the God state; they are only conscious of the body state. In order for them to inherit the God state, they have to love, worship, and be guided by the Master, who is constantly dwelling in the God state.

The love that the aspirant has for the Master is really the response evoked by the greater love the Master has for the aspirant. It is to be placed above all other loves. Love for the Master naturally becomes a central power in the life of the aspirant because he knows the Master to be an embodiment and representation of infinite God. All his thoughts and aspirations therefore come to be woven around the personality of the Master. The Master thus has unquestioned supremacy among the claims recognized by the aspirant; and it is through this supremacy that the Master becomes the focal point for the radiation of spiritual forces – which dispel all darkness, pluck out the sins of the heart, and initiate the aspirant into a life of freedom and Truth-consciousness.

The fundamental requisite for the candidate who would be a true disciple is an unquestioning love for the Master. All the other streams of love ultimately join this great river of love for the Master and disappear in it; this is illustrated by the story of Majnun and Layla. Majnun loved Layla so intensely that every moment of his life he was filled with thoughts about her. He could not eat, drink, or sleep without thinking

All love leads to Master, as in story of Majnun and Layla

of her; and all he wanted was Layla's happiness. He would gladly have seen her married to some other person if he felt it to be in her interest, and he would even have died for her husband if he had thought she would thereby be happy. The utter self-denial and sincerity of his love ultimately led him to his Master. Every second of his life Majnun thought not of himself but of his beloved, and this lifted his love from the physical or intellectual level and made it spiritual. The spiritualization of his love led him to the divine Beloved.

The Master is the divine Beloved; and when the disciple meets his Master, all that he has to do is to love him. For if the disciple loves the Master out of the fullness of his heart, his final union with him is assured. He need not worry about the quality of his love. He should love in spite of his

**Purification through
love and surrender**

weaknesses and not tarry till he can purify his own heart. The Master is the very source of purity, and to set one's heart on the Master is the beginning of self-purification. When the disciple has wholehearted devotion for the Master, he opens himself to the reception of the divine love that the Master pours upon him. All his weaknesses are consumed in this fire of divine love of which he thus becomes the recipient. If the disciple is to be free from all weaknesses and attain incorruptible and infinite purity, he has to dedicate his life to the Master without any reservations or provisions. He must offer his weaknesses as well as his strengths, his vices as well as his virtues. There should be no ifs and buts about his offering. His self-surrender must be so complete as to allow no room in his mind for even a shadow of any secret self-desire.

Complete self-surrender and unquestioning love become possible when the disciple achieves unswerving faith in the Master. Faith in the Master is an indispensable part of true discipleship. Once God is realized there is no question of faith at all,

Value of faith

just as there is no question of faith when a man knows himself to be a man. But till this state of Realization is attained, the faith that the disciple places in the Master is his most reliable guiding light and is comparable to the rudder of a ship. It is not correct to describe faith as being blind, for it is more like sight than like unrelieved ignorance; nonetheless faith is short of direct experience until the aspirant realizes God for himself.

It is not for nothing that all the religions are referred to as "faiths." One of the essentials of the aspirant's life is that he should

have faith. Faith may express itself through diverse forms, but from the psychological point of view they are one and the same thing and cannot be diversely labeled. The only differences in faith are differences of degree. Faith may be strong and vital, or weak and lukewarm. A weak and lukewarm faith does not carry a person further than adherence to rituals and ceremonies; but a strong and vital faith is bound to take the aspirant beyond the external forms of religion, helping him to eschew the husk and get at the kernel of true spiritual life. Faith reaches its natural climax and goal when it comes to rest in one's own Master.

The faith of the disciple must always be securely grounded in his experience of the divinity of the Master. He must not be like a straw carried anywhere by the slightest breeze. He should be like a rock that remains unmoved in the severest of storms.

Story of Kalyan

The story of Kalyan brings out the meaning of a really sound faith in the Master. Kalyan was a disciple of Swami Ramdas Samarth, who was a Perfect Master at the time of Shivaji. A Master loves all disciples alike, but some might be particularly dear to him—just as an individual loves all parts of his body, though the eyes may be more dear to him than his fingers. Swami Ramdas Samarth had many disciples, but his favorite was Kalyan. The other disciples did not quite understand why Kalyan should be dearer to the Master than the others.

One day Swami Ramdas tested the devotion of his disciples. He asked all his disciples to come to him and pretended to be so sick as to be on the point of death. He had placed a mango on the joint of his knee and bound it in a bandage so that it looked like a huge swelling. Swami Ramdas pointed to this swelling and told the disciples that it was a malignant tumor and that there was no chance of his living unless someone sucked the poison from the joint of his knee. At the same time, he made it clear to all that whoever sucked out the poison would die instantaneously. Then he asked whether any disciple was prepared to suck out the poison from the swelling at the cost of his own life. All the disciples hesitated except Kalyan, who arose immediately and began to suck from the swelling. To his surprise Kalyan found sweet mango juice and not poison, and Swami Ramdas praised his unswerving faith and self-denying love. To be willing to die for the happiness of the Beloved is true love. Such implicit faith, unfaltering love, and undivided loyalty as that of Kalyan can come to the disciple

only through the grace of the Master.

Undivided loyalty to the Master does not introduce any narrowness in the sphere of the disciple's life. To serve the Master is to serve one's own Self in every other self. The Master dwells in universal consciousness and wills universal spiritual

Master realized by serving him

well-being. To serve the Master is therefore to participate in his cause, which is to serve all life. While sharing in the work of the

Master, the disciple may be required to be in touch with the world. But though moving in the world in accordance with the work allotted him, he is in inward contact with the Master as infinite Being. Therefore, by sharing in the work of the Master, the disciple comes closer to him and becomes an integral part of his consciousness. Serving the Master is the quickest means of realizing him.

The service that the disciple can offer the Master is not only linked with the universal cause of humanity but is one of the most potent means of bringing the disciple nearer his spiritual goal. When the disciple's service is spontaneous, whole-

Sharing work of Master

hearted, selfless, and unconditional, it brings him more spiritual benefit than can ever

come by any other means. Serving the Master is a joy for the disciple, even when it means an ordeal that tries his body or mind. Service offered under conditions of discomfort or inconvenience is a test of the disciple's devotion. The more trying such service becomes, the more welcome it is for the disciple. And as he voluntarily accepts physical and mental suffering in his devoted service to the Master, he experiences the bliss of spiritual fulfillment.

The sense of undivided and absolute loyalty to the Master is made possible by the right understanding of what the Master is and what he really stands for. If the disciple has an imperfect grasp of the true status and function of the Master, he is

Allegiance to Master

likely to set up a false antithesis between his own higher Self and the Master. As a

consequence of this antithesis, he might create in his mind an artificial and imaginary conflict between the claims of the Master and other claims that seem legitimate. A disciple should be aware from the very beginning that the Master only requires the disciple to realize his own higher Self. In fact, the Master symbolizes this higher Self of the disciple and is none other than this higher Self, which is the same one

Reality in all.

Thus allegiance to the Master is only another form of allegiance to one's higher Self. This does not mean, however, that merely formal allegiance to the higher Self is in any way an adequate substitute for allegiance to the Master. The disciple cannot have a clear perception of his own higher Self until he is God-realized; and often that which comes to him as his duty is really a prompting of some sanskaras interpolating themselves between the higher Self and his field of consciousness. The Master, on the contrary, is one with the higher Self and can make no mistake about right valuation.

The disciple therefore must always test his own promptings by means of the standards or orders given by the Master. In the event of any conflict between the two, he should thoroughly reexamine his own ideas to discover the points wherein they might be short of perfection. Almost always a little reflection is sufficient to perceive the basic harmony between the true dictates of his own higher Self and the requirements of the Master.

If, however, on some rare occasion the disciple is unable to reconcile the two, he may be sure that he has either not properly understood the dictates of his own higher Self or that he has not properly grasped the import of his Master's requirements. In such cases the Master gives latitude to the disciple to follow his own conscience. The Master may sometimes give instructions with the intent of preparing his disciple for a higher mode of life. It is under such circumstances that the disciple finds himself confronted by an apparent and temporary variance between his own inclinations and the Master's instructions. But usually the Master does not give any instructions for which the disciple has not had inward anticipatory preparation.

The Master is supremely impersonal, and always his only concern is to remove the veils between the consciousness of the disciple and his higher Self. Therefore there can never be any real conflict between the allegiance of the disciple to his Master and his allegiance to his own higher Self. Indeed, at the end of his search the disciple discovers that the Master is none other than his own higher Self in another form. The Master in his utter impersonality and unhampered divinity is so complete that he has no desire. In relation to the disciple all he requires is that the

Gases of conflict

Meaning of true discipleship

disciple reconstitute himself in the light of the highest Truth. To become a disciple is to begin to tread the path leading toward the spiritual goal. This is the meaning of true discipleship.

The Ways of the Masters

Masters are absolutely impersonal and universal in their consciousness, but for spiritual purposes they can limit the scope of their work and also allow their manifested personality to become the center of the aspirations of their disciples. They use personal relationships as well-defined channels to pass on their help to those aspirants who become connected with them.

Masters ever ready to help

The Masters are always on the lookout for those who need and deserve their help, and the faintest gleams of spiritual yearnings are not overlooked by them. They foster and promote the advancement of all aspirants in multifarious ways that are unfailingly effective, although they might not necessarily be completely intelligible to others.

The help of a Perfect Master consists in making the spiritual journey of the aspirant sure and safe, as well as in shortening the time he might otherwise take to arrive at the goal. The aspirant may go a long way through independent search, but he is unable to cross the sixth plane without the help of a Master. Even on the interme-

Nature of their help

mediate planes of involution of consciousness, the help of a Master is extremely valuable because he prevents the aspirant from getting stuck on the way and protects him from the pitfalls and dangers with which the spiritual path is beset. Kabir, the Perfect Master, has compared the three stages of the path to the three phases of fire. Just as first there is only smoke and no fire, then there is fire enveloped in smoke, and lastly there is only fire without smoke, so the beginnings of

the path are enveloped in thick ignorance, midway there is confused perception of the goal, and finally there is realization of Truth without the slightest alloy of illusion. Since the path lies through illusions of many kinds, the aspirant is never safe without the guidance of a Master, who knows all the stages of the path and can take him through them.

Before the opening of the inner eye, the mind conceives of the goal as the Infinite; and this conception is based upon some symbolic image of infinity, such as the sky or the ocean, which suggests the idea of vastness. Although such a concept of the

Abode of delusion Infinite is clear and well defined, it has to be superseded by direct perception of the Infinite. The aspirant sees the Self directly when his inner eye of the spirit is opened. When this happens, the mind is dazed by what it sees and is no longer as clear as it was before the opening of this inner eye. Being dazed by the perception of the Self, the mind loses its capacity to think clearly and mistakes the seeing of the Self with its being actually realized. Hence comes the illusion of being at the end of the path when one is still traversing it. In Sufi terms this particular part of the path is known as *muqam-e-afsan*, or the abode of delusion. It is in such difficult phases of the path that the Master can, through his skillful intervention, give a push to the aspirant so that he keeps on going instead of getting caught up on the way.

In fact, there is danger of the aspirant being detained on each one of the inner planes, because each in its own way is very alluring and serves as a trap for the aspirant. The Master either takes the aspirant past these planes or through them without

Contribution of Master unnecessary delay. However, the aspirant has to walk his own way. The contribution of the Master consists in confirming and consolidating the previously acquired intuitions and perceptions of the aspirant, and in precipitating his consciousness into the next stage-which, though unavoidable, is by its nature impossible for the aspirant to anticipate.

The Master uses Maya to take the disciple out of Maya; and as he is himself beyond good and evil, he may often require things that are unacceptable and even shocking to the ordinary good sense of his disciples. The best thing for the disciple to

Implicit faith do is to follow the instructions of the Master with implicit faith, without bringing them to the bar of his limited capacity of judgment. The following famous

instances illustrate this point.

There is the Koranic story of Abraham* being called upon to sacrifice his beloved son Ishmael to the Lord. When Abraham, firm in his resolve and faith, was about to slaughter Ishmael, God intervened and accepted the sacrifice of a ram as ransom for the son.

When Shams-e-Tabriz ordered Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi, his disciple, to fetch wine for him, he unflinchingly complied in order to please and win the grace of his Master. At the time, the Maulana commanded a large following of Muslim divines because of his reputation as a great theologian in the Islamic world-and wine is religiously prohibited (*haram*) to the Muslims. Hence it was a crucial test for the Maulana to carry a jar of wine on his shoulders through the streets, but he did it.

Ghausali Shah was asked by one of his Masters, who lived in a hut by the side of the river Ganges, to fill a vessel with water for drinking-but only from midstream. It was about midnight, and the river Ganges was in heavy flood because of the monsoon. The disciple hesitated at first but finally gathered courage to attempt the impossible, believing in the omniscience of the Master. No sooner had he stepped into the angry waters of the Ganges than he witnessed a wonderful transformation of the scene. Instead of surging waves and floods, the river had turned into a thin stream; and the vessel to be filled almost touched the riverbed. The disciple nearly crossed the river to the opposite bank in search of midstream.

While thus occupied, the Master appeared on the scene and asked him the reason for his delay. When Ghausali Shah explained that the midcurrent could not be located, the Master allowed him to fill the vessel by handfuls and himself helped in the process. The Master then left the disciple on some pretext, asking him to follow immediately after filling the vessel. When Ghausali Shah returned to the hut with the vessel full of water, he was bewildered to learn from other disciples that the Master had never left the hut for a minute during his absence but was talking to them all the while about him.

These stories show how the Masters may use their powers on rare occasions to break down the ego of their disciples or help them further along the path. As a rule the Masters are very sparing in the use of their divine powers, and they never use them unless it is

*See Glossary.

absolutely necessary for spiritual purposes. Ordinarily they secure their purposes through normal, mundane ways. While doing so, they not only exhibit great understanding, a keen sense of humor, unending patience, and consummate tact, but they also take great trouble to help their disciples and adjust themselves in numberless ways to whatever might be entailed by the needs of the situation.

Some of these points are effectively brought out by the story of the great mystic Bahlul. Bahlul wanted to contact certain notables of Persia for reasons of his own. The only way to do this was to go to the prince's party that was attended by these

Story of Bahlul

notables. Unfortunately Bahlul was bald-headed, and in those days no one without hair was allowed to attend a party given by the prince. The prince had lost all his hair, and to see others without hair reminded him of it and prevented him from enjoying the party. Since the prince was very sensitive on this point, no one bald was allowed to come to the party. So when bald Bahlul went to the party in his shabby clothes, he was thrown out. The party lasted for three days, however; and on the second day Bahlul borrowed some fine clothes and a wig, disguised himself, and again went to the party.

During the party no one recognized Bahlul, and in his fine clothes he made a great impression upon all the notables. He made himself so agreeable that even the prince offered him a warm welcome and invited him to sit near him. No sooner was Bahlul seated than he winked at the prince. The prince did not understand the meaning of his winking but vaguely felt that such a gesture from an illustrious man like him must mean something important. Thinking that it immediately required a suitable response, he also winked. Those who were nearby saw this exchange of winking and felt impelled to imitate them. They also winked at each other, and soon the winking spread throughout the crowd so that for five minutes the party saw nothing but winking.

Then Bahlul cried, "Stop! O you wise men. Why do you wink?" And the notables replied, "We are winking because you great men were winking. We only imitate you." Then immediately Bahlul took off his wig and said, "We two are both bald. Imitate us." The notables then went away, and on the third day they all came with shaved heads. Then Bahlul turned to the prince and said, "We two are permanently bald; these men will have to shave their heads daily in order to remain

bald.” Thus through his tactful handling and sense of humor, he secured access to those whom he wanted to help.

The Sadguru takes infinite pains to contact and win over the disciple for spiritual life. Since the progress of the disciple is secured only if his love for the Master is not allowed to dwindle, he takes every

Dealing with failings of disciple

care to remove all obstacles that might be standing in the way of the wholehearted devotion of the disciple. If sometimes he is seen to humor the individual nature of the disciple, it is only to keep those obstacles from creating a serious impediment in his way. Sometimes he might even seem to feed the ego of the disciple, but all this is just allowing full scope to the ignorance of the disciple. It is only a preparation for the final extinguishing of his ego, just as animals to be offered in sacrifice are carefully nurtured before their annihilation. The Master is himself beyond good or evil and is not perturbed by the failings of the disciple. He tolerates them with unflinching patience and infinite capacity to wait, knowing full well that once the disciple gets established on the path these failings will be swiftly washed away.

Once the Master is satisfied that the disciple is firmly established on the path, he is keen to cleanse the mind of the disciple of all blemishes. Often he achieves this task even at the risk of appearing ruthless, just as when a surgeon, completely disregarding the protests of the patient, is active with his knife. Ultimately the disciple cannot fail to see that all such measures are really in his interest. Therefore he is never pushed away from his Master but is drawn closer to him in the very process of the cleansing that might have appeared irksome or painful.

The usual method of the Master, however, is as sweet and agreeable for the disciple as it is effective. The Master is very pleased when the disciple shows any real progress in the spiritual life. By conferring

Help through praise

well-merited praise on the disciple, he confirms in him the spiritual qualities he is in the process of realizing and arouses in him the confidence that will enable him to cope with any situation. The glow of noble emotion, a gesture of self-denial, a heroic sacrifice, or an incident revealing extraordinary patience or love or faith—any one of these is sufficient to make the Master happy and evoke his approbation. The usual method of the Master to encourage the good qualities

in the disciple is plain and unconcealed appreciation of his attainments. The disciple soon begins to value the Master's approval and delights in it more than in anything else. He is ready to resist the greatest of temptations and undergo the most trying ordeals, which would otherwise have seemed impossible to him, if only he knows that this will make the Master happy.

Since the Master is, for the aspirant, a symbol of the supreme Self in all, the problem of true adjustment to the Master appears to him to be the same as realizing his own inner divinity and arriving at true adjustment with all other forms of the supreme Self. Through his allegiance to the Master, the aspirant achieves conscious appreciation of the fundamental unity of all these problems. From the psychological point of view, he is in a position to tackle them not as separate problems but as aspects of one problem. Thus he can arrive at true integration, which is different from a temporary compromise between conflicting claims. In order to help the disciple achieve this difficult task, the Master has to become the nucleus of all the spiritual idealism of the aspirant, because intensive concentration of mental energy is necessary if the aspirant is to break through the many barriers that lie between him and his goal.

The supreme claim of the Master cannot be challenged or limited even by the spontaneous reverence that the disciple is bound to feel for Masters other than the one who has accepted him. All Perfect Masters are *one* in their consciousness, and it is absurd to imagine any grades between them. Though one Master is not greater than another, the disciple must, for his own purposes, place the claim of his own Master over and above the claims of other Masters-until he transcends the domain of duality and realizes the unity of all life. Mental energy would be dissipated unless there arose a supremely imperative claim among the many conflicting claims of life.

Exclusive concentration upon one Master is therefore usually indispensable for the gathering up of the dispersed mental energy of the disciple. In very rare cases, owing to special circumstances, the Masters themselves might decide to share the spiritual work in relation to a particular disciple. There are therefore exceptional cases of disciples who have had to affiliate themselves to two or more Masters.

This is an exception rather than the rule; and where there are more Masters than one, they arrange the distribution of their work so carefully that they do not set up any conflict of claims.

The Nature of the Ego and Its Termination

Part I

The Ego as the Center of Conflict

In the prehuman stage consciousness has experiences, but these experiences are not explicitly brought into relation with a central "I." For example, a dog may get angry, but it does not continue to feel "I am angry." Even in this case we find that the

Origin of ego dog learns through some experiences and thus bases the action of one experience on another; but this action is a result of a semimechanical tension of connected imprints, or *sanskaras*. It is different from the intelligent synthesis of experiences that the development of "I"-consciousness makes possible. The first step in submitting the working of isolated impressions to intelligent regulation consists in bringing them all into relation with the center of consciousness, which appears as the explicit limited ego. The consolidation of ego-consciousness is most clear and defined from the beginning of human consciousness.

Human consciousness would be nothing more than a repository for the accumulated imprints of varied experiences if it did not also contain the principle of ego-centered integration, which expresses itself in the attempt to organize and understand experience. The process of understanding experience implies the capacity to

Formation of ego hold different bits of experiences together as parts of a unity and the

the capacity to evaluate them by their being brought into mutual relationships. The integration of the opposites of experience is a condition of emancipating consciousness from the thralldom of diverse compulsions and repulsions, which tend to dominate consciousness irrespective of valuation. The early attempts to secure such integration are made through the formation of the ego as its base and center.

The ego emerges as an explicit and unflinching accompaniment to all the happenings of mental life in order to fulfill a certain need. The part played by the ego in human life may be compared to the function of ballast in a ship. The ballast in a ship

Ego arises to fulfill need

keeps it from oscillating too much. Without it the ship is likely to be too light and unsteady and is in danger of being over-

turned by the lawless winds and waves. Thus mental energy would be caught up endlessly in the multitudinous mazes of dual experience and would all be wasted and dissipated if there were no provisional nucleus. The ego takes stock of all acquired experience and binds together the active tendencies born of the relatively independent and loose instincts inherited from animal consciousness. The formation of the ego serves the purpose of giving a certain amount of stability to conscious processes and also secures a working equilibrium, which makes for a planned and organized life.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to imagine that the arising of the ego is without any purpose. Though it arises only to vanish in the end, it does temporarily fulfill a need that could not have been ignored in the long journey of the soul. The ego is not

Necessary evil

meant to be a permanent handicap, since it can be transcended and outgrown through

spiritual endeavor. But the phase of ego formation must nevertheless be looked upon as a necessary evil, which has to come into existence for the time being.

The ego thus marks and fulfills a certain necessity in the further progress of consciousness. However, since the ego takes shelter in the false idea of being the body, it is a source of much illusion, which

Ego creates divisions and separation

vitiates experience. It is of the essence of the ego that it should feel separate from the rest of life by contrasting itself with other forms of life. Thus, though inwardly trying to

complete and integrate individual experience, the ego also creates an

artificial division between external and internal life in the very attempt to feel and secure its own existence. This division in the totality of life cannot but have its reverberations in the inner individual life over which the ego presides as a guiding genius.

While always striving to establish unity and integration in experience, the ego can never realize this objective. Though it establishes a certain kind of balance, this balance is only provisional and temporary.

The incompleteness of its attainments is evident from the internal conflict that is never absent as long as experience is being faced from the point of view of the ego. From

Ego becomes source of conflicts

moment to moment the mind of man is passing through a series of conflicts. The minds of great and distinguished persons as well as the minds of common people are seen to be harassed by conflicting desires and tendencies. Sometimes the conflict the mind is faced with is so acute that the person concerned yields to the pressures, and there is either a partial or total derangement of the mind. There is really no vital difference between the normal and the so-called abnormal individual. Both have to face the same problems; but the one can more or less successfully solve his problems, and the other cannot solve them.

The ego attempts to solve its inner conflicts through false valuations and wrong choices. It is characteristic of the ego that it takes all that is unimportant as important and all that is important as unimportant. Thus, although power, fame,

False valuation

wealth, ability, and other worldly attainments and accomplishments are really unimportant, the ego takes delight in these possessions and clings to them as "mine." On the other hand, true spirituality is all-important for the soul, but the ego looks upon it as unimportant.

For example, if a person experiences some bodily or mental discomfort while doing work of spiritual importance, the ego steps in to secure the unimportant bodily or mental comfort, even at the cost of giving up the really important spiritual work. Bodily and mental comfort, as well as other worldly attainments and accomplishments, are often necessary; but they are not therefore important. There is a world of difference between necessity and importance. Many things come to the ego as being necessary, but they are not in themselves important. Spirituality, which comes to the ego as being unnecessary, is really important for the soul. The ego thus represents a deep and

fundamental principle of ignorance, which is exhibited in always preferring the unimportant to the important.

The mind rarely functions harmoniously because it is mostly guided and governed by forces in the subconscious. Few persons take the trouble to attain mastery over these hidden forces that direct the

Conflicts solved through true valuation course of mental life. The elimination of conflict is possible only through conscious control over the forces in the subconscious.

This control can be permanently attained only through the repeated exercise of true valuation in all the cases of conflict presented to the mind.

If the mind is to be freed from conflict, it must always make the right choice and must unfailingly prefer the truly important to the unimportant. The choice has to be both intelligent and firm in all cases

Need for intelligent and firm choices of conflict-important as well as unimportant. It has to be intelligent because only through the pursuit of true and permanent values is it possible to attain a poise that is

not detrimental to the dynamic and creative flow of mental life. An unintelligent choice, if it is firm, may temporarily overcome conflict; but it is bound in the long run to curtail the scope of life or to hamper the fulfillment of the whole personality. Moreover, the conflict will surely reappear in some other form if it has not been intelligently solved. An intelligent solution, on the other hand, requires an insight into true values, which have to be disentangled from false values. The problem of the conflict of desires thus turns out to be the problem of conflicting values, and the solution of mental conflict therefore requires a deep search for the real meaning of life. It is only through wisdom that the mind can be freed from conflict.

Having once known what the right choice is, the next step is to stick to it firmly. Although the competing tendencies in the mind may be quieted by choosing one particular course in preference to other alternatives, they still continue to act as

Fidelity to right choice obstacles in making the choice fully effective and operative. At times there is a

danger of a decision being subverted through the intensification of those competing forces in the subconscious. To avoid defeat, the mind must stick tenaciously to the right values it has perceived. Thus the solution of mental conflict requires not only perception of right values

but also an unswerving fidelity to them.

An intelligent and firm choice, however, has to be repeatedly exercised in *all* matters—small or great. For the ordinary worries of life are not in any way less important than the serious problems with

True values must govern all matters

which the mind is confronted in times of crisis. The roots of mental conflict cannot completely disappear as long as there is only intermittent exercise of intelligent and firm

choice. The life of true values can be spontaneous only when the mind has developed the unbroken habit of choosing the right values. Three-quarters of our life is made up of ordinary things; and though conflict concerning ordinary things may not cause much mental agony, it still leaves in the mind a sense of uneasiness that something is wrong. The conflicts that turn upon ordinary things are rarely even brought to the surface of consciousness. Instead they cast a shadow on one's general feeling about life as if from behind a screen. Such conflicts have to be brought to the surface of consciousness and frankly faced before they can be adequately solved.

The process of bringing conflict to the surface of consciousness should not degenerate, however, into a process of imagining conflict where there is none. The sure sign of a real hidden conflict is the sense

Hidden conflicts

that the whole of one's heart is not in the thought or action that happens to be dominant at the moment. There is a vague feeling

of a narrowing down or a radical restriction of life. On such occasions an attempt should be made to analyze one's mental state through deep introspection, for such analysis brings to light the hidden conflicts concerning the matter.

When the conflicts are thus brought to light it is possible to resolve them through intelligent and firm choices. The most important requirement for the satisfactory resolution of conflict is motive

Longing for ideal as motive power

power or inspiration, which can only come from a burning longing for some comprehensive ideal. Analysis in itself may aid choice, but the choice will remain a barren

and ineffective intellectual preference unless it is vitalized by zeal for some ideal appealing to the deepest and most significant strata of human personality. Modern psychology has done much to reveal the sources of conflict, but it has yet to discover methods of awakening

inspiration or supplying the mind with something that makes life worth living. This indeed is the creative task facing the saviors of humanity.

The establishment of a true ideal is the beginning of right valuation. Right valuation in turn is the undoing of the constructions of the ego, which thrives on false valuation. Any action that expresses the true values of life contributes toward the disintegration of the ego, which is a product of ages of ignorant action. Life cannot be permanently imprisoned within the cage of the ego. It must at some time strive toward the Truth. In the ripeness of evolution comes the momentous discovery that life cannot be understood and lived fully as long as it is made to move around the pivot of the ego. Man is then driven by the logic of his own experience to find the true center of experience and reorganize his life in the Truth. This entails the wearing out of the ego and its replacement by Truth-consciousness. The disintegration of the ego culminates in realizing the Truth. The false nucleus of consolidated *sanskaras* must disappear if there is to be a true integration and fulfillment of life.

The Nature of the Ego and Its Termination

Part II

The Ego as an Affirmation of Separateness

The ego is an affirmation of separateness. It takes many forms. It may take the form of a continued self-conscious memory expressing itself in recollections-like “I did this and I did that”; “I felt this and I felt that”; “I thought this and I thought that.” It also takes the form of ego-centered hopes for the future expressing themselves through plans-like “I shall do this and I shall do that”; “I shall feel this and I shall feel that”; “I shall think this and I shall think that.” Or again in the present, the ego manifests itself as a strong feeling of being someone in particular and asserts its distinctness and separateness from all other centers of consciousness. While provisionally serving a useful purpose as a center of consciousness, the ego, as an affirmation of separateness, constitutes the chief hindrance to spiritual emancipation and enlightenment of consciousness.

The ego affirms its separateness through craving, hate, anger, fear, or jealousy. When a person craves the company of others, he is keenly conscious of being separate from them and thus feels his own separate existence intensely. The feeling of separation from others is most acute where there is great and unrelieved craving. In hate and anger also, the other person is, so to speak, thrown out of one’s own being and regarded not only as a foreigner but as definitely hostile to

the thriving of one's ego. Fear also is a subtle form of affirming separateness and exists where the consciousness of duality is unabated. Fear acts as a thick curtain between the "I" and the "you." And it not only nourishes deep distrust of the other but inevitably brings about a shrinking and withdrawal of consciousness, so as to exclude the being of another from the context of one's own life. Therefore, not only other souls but God should be loved and not feared. To fear God or His manifestations is to strengthen duality; to love God and His manifestations is to weaken it.

**Ego feeds upon
exclusive feelings**

The feeling of separateness finds most poignant expression in jealousy. There is a deep and imperative need in the human soul to love and identify itself with other souls. This is not fulfilled in any instance where there is craving or hate, anger or fear. In jealousy, in addition to the nonfulfillment of this deep and imperative need for identification with other persons, there is a belief that some other soul has successfully identified itself with the person whom one sought. This creates a standing and irreconcilable protest against *both* individuals for developing a relationship that one really wished to reserve for oneself. All exclusive feelings like craving, hate, fear, or jealousy bring about a narrowing down of life and contribute to the limitation and restriction of consciousness. They become directly instrumental in the affirmation of separateness of the ego.

**Jealousy
strengthens ego**

Every thought, feeling, or action that springs from the idea of exclusive or separate existence binds. All experiences (small or great) and all aspirations (good or bad) create a load of impressions and nourish the sense of the "I." The only experience that makes for the slimming down of the ego is the experience of love, and the only aspiration that makes for the allevia-

**Slimming down of
ego through love**

tion of separateness is the longing to become one with the Beloved. Craving, hatred, anger, fear, and jealousy are all exclusive attitudes that create a gulf between oneself and the rest of life. Love alone is an inclusive attitude, which helps bridge this artificial and self-created gulf and tends to break through the separative barrier of false imagination. In true love, the lover also longs, but he longs for union with the Beloved. When seeking or experiencing union with the Beloved, the

sense of the “I” becomes feeble. In love the “I” does not think of self-preservation, just as the moth is unafraid of getting burned in the flame. The ego is the affirmation of being separate from the other, while love is the affirmation of being one with the other. Hence the ego can be dissolved only through real love.

The ego is implemented by desires of varied types. Failure to fulfill desires is a failure of the ego. Success in attaining desired objects is a success of the ego. Through fulfilled desires as well as through unfulfilled ones, the ego is accentuated. The ego can even feed upon a comparative lull in the surging of desires and assert its separative tendency through feeling that it is desireless. When there is a real cessation of all desires, however, there is a cessation of the desire to assert separativeness in any form. Therefore real freedom from all desires brings about the end of the ego. The ego is made of variegated desires, and the destroying of these desires amounts to the destruction of the ego.

The problem of erasing the ego from consciousness is very complicated, however, because the roots of the ego are all in the subconscious mind in the form of latent tendencies; and these latent tendencies are not always accessible to explicit consciousness. The limited ego of explicit consciousness is only a small fragment of the total ego. The ego is like an iceberg floating in the sea. About one-seventh of the iceberg remains above the surface of the water and is visible to the onlooker, but the major portion remains submerged and invisible. In the same way, only a small portion of the real ego becomes manifest in consciousness in the form of an explicit “I,” and the major portion of the real ego remains submerged in the dark and inarticulate sanctuaries of the subconscious mind.

The explicit ego, which finds its manifestation in consciousness, is by no means a harmonious whole; it can and does become an arena for multitudinous conflicts between opposing tendencies. It has a limited capacity, however, for allowing simultaneous emergence of conflicting tendencies. Two persons have to be at least on speaking terms if they are to enter into articulate wrangling. If they are not on speaking terms, they cannot

Ego made of desires

Roots of ego in subconscious mind

Ego heterogeneous in constitution

bring themselves to quarrel on common ground. In the same manner, two tendencies that can enter into conscious conflict must have some common ground. If they are too disparate, they cannot find admittance into the arena of consciousness—even as conflicting tendencies—but have to remain submerged in the subconscious mind until they are both modified through the tension exerted by the diverse activities connected with the conscious mind.

Although the entire ego is essentially heterogeneous in its constitution, the explicit ego of consciousness is less heterogeneous than the implicit ego of the subconscious mind. The explicit ego operates as a formidable whole compared with the isolated subconscious tendencies that seek to emerge in consciousness. The organized ego of explicit consciousness thus becomes a repressive barrier that indefinitely prevents several constituents of the implicit ego from access to consciousness. All the problems of the ego can be tackled only through intelligent and conscious action. Therefore, complete annihilation of the ego is possible only when all the constituents of the ego pass through the fire of intelligent consciousness.

The action of intelligent consciousness on the components of the explicit ego is important, but in itself it is not sufficient for the desired results. The components of the implicit ego of the subconscious mind

**Intensified conflict
ends in attaining
poise and harmony**

have to be brought to the surface of consciousness somehow and become parts of the explicit ego, and then be submitted to the action of intelligent consciousness. If this is to be achieved, there has to be a weakening of the explicit ego in such manner as to allow the emergence into consciousness of those desires and tendencies that could not hitherto find admittance into the arena of consciousness. This release of inhibited tendencies naturally brings about additional confusion and conflict in the explicit ego. Therefore the disappearance of the ego is often accompanied by intensified conflicts in the arena of the conscious mind rather than by any comfortable easing of them. However, at the end of the uncompromising and acute struggle lies the state of true poise and unassailable harmony that comes after the melting away of the entire iceberg of the ego.

The digging out of the buried roots of the ego from the deeper

layers of the subconscious and bringing them to the light of consciousness is one important part of the process of wiping out the ego. The other important part consists in the intelligent handling of desires *after* they gain entrance to the arena of consciousness. The process of dealing with the components of explicit consciousness is by no means clear and simple, for the explicit ego has a tendency to live through *any* one of the opposites of experience. If it is ousted from one opposite by the intensive operation of intelligent consciousness, it has a tendency to move to the other extreme and live through it. Through repeated alternation between the opposites of experience, the ego eludes the attack of intelligent consciousness and seeks to perpetuate itself.

The ego is hydra-headed and expresses itself in numberless ways. It lives upon any type of ignorance. Pride is the specific feeling through which egoism manifests. A person can be proud of the most unimportant and silly things. Instances are known, for example, of people developing their nails to an abnormal length and preserving them, despite much inconvenience to themselves, for no other reason than to assert separateness from others. The ego must magnify its attainments in grotesque ways if it is to live in them. Direct assertion of the ego through self-display in society is very common; but if such direct assertion is prohibited by the rules of conduct, the ego has a tendency to seek the same result through the slander of others. To portray others as evil is to glorify oneself by *suggesting* a comparison—a comparison the ego would willingly develop, though it often restrains itself from doing so.

The ego is activated by the principle of self-perpetuation and has a tendency to live and grow by any and all means not closed to it. If the ego faces curtailment in one direction, it seeks compensating expansion in another. If it is overpowered by a flood of spiritual notions and actions, it even tends to fasten upon this very force, which was originally brought into play for the ousting of the ego. If a person attempts to cultivate humility in order to relieve himself of the monstrous weight of the ego and succeeds in doing so, the ego can, with surprising alacrity, transfer itself to this attribute of humility. It feeds itself through repeated assertions like “I am spiritual,” just as in the

primary stages it achieved the same task by assertions like "I am not interested in spirituality." Thus arises what might be called a *spiritual* ego, or an ego that feels its separateness through the attainment of things considered to be good and highly spiritual. From the truly spiritual point of view, this type of ego is as binding as the primary and crude ego, which makes no such pretensions.

In fact, in the more advanced stages of the path, the ego does not seek to maintain itself through open methods but takes shelter in those very things that are pursued for the slimming down of the ego.

These tactics of the ego are very much like guerrilla warfare and are the most difficult to counteract. The ousting of the ego from consciousness is necessarily an intricate process and cannot be achieved by exercising a constantly uniform approach. Since the nature of the ego is very complicated, an equally complicated treatment is needed to get rid of it. As the ego has almost infinite possibilities for making its existence secure and creating self-delusion, the aspirant finds it impossible to cope with the endless cropping up of fresh forms of the ego. He can hope to deal successfully with the deceptive tricks of the ego only through the help and grace of a Perfect Master.

In most cases it is only when the aspirant is driven to realize the futility of all his efforts that he approaches a Master. By himself he can make no headway toward the goal that he dimly sights and seeks. The

stubborn persistence of the ego exasperates him, and in this clear perception of helplessness he surrenders to the Master as his

last and only resort. The self-surrender amounts to an open admission that the aspirant now has given up all hope of tackling the problems of the ego by himself and that he relies solely upon the Master. It is like saying, "I am unable to end the wretched existence of this ego. I therefore look to you to intervene and slay it." This step, however, turns out to be more fruitful than all other measures that might have been tried for the slimming down and subsequent annihilation of the ego. When through the grace of the Master the ignorance that constitutes the ego is dispelled, there is the dawn of Truth—which is the goal of all creation.

The Nature of the Ego and Its Termination

Part III The Forms of the Ego and Their Dissolution

The ego subsists upon mundane possessions like power, fame, wealth, ability, attainments, and accomplishments. It creates and recognizes the “thine” in order to feel what is distinctively “mine.”

Ego lives through idea of “mine”

However, in spite of all the worldly things that it claims as “mine,” it constantly feels empty and incomplete. To make up for this deep restlessness in its own being, the ego seeks to fortify itself through further acquisitions. It brings the array of its entire varied possessions into relief by comparison with others who might be inferior in any one of the items stamped as “mine.” And it often uses these possessions for wanton and uncalled-for self-display, even to the disadvantage of others. The ego is dissatisfied in spite of its mundane possessions; but instead of cultivating detachment from them, it seeks to derive satisfaction from a more intense sense of possession in contradistinction to others. The ego as an affirmation of separateness lives through the idea of “mine.”

The ego wants to feel separate and unique, and it seeks self-expression either in the role of someone who is decidedly better than others or in the role of someone who is decidedly inferior. As long as there is ego, there is an implicit background of duality; and as long as

there is the background of duality, the mental operations of comparison and contrast cannot be effectively stilled for long. Therefore, even when a person seems to feel a sense of equality with another, this feeling is not securely established. It marks a point of transition between the two attitudes of the ego rather than permanent freedom from the distinction between the "I" and the "you."

Forms of ego

This pseudo sense of equality, where it exists, may be stated in the formula "I am not in any way inferior or superior to the other." This will at once be seen to be a negative assertion of the ego. The balance between the "I" and the "you" is constantly disturbed by the predominance of a superiority or inferiority complex. The

Idea of equality

idea of equality arises to restore this lost balance. The negative assertion of the ego in the form of equality is, however, utterly different from the sense of unity that is characteristic of the life of spiritual freedom. Although the sense of equality is made the basis of many social and political ideals, the real conditions of rich cooperative life are fulfilled only when the bare idea of equality is replaced by the realization of the unity of all life.

The feelings of superiority and inferiority are reactions to each other, and the artificially induced feeling of equality might be regarded as a reaction to both. In all these three modes the ego succeeds in asserting its separateness. The superiority complex and the inferiority complex for the most part remain disconnected from each

Two complexes

other. They both seek separate and alternate expression through suitable objects, as when a person dominates those whom he regards as his inferiors and submits to those whom he looks upon as his superiors. But such alternative expression through contrasting behavior only accentuates these opposite complexes instead of leading to their dissolution.

The superiority complex is stirred when a person meets someone who is in some way remarkably inferior in mundane possessions. In spite of its many possessions, the ego is constantly confronted with the spectacle of its intrinsic emptiness.

Superiority complex

Therefore it clings to the comforting delusion of its worthwhileness by demonstrating the greatness of its possessions. This contrast is not confined to

theoretical comparison but often exhibits itself in an actual clash with others. Thus, aggressiveness is a natural outcome of the need to compensate for the poverty of the ego-life.

The inferiority complex is stirred when a person meets someone who is in some way remarkably superior in respect to mundane possessions. But his submissiveness to the other is rooted either in fear or selfishness. It can never be wholehearted or spontaneous because there is a lurking jealousy of and even hatred for the other for possessing something he would rather have for himself. All forced and outward submission is purely the effect of an inferiority complex and can only enhance the ego in one of its worst forms. The ego attributes its sense of emptiness to the apparently inferior possessions it can claim as "mine," rather than to its deep-rooted viciousness in seeking fulfillment through possessions. Awareness of its inferiority in possessions becomes only a further stimulus for making desperate efforts to add to its possessions through such means as are available to it. Thus while perpetuating the inward poverty of the soul, the inferiority complex, like the superiority complex, constitutes an agent for selfishness and social chaos, and for the accumulation of that type of ignorance which characterizes the ego.

When a person comes into contact with a Perfect Master and recognizes him as having the state of egoless Perfection, he voluntarily surrenders himself to the Master. The disciple perceives the ego to be a source of perpetual ignorance, restlessness, and conflict; and he also recognizes his own inability to terminate it. But this self-surrender should be carefully distinguished from the inferiority complex because it is accompanied by awareness that the Master is the ideal and as such has a basic unity with the disciple. Such self-surrender is in no way an expression of loss of confidence. On the contrary, it is an expression of confidence in the final overcoming of all obstacles through the help of the Master. The appreciation of the divinity of the Master is the manner in which the higher Self of the disciple expresses its sense of dignity.

In order to bring about a rapid dissolution of these two chief forms of the ego, the Master may deliberately stir both of these complexes in alternation. If the disciple is on the point of losing heart and giving up

the search, he might arouse in him deep self-confidence. If he is on the point of becoming egotistic, he might break through this new barrier by creating situations in which the disciple has to accept and recognize his own incapacity or futility. Thus the Master wields his influence over the disciple to expedite the stages that the melting ego passes through before its final disappearance.

The superiority and inferiority complexes have to be brought into intelligent relation with each other if they are to counteract each other. This requires a situation in which both would be allowed to have their play at the same time, without requiring the repression of one in order to express the other. When the soul enters into a dynamic and vital relation with the Master, the complexes concerned with the senses of inferiority and superiority are both brought into play; and they are so intelligently accommodated that they counteract each other. The disciple then feels that he is nothing in himself, but in and through the Master he is enlivened by the prospect of being Everything.

Thus at one stroke the two complexes are brought into mutual tension and tend to annihilate each other in the attempt the disciple makes to adjust himself to the Master. With the dissolution of these opposite complexes, there comes a breaking down of the separative barriers of the ego in all its forms. With the breaking down of the barriers of separation, there arises divine love. With the arising of divine love, the separate feeling of "I," as distinguished from "you," is swallowed up in the sense of their unity.

For a car to move toward its destination, a driver is necessary. However, the driver may be susceptible to strong attractions for things that he encounters on the way; and he might not only halt at intervening places for an indefinite time but also get lost by the wayside in pursuit of things that have only temporary charm. Thus he might keep the car moving all the time but without coming nearer the goal, and he might even get further away from it. Something like this happens when the ego assumes control of human consciousness. The ego may be compared to a driver who has a certain amount of control over a car and a certain capacity to drive it, but who is in complete darkness about its ultimate destination.

For a car to reach its ultimate destination, it is not enough merely to have someone who can drive the car. It is equally necessary that this driver should be able to direct the car toward the destination. As long as the movement of consciousness is under the full and exclusive domination of the ego, the spiritual advancement of the person is jeopardized by the natural tendency of the ego to strengthen the separative barriers of false imagination. So, because of ego-centered activities, consciousness remains enclosed by the walls of its own creation and moves within the limits of this *mayavic* prison.

If consciousness is to be emancipated from its limitations and rendered adequate to serve the original purpose for which it came into existence, it must draw its directive momentum not from the ego but from some other principle. In other words, the driver who is ignorant of the ultimate destination must be exchanged for another driver who is free from all the allure of accidental things encountered on the way, and who centers his attention not on the rest stations or side attractions but on the ultimate goal of nonduality. The shifting of the center of interest from unimportant things to truly important values is comparable to the transference of power from the ignorant driver to the driver who knows the destination. Concurrent with this gradual shifting of the center of interest, there is progressive dissolution of the ego and motion toward the Truth.

If the ego were nothing but a medium for the integration of human experience, it would be possible for one to get established in the final Truth merely by carrying further the activity of the ego. But while playing a specific part in the progress of consciousness, the ego also represents an active principle of ignorance that prevents further spiritual development. The ego attempts the integration of experience, but it does so around the false idea of separateness. Having taken an illusion as the foundation for the construction of its edifice, it never succeeds in anything but the building of illusions one upon another. Arriving at the Truth is actually hindered rather than helped by the function of the ego. The process of arriving at the Truth can be fruitful only if the integration presided over by the ego is carried further without bringing in the basic ignorance of separateness.

As long as human experience lies within the limitation of duality, integration of experience is an essential condition for a rational and

significant life. But the ego as a nucleus for integration has to be renounced because of its inevitable alliance with the forces of ignorance. There arises, then, an imperative need for a new center of integration that will steer clear of the basic ignorance of separateness and will allow free scope for the incorporation of all values formerly inaccessible to the ego-center. Such a new center is provided by the Master, who expresses all that has real value and who represents the absolute Truth. The shifting of interest from unimportant things to important values is facilitated by allegiance and self-surrender to the Master, who becomes the new nucleus for integration.

The Master, when truly understood, is a standing affirmation of the unity of all life. Allegiance to the Master, therefore, brings about a gradual dissociation from the ego-nucleus, which affirms separateness. After this important crisis in the life of

Union with Master and realization of Truth an individual, all mental activity has a new frame of reference. And its significance is to be gathered in the light of its relation to the

Master as the manifestation of infinite Truth, not in the light of any relation to the ego-center as a limited "I." The person henceforth finds that all acts that flow from him are no longer initiated from the limited "I" but are all inspired by the Truth working through the Master. He is also no longer interested in the well-being of the limited self but is only interested in the Master as representing universal and undivided life. He offers all his experiences and desires to the Master, reserving neither the good nor the evil for the limited "I," stripping the ego of all content.

This advancing bankruptcy of the ego does not interfere with the process of integration because the function is now performed around the new center of the Master as representing the Truth. When the ego-nucleus is completely bankrupt and devoid of any power or being, the Master, as Truth, is firmly established in consciousness as its guiding genius and animating principle. This constitutes both the attainment of union with the Master and the realization of the infinite Truth.

As the egogradually adjusts itself to the spiritual requirements of life-through the cultivation of humanity, selflessness and love, wholehearted surrender and offering oneself to the Master, as

Truth-it suffers a drastic curtailment. It not only offers less and less resistance to spiritual unfoldment but also **Knowledge of true Self** undergoes a radical transformation. This eventually turns out to be so great that in the end the ego, as an affirmation of separateness, completely disappears and is substituted by the Truth, which knows no separateness.

The intermediate steps of slimming down the ego and softening its nature are comparable to the trimming and pruning of the branches of a wild and mighty tree, while the final step of annihilation of the ego amounts to the complete uprooting of this tree. When the ego disappears entirely, there arises knowledge of the true Self. Thus, the long journey of the soul consists in developing from animal consciousness the explicit self-consciousness as a limited "I," then in transcending the state of the limited "I" of human consciousness, through the medium of the Master. At this stage the soul is initiated into the consciousness of the supreme and real Self as an everlasting and infinite "I am," in which there is no separateness and which includes all existence.

*The Place of Occultism in Spiritual Life**

Part I

The Value of Occult Experiences

The spiritual path leading to the emancipation of consciousness brings with it an unfoldment of many psychic capacities, which are latent in the human soul. This unfoldment increases the scope and range of human consciousness. These new **Psychic capacities help or hinder emancipation** elements often play an important part in helping or hindering the spiritual emancipation of consciousness. Therefore, the aspirant not only has to understand the value of such experiences as unusual and significant dreams, visions, astral journeys, and glimpses of the subtle world, but he also has to learn to distinguish real occult experiences from hallucinations and delusions.

Although it is customary to exaggerate the importance of occult experiences, it is not uncommon to doubt their validity and to treat them with the **Contempt for occult born of ignorance** contempt usually accorded to all forms of mental aberrations and abnormalities. The attitude of unqualified contempt for occult experiences is of course

*In the following three Parts, *occult* and *occultism* are generally used in the broadest sense to mean hidden or beyond the range of ordinary experience; but in certain contexts they mean more specifically psychic or supernatural (see Glossary).-ED.

most pronounced in those who are not even abecedarians in direct knowledge of the occult. It hurts the ego to admit and feel that there might be vast unexplored fields of the universe that are accessible just to a limited number of persons, and from which one happens to be excluded. The undeserved contempt that occultism at times receives is almost always the outcome of profound ignorance about its real meaning. This attitude of contempt is of course different from a cautious and critical attitude. Those who have a cautious and critical approach and who are endowed with humility and openness of mind are ever ready to recognize and admit occult phenomena when they occur.

An aspirant is usually helped by a Perfect Master through ordinary means, and the Master prefers to take him veiled along the spiritual path. But when there are specific indications, he may also use

**Some dreams
spiritually significant**

occult techniques to help the aspirant. Special types of dreams are among the common methods used for touching the deeper life of the aspirant. Masters have not infrequently first contacted aspirants by appearing in their dreams. Such dreams, however, have to be carefully distinguished from ordinary dreams. In ordinary dreams the subtle body is active in exercising its functions of seeing, tasting, smelling, touching, and hearing; but the soul is not using the subtle body with full consciousness. As these experiences in ordinary dreams are received subconsciously, they are in most cases purely subjective, relating to physical activities and concerning the gross world, and are the creations of nascent sanskaras stored in the mind. In some cases, however, a dream that is indistinguishable from ordinary dreams may be the reflection in the subconscious of some objective experience of the subtle body and not merely a product of fancy.

Most dreams are purely subjective and subconscious experiences of the subtle body. They have no special spiritual significance, except that they can be occasions for forging new sanskaras or spending up old ones and that occasionally they shed

Rare types of dreams

light upon the hidden complexes and un-faced problems of one's personality. Such dreams can never include something that is not in some way a part of the past experience of the person. They allow scope for novelty only in respect to new combinations of items that have already appeared in past experience. The rare types of dreams are those about persons and

things unknown in this life but known in some past life or lives. Still more rare are the dreams of persons and things that have never appeared in this life or former lives but are going to appear in the future. Ordinary dreams are thus utterly different from dreams that have occult significance.

Very often, when the aspirant is undergoing psychic unfoldment, he has occasional mystic experiences of the subtle world in the form of significant visions, lights, colors, sounds, smells, or contacts. At first

**Beginnings of
occult experience**

these experiences are fitful, and the aspirant is likely to treat them as hallucinations. But even when he treats them as hallucinations, he finds it impossible to resist their directive influence because of their intrinsic potency. The spiritual journey, however, becomes more smooth if the aspirant learns to cultivate the right attitude toward occult experiences, which consists in taking them for what they are worth. This balanced attitude is just what the aspirant in the initial stages finds difficult to maintain.

The beginner is apt to exaggerate the importance of his glimpses into the inner worlds and to develop an ungovernable craving for repetition of these experiences, or he tries to treat them as abnormal phenomena and underrates their significance.

**Balanced attitude
difficult to maintain**

Of these two alternatives, the attitude of exaggerating the importance of occult experiences is the most common, because the novelty and rarity of occult experiences are factors that contribute to charging them with overwhelming importance.

In fact, the ego of the aspirant tends to become attached to this new field revealed to him, which gives him the sense of being a rare person admitted to an exclusive privilege. The more experiences a

**Craving for occult
experiences**

person has, the greater scope he desires. He also develops the habit of depending upon occult goading for each step on the path, just as those who take drugs get addicted to them and require stimulation even for doing things they could formerly do without such stimulation. In order to avoid this pitfall for the aspirant, the Master takes good care not to cater to his new craving for occult experiences. Such experiences are vouchsafed to the aspirant if and when they are absolutely necessary for spiritual purposes and not

when he wants or asks for them.

If the aspirant is found to attach undue importance to occult experiences or to develop an ungovernable craving for them, the Master might deal with this obstacle in his own way by actually weakening or annulling the occult experiences that

Dealing with craving for occult experiences have become the basis for such craving. This is like giving immediate relief to a patient by surgical removal of the cause of a physical disorder. It serves the purpose of protecting the aspirant from forging fresh chains for self-limitation. The aspirant must not be allowed under any circumstances to get caught up in false values and futile searching. These can only lead to sidetracking and cause unnecessary delay in achieving the real goal, which is to get initiated into the truly spiritual life. The introduction of the aspirant to occult phenomena is necessarily a very gradual and prolonged process. The Master is never anxious to expedite it, as few persons are really qualified to stand the expansion of their experience in this new dimension.

In the initial stages the appearance of occult phenomena is very fitful, and the aspirant sometimes doubts their validity, treating them with caution in order to rule out the possibility of his being deluded.

Validity of occult experience But occult experiences often bear unmistakable credentials of their own validity. Even when any such credentials are not evident, they compel due respect and attention because of the unusual significance, bliss, peace, and directive value with which they are surcharged. Mainly because of these characteristics, the aspirant is able to distinguish real occult experiences from hallucinations and delusions.

Hallucinations are erroneous perceptions and consist in actually seeing or hearing things that do not really exist. Though they are clearly different in this respect from merely imagining things, they remain objects of doubt in spite of their

Occult distinguished from hallucination and delusion similarity to normal perceptions. Delusions are even more deceptive because they consist not only in actually seeing things that really do not exist but also in having complete conviction of their existence. However, hallucinations and delusions do not bring extraordinary bliss or peace to the person who

experiences them. The bliss and peace that are attendant upon real occult experiences are fairly reliable criteria by which to distinguish them as genuine. Hallucinations and delusions are like the nightmares of wakeful consciousness.

Even when real occult experience can be clearly differentiated from illusion, it suffers in its power and efficacy if it becomes the object of doubt. This can happen when the person who has had the experience

Aspirant must develop self-confidence discusses the matter with others who, because of their incapacity to understand such things, throw out contrary thoughts and shake his conviction. For this

reason, the Master usually requires a disciple to maintain strict secrecy about his experiences. Even a deep experience is likely to become weak through the contradiction and skepticism of others, unless the aspirant has learned to follow his own inner experience irrespective of what others might think or say. If the aspirant is to make quick progress and to profit most from the Master's help, he must develop immense and unshakable confidence in himself and the Master. He must not look to others for guidance, because those who will understand his problems or his experiences are very few. The aspirant must indeed be prepared to face the possibility of not being completely understood by any of his friends or relatives, for they may be in the dark about the grounds for his ideology and course of action.

If at the time of its occurrence an occult experience has served the purpose of giving new momentum to spiritual endeavor, it often does not matter if the aspirant considers it in retrospective analysis and

Effect of doubt on occult experience thought as being a form of delusion. However, there are some occult experiences that are deliberately vouchsafed to the aspirant

in order that they should be standing sources of inspiration and guidance. With regard to these special experiences, it becomes necessary that the aspirant cease doubting their validity and importance.

The general attitude of seeking endless corroborations of occult experiences is definkely unhealthy, and the Master gives corroborative confirmation only when he considers it necessary. Further, he takes the initiative in the way he judges best in the situation. Whatever he does arises from his unfettered discretion and is in no way related to or dependent upon any expectation developed by the aspi-

rant. But when it is spiritually necessary, the Master does increase the efficacy of occult experience by confirming its validity and authority through some direct or indirect corroboration from the aspirant's normal range of experience.

In the advancing stages leading to the beginning of the path, the aspirant becomes spiritually prepared for being entrusted with free use of the forces of the inner world of the astral bodies.* He may then

Astral journeys

undertake astral journeys in his astral body, leaving the physical body in sleep or wakefulness. The astral journeys that are taken unconsciously are much less important than those undertaken with full consciousness and as a result of deliberate volition. This implies conscious use of the astral body. Conscious separation of the astral body from the outer vehicle of the gross body has its own value in making the soul feel its distinction from the gross body and in arriving at fuller control of the gross body. One can, at will, put on and take off the external gross body as if it were a cloak, and use the astral body for experiencing the inner world of the astral and for undertaking journeys through it, if and when necessary.

The sights, smells, tastes, contacts, and sounds that are experienced through conscious use of the astral body are clear and definite, like the experiences gained through conscious use of the gross

Expanded scope for advancement

body. They are not vague or subjective, as in ordinary dreams, but are as objective and effective as other experiences of wakeful consciousness. The ability to undertake astral journeys therefore involves considerable expansion of one's scope for experience. It brings opportunities for promoting one's own spiritual advancement, which begins with the involution of consciousness.

The harnessing of occult forces is not to be regarded in any way as a substitute for the inner effort the aspirant must make to advance further. When occult experiences are gifts

Occult experience no substitute for inner effort

from a Perfect Master, they serve the purpose of unveiling much of the hitherto obscured intuition, removing some of the difficulties leading toward the spiritual path, and filling the aspirant with the great confidence and enthusiasm that

*See Glossary.

are necessary to cope with the new requirements at each stage. But the aspirant makes real progress by putting into practice the best intuitions of his heart, not by being the merely passive recipient of occult experiences.

The Place of Occultism in Spiritual Life

Part II

The Relationship with the Master in Spiritual Life

Those who have even a preliminary acquaintance with the structure and laws of the inner spheres of existence know that complete isolation of human beings is a figment of the imagination. Whether they desire it or not, all persons are constantly acting and interacting upon each other by their very existence, even when they do not establish any contact on the physical plane. There are no limits to the spreading of the influence of the individual. The magnetic influence of the subtle spheres knows no barriers of national frontiers or any other conventional limitations.

People constantly interacting on inner spheres

Good thoughts as well as evil thoughts, cheerful moods as well as gloomy moods, noble and expansive feelings as well as petty and narrow emotions, unselfish aspirations as well as selfish ambitions -all these have a tendency to spread out and influence others, even when they are not expressed in words or deeds. The world of mental life is as much a unified system as the world of gross matter. The gross world as a vehicle of spiritual life has its own indubitable importance, but the links and connections existing between different persons can by no means be fully estimated if one merely considers the tangible

transactions that take place in the gross world.

For an aspirant to see a Perfect Master does not yield its full significance except in the context of all the corresponding happenings of the inner planes of consciousness. The *rishis*, or sages, attach great importance to having the *darshan* (contact through sight) of Perfect Masters. For they are the source of the constant flow of love and light, which emanates from them and makes an irresistible appeal to the inner feelings of the aspirant, even when he receives no verbal instructions from them. The effect of darshan is dependent upon the receptivity and response of the aspirant, whose reaction is determined by his own *sanskaras* and past connections.

Often the aspirant is completely satisfied with the darshan of a Master, and he desires nothing further from him. To derive bliss and contentment from the mere darshan of the Master is a great thing because it indicates that the aspirant has desirelessness and love, which are the two essentials of spiritual life. Having had the darshan of the beloved Master, the aspirant naturally desires nothing except to have more of his darshan and is thus impelled by his inner spiritual urge to seek the *sahavas* (company) of the Master as often as possible. Further *sahavas* of the Master implements and strengthens the purifying effect of darshan, and also results in drawing the aspirant closer and closer to the Master on the inner planes.

Like darshan, falling at the feet of a Master also has special value of its own. The feet, which are physically the lowest part of the body, are the highest from the spiritual point of view. Physically, the feet go through everything-good and bad, beautiful and ugly, clean and dirty; yet they remain above everything. Spiritually, the feet of the Masters are above everything in the universe, which is like dust to them. When people come to a Perfect Master and touch his feet with their hands, they lay the burden of their *sanskaras* on him. He collects the *sanskaras* from all over the universe, just as an ordinary person, in walking, collects dust on his feet.

There is an ancient tradition that after the aspirant has the darshan of a Master and falls at his feet, he washes the Master's feet with milk and honey and places a coconut near them as his offering. Honey represents red (bad) *sanskaras*, milk represents white (good)

sanskaras, and the coconut represents the mind. Thus this convention, which has become established in some areas in connection with greeting the Masters, really symbolizes throwing the burden of all sanskaras on the Master and surrendering the mind to him. Adoption of this inner attitude constitutes the most critical and important step that the aspirant must take in order to get initiated on the spiritual path.

Once the aspirant experiences the bliss of the darshan of a Master, that sight gets carved on his mind. And even when he is unable to establish frequent personal contact, his mind turns to the Master

Mental contact

again and again in an effort to understand his significance. This process of establishing mental contact with the Master is essentially different from merely imaginative revival of past incidents. In the ordinary play of imagination, the recall of past incidents is not necessarily animated by a definite purpose; whereas in establishing mental contact there is a definite purpose. Owing to the directive power of purpose, imagination ceases to be a mere revolving of ideas and reaches out to the Master and establishes contact with him.

Such mental contact with the Master is often as fruitful and effective as his physical darshan. The inward repetition of such mental contacts is like constructing a channel between Master and aspirant—who becomes thereby the recipient of the grace, love, and light that are constantly flowing from the Master, in spite of the apparent distance between them. Thus, the help of the Master goes out not only to those who are in his physical presence but also to others who establish mental contact with him.

The Master devotes careful attention to the individual needs of the disciple, and the first thing he does is to protect the disciple from influences that will divert his attention from the path or interfere with

Special precautionary instructions

his progress. Often the Master requires the disciple to accept some kind of temporary isolation so that his mind is guarded against impacts that might impede his spiritual progress. Thus some yogis, under instructions from their Masters, prepare their own food and do not allow anyone to remain present at the time of eating it. The reason is to avoid impressions of evil from the glance of bad persons. A disciple is also likely to catch the impressions of another's lust, just as a clean cloth may be readily soiled by dirt.

In the earlier stages the aspirant must guard against any complications that might arise through association with others who are not on the path. But the Master gives special instructions for the severance or avoidance of certain connections and contacts only when they are specifically indicated for a special case. In most cases, however, all that is necessary is secured merely by the constant company of the Master, and no need arises to submit the disciple to actual isolation. Although the disciple may be outwardly in touch with the world, he remains mentally detached from it because of his inner connection with the Master.

Just as the Master may isolate a close disciple from undesirable contacts and connections, he may also actually encourage and bring about new and fresh contacts that he deems to be in the spiritual interest of the disciple. He has a consummate understanding of the sanskaras and karmic ties and their complications. Thus he can consciously help people to enter into such associations as will allow and call forth important responses and activities, and help the progress of all concerned along the line of least resistance or by the shortest possible route. He uses his knowledge of the past lives, sanskaras, and connections of people to help them economize their spiritual energy and use it for the best results.

The unity and solidarity of the inner planes make it possible for the Master to use his disciple as an instrument for his work even when the disciple is unaware of serving this larger purpose of the Master.

This is possible because the disciple, through his love and understanding of the Master as well as his obedience and surrender, establishes a rapport with the Master and comes to be in tune with him. Those who come into direct contact with the Master receive his direct help, and those who are closely connected with his disciples receive the Master's indirect help.

The sharing of spiritual work is by no means onesided. Even the disciples who merely think of the Master or meditate upon him have the privilege of sharing the spiritual and universal work in which the Master might be engaged at that moment.

Master as relay station As he is one with Eternity, the Master is beyond time and all limitations of time. As he is also interested in the spiritual upliftment of humanity, he

**Helpful contacts
and associations**

**Disciple used
as instrument**

assumes many of the limitations of time; and his work can be helped by the voluntary cooperation of his disciples. The Master feeds upon the love of his disciples and utilizes the spiritual forces released by them for his universal work. In this way the Master is like the relay station that receives a song only in order to broadcast it to the world at large. To love the Master is to love all, not merely symbolically but actually; for what the Master receives on the inner planes of consciousness he spiritualizes and distributes. Thus he not only strengthens the personal links that the disciples may have with him but also gives them the privilege of sharing his divine work.

In infinite ways, the Sadguru tries to draw the aspirant into his own being so that the aspirant may get disentangled from the mazes of the universe and come to desire God. This longing for God is present in the aspirant from the very beginning, but the Master makes this primary longing more intense and articulate by opening the

Internal eye

internal eye of the aspirant. When the internal eye is opened, God—who is the object of search and longing—is actually sighted. As the gaze of the soul is turned inward and fixed upon the supreme Reality, the desire to establish union with it becomes much more ardent than when the soul is groping for God through mere speculation or imagination. When the time is ripe, the Master can open this internal eye in an instant.

Ultimately the aspirant has to realize that God is the only Reality and that he is really one with God. This implies that he should not be overpowered by the spectacle of the multiform universe. In fact, the

Om Point

whole universe is in the Self and springs into existence from the tiny point in the Self referred to as the *Om* Point. But the Self as the individualized soul has become habituated to gathering experiences through one medium or another, and therefore it comes to experience the universe as a formidable rival, other than itself. Those who have realized God constantly see the universe as springing from this *Om* Point, which is in everyone.

The process of perception runs parallel to the process of creation, and the reversing of the process of perception without obliterating consciousness amounts to realizing the nothingness of the universe as a separate entity. The Self as the individualized soul sees first through the mind, then through the subtle eye, and lastly through the physical

eye; but it is vaster than all it can perceive. The big oceans and the vast spaces of the sky are tiny as compared with the Self. In fact, all that it can perceive is finite, but the Self itself is infinite. When the individualized Self retains full consciousness and yet sees nothing, it has crossed the universe of its own creation and has taken the first step to know itself as Everything.

**Reversing process
of perception**

The entire process of withdrawing consciousness from the universe and becoming conscious of the Self is accompanied by an increasing control of all the vehicles of consciousness. Such control is made

Siddhis

possible by the vivification and activation of unused centers of control, and the functioning of new centers brings in its train a number of hidden powers. These new powers are commonly known as *siddhis*, and they can come before the aspirant has become spiritually perfect. In fact, egotism can flourish through the acquisition of such powers. The aspirant may not only take delight in possessing them but might actually use them for mundane purposes from which he has not necessarily freed himself.

Siddhis are therefore rightly regarded as obstacles to the attainment of Realization. However, after God is realized all these powers dwindle in their importance. The siddhis have their scope in the nothingness that is the universe; whereas the person who realizes God is permanently and immovably established in the supreme Reality. Although the whole universe is like a zero to the God-realized person, he may voluntarily assume responsibility for those souls who are enmeshed in the tangles of the universe. In that case he can freely and legitimately make use of these powers for the spiritual good of others.

There is nothing that does not admit of direct or indirect control by the Masters of wisdom. Large social phenomena (such as wars, revolutions, and epidemics) as well as cosmic phenomena (such as

**Furtherance of
divine plan**

earthquakes and floods) are equally amenable to their control and direction through the release of the forces of the exalted planes on which the Masters are consciously stationed. The Masters may also use occult forces to effect cooperative and coordinated spiritual work. They frequently hold meetings and conferences on the higher inner planes for securing the advancement of humanity. The Oversoul in all is only one, and it always functions

as a unity. Those who have become conscious of this unity become fit to understand unlimited responsibility. Because they have shed the limitations of the human mind and have become so impersonal and universal in their interest, they are effective vehicles for the execution and furtherance of the divine plan on earth.

The Place of Occultism in Spiritual Life

Part III Occultism and Spirituality

Occultism is a branch of knowledge concerned with the study of certain aspects and forces of the universe and the human personality. In this respect there is no difference in principle between occultism and other sciences concerned with the study of these subjects. The difference between occultism and other sciences arises because other sciences are concerned with aspects and forces directly or indirectly accessible to ordinary observation and manipulation; whereas occultism is concerned with those hidden aspects and forces that are essentially inaccessible to ordinary observation and manipulation. The development of occult knowledge is conditioned by the unfolding of the latent powers of the human spirit. Many of the psychic research societies of modern times approach occult knowledge with the same attitude that characterizes the study of other fields of knowledge. In principle there seems to be no reason why it should be regarded as either less valuable or more valuable than other fields of theoretical knowledge. One finds these societies trying to pursue occult knowledge in an organized and cooperative manner.

The Perfect Masters have deemed it desirable at times to reveal to the generality of mankind some theoretical knowledge about certain important features of spiritual life—such as immortality and reincar-

nation, the existence of different bodies and planes, and the laws concerning evolution and the operation of karma. Such knowledge gives the right sort of background for spiritual aspiration and effort, and brings the perspective of the average person as near to the Truth as is possible under the circumstances. However, with the exception of such general knowledge about fundamentals, the Masters have consistently preferred to attach minimum importance to the spread of detailed knowledge about occult phenomena. They have even scrupulously withheld information concerning those points likely to have vital bearing upon occultism as an art.

In occultism, more than in any other science, there is a sharp and significant division between those who know and those who do not know. In other sciences, to a certain extent, indirect knowledge can take the place of direct knowledge. In occult-

Those who know and those who do not know ism, indirect knowledge can in no way approximate direct knowledge in import and significance. Therefore, though occultism is an important science, the spread of purely theoretical information about the occult can have little importance. For those who have no firsthand experience of the occult, purely theoretical acquaintance with some occult facts can have no special value. These occult phenomena are bound to remain for them more or less in the same category as descriptions of unseen lands or works of imagination.

However, even the spread of purely theoretical information about occult facts is accompanied at times with mischief, since it is likely to arouse idle curiosity and stimulate craving for acquiring control over unknown forces with a view to using them

Occultism as an art for selfish ends. There is nothing particularly spiritual about occult power as such.

Like any other mundane power or scientific invention, it is capable of being used for good ends or bad. It gives immense scope for cooperative work on the higher planes, but this necessarily implies a spiritual preparedness to shoulder the special responsibility. Occultism as a science may be said to be more or less on the same footing as other sciences, but occultism as an art stands by itself.

The novice may seek some occult powers and, within certain limits, even succeed in acquiring them. But this new attainment will prove to be a curse rather than a blessing if he is not spiritually

prepared for the adequate fulfillment of the new responsibility implied in the acquisition of the new powers. Even

Misuse of occult power the slightest misuse of occult power causes a severe reaction and creates a binding for the soul. Sometimes it may retard the progress of the aspirant and may even lead to a considerable setback. Apart from the spiritual ruin the novice may invite upon himself through indiscreet use of occult power, he is bound to be a source of incalculable harm to others over whom he has succeeded in wielding a formidable advantage.

In the hands of the Masters of spiritual wisdom, occult power is not only safe but has immense capacities that can be harnessed in the service of humanity; yet even they are very sparing and economical in

Occult power must further spiritual purposes

its use. By its very nature, occultism as an art has its own natural limitations. It cannot be widely used for helping the material needs of humanity or helping it in its mundane purposes. The introduction of an uncertain and incalculable factor, which the free exercise of occult power would involve, is bound to create much confusion and disturbance in the ordinary pursuits of man, who must be left to his own limitations, resources, and possibilities for the equal and uninterrupted working out of the law of karma. The use of occult power, therefore, has to be strictly restricted to the furtherance of spiritual purposes.

Sometimes the Masters do fulfill some of the mundane desires of their devotees. However, this is not done because they are interested in mundane affairs but because they are interested in weaning their devotees away from their material crav-

Material bait for spiritual purposes

ings. When children are very young, they often cannot be induced to learn the alphabet. In order to attract their attention to the alphabet, their elders sometimes present them with letters specially constructed out of sweets. Then they attend to these lessons, not because they are interested in the letters as such, but because they are interested in the sweets. Yet this often proves to be the beginning of their interest in the letters themselves, and the sweets can soon be discarded after they have cultivated this interest. Worldly people are like such young children. Just as a parent may occasionally give a piece of chocolate to the baby in order to encourage it to be good, the Masters might give their worldly-minded devotees certain harmless objects

they desire so that they may eventually be willing to part with them and become interested in true spirituality.

Worldly people are so immersed in material cravings that nothing interests them unless it has some direct bearing upon the fulfillment of these cravings. Thus they may come to a Perfect Master and serve

Masters not to be approached with material motives

or respect him in the expectation of being helped with their material problems. When a person approaches a Master with respect, it becomes the duty of the Master to help him spiritually, even when he has come with some other motive. The Master, with his perfect understanding of the human mind, may therefore decide to help the person materially in order to win him over to true spirituality. Such offering of material bait for spiritual purposes is an exception rather than the rule. Mostly the Masters discourage people from approaching them for any material advantage. From the spiritual point of view, it is infinitely better for a person to love a Master simply because he is lovable than to love him for some selfish ends. People should go to a Master because they are genuinely interested in true spirituality and for no other reason. It is only then that they derive the greatest benefit from their contact with the Master.

Occultism as an art derives its justification solely from its capacity to subserve spiritual purposes; any diversion of occult power from this end may be looked upon as misuse. It must not be summoned

Purification of human heart

merely for worldly purposes. Its true function is not to secure the fulfillment of human cravings but to secure the purification of the human heart. Occultism as an art is among the most effective and potent factors that can contribute to the purging of humanity by helping it to give up baser desires.

Occultism as an art becomes particularly relevant and necessary for those who are about to unfold their latent psychic powers and for those who already have considerably developed powers but sometimes

Use of powers on higher planes

are not fully alive to the gross world, owing to the withdrawal of their consciousness to the higher planes. Hence they have to be spoken to in a language they can understand. Many advanced aspirants develop a number of occult and mystic powers, but they are often as much in need of spiritual help as

the ordinary run of humanity. As they are in possession of many powers, they can be readily and effectively helped by a Perfect Master irrespective of distance. When the Master's help can be consciously received in the higher planes, it becomes much more fruitful than the help he can give merely through the gross medium.

Apart from the difficulties existing in forward movement on the path, one of the characteristics of advanced aspirants is to get so deeply established in the happiness of their station that they are reluctant to "come down" for work in the gross sphere. This coming down of advanced aspirants must not be confused with the return to normal consciousness after the seventh plane experience, which is the state of God-realization of the Perfect Ones.

Coming down

A Perfect Master's return journey-as well as the consequent position in different planes after Realization-is actuated by altruistic motives and is the result of *prarabdha* (inevitable destiny), which he utilizes for the spiritual uplift of humanity in accordance with his vested authority. Although Perfect Masters are conscious of all the planes simultaneously, it is said that Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, India, for instance, stationed himself in the fifth plane of involution of consciousness. It is also true that the Avatar functions from all the planes of consciousness simultaneously but sometimes for His universal work stations Himself in a particular plane. Therefore it is said, for example, that the Prophet Muhammad stationed Himself in the seventh plane, while Lord Buddha stationed Himself in the fifth.

The coming down of advanced aspirants, on the other hand, is induced in order to help accelerate their forward movement on the spiritual path when they find themselves hung up anywhere between the planes. Thus, if an aspirant gets hung up somewhere between the third and fourth planes, a Master usually brings him down to the third plane prior to pushing him up to the fourth. Coming down from a high station is also often necessary in the interest of those who are still in the wilderness of the world and have not yet entered the path. The Master may sometimes decide to get some spiritual work done through an advanced aspirant and may require him to postpone his efforts for individual advancement for the sake of others.

Such coming down eventually turns out to be a spiritual preparation for traversing the next stage of the path smoothly and quickly; but even so, the aspirant finds it difficult to renounce the advantages of his

attainment for the purpose of helping others. Coming down is particularly difficult for a person intensely experiencing a state of enchantment. In Sufism, this enchantment is known as *hairat*. The aspirant finds it extremely difficult to get out of this state. However, it is necessary that he should resist getting lost in enchantment because sometimes he must come down for the sake of others in the world. A Master has ways of dealing with an advanced aspirant and can bring him around to any unpalatable move.

This is very well illustrated by the story of a famous *wali* named Baba Fariduddin, also known as Ganj-e-Shakkar. Much before he attained Illumination, this wali, or friend of God, was in *hairat* and completely absorbed in that state. He could not close his eyes, which were always open, dazed, and glassy; and he could not eat. His Master, Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, wanted him to get out of this state of enchantment and to come down, but the wali found it difficult to obey his Master. Then the Master turned the key and brought him around in the following manner.

Story of Ganj-e-Shakkar

The Master inwardly inspired five thieves to come near the place of Ganj-e-Shakkar. They sat within five paces of the wali and began to divide the plunder they had stolen. Soon they began quarreling with each other, and two of them killed the other three. These two, who were successful in the quarrel, divided the loot between them and ran away. But while running away they passed by the place where the wali was sitting. As soon as they came near him, he regained normal consciousness. The proximity of the criminals was sufficient crude stimulus to bring him down to normal consciousness.

The first thing that the wali saw were some sparrows, and his first impulse was to try his nascent powers on them. He said, "O sparrows, die!" and the sparrows fell down dead. Then he said, "Sparrows, rise up!" and they rose. The two thieves who saw this were amazed, and they requested the wali to raise the three thieves whom they had killed in a moment of anger. On this, the wali addressed himself to the three dead thieves and said, "Rise up!" But they did *not* rise. He was aghast at the thought that he had lost his powers; and repenting for the frivolous use of his powers, he went crying to his Master. When he came near, he saw that those three thieves were massaging the feet of his Master.

The wali then went back to his original place, indifferent to food

or drink. He became lean and remained in the same spot for ten years, until white ants began to eat his body. People used to come to the wali and place near him large quantities of sugar, which the ants ate instead. Since he was always surrounded by heaps of sugar, he came to be known as *Ganj-e-Shakkaar*, or the “treasury of sugar.” His story shows how even the most advanced aspirants need the help of a Master if they are to proceed further on the way to Realization.

Ganj-e-Shakkar’s story illustrates the sort of occasion that calls forth the use of occult methods and occult powers; but it must be carefully noted that no occult phenomenon, regardless of magnitude,

can have any intrinsic value in itself. The value that seems to belong to any phenomena-occult or nonoccult-is either purely illusory or entirely relative. Illusory values

arise when anything acquires false importance, because it stimulates or promises to fulfill the passing cravings and the limited purposes born of ignorance. If the thing is taken out of the context of these passing cravings and limited purposes, it is immediately deprived of the entire meaning with which it seemed to be surcharged. Relative values arise when a thing acquires importance through serving the realization or expression of the Truth. The importance of such things is derived from their being the essential conditions for the game of divine life; and therefore, though it is relative, such value is real and not illusory.

Most persons consciously or unconsciously attach undue importance to occult phenomena and mistake them for spirituality. For them, miracles and the phenomena of the spirit world are the real

topics of absorbing interest, and this is presumed to indicate an interest in a life of true spirituality. There is a very clear and definite distinction, however, between occultism and mysticism, spiritualism and spirituality; and any failure to grasp the full import of this difference can only lead to confusion.

Occultism distinct from spirituality

All miracles belong to the phenomenal world, which is the world of shadows. As phenomena, they are subject to change, and nothing that changes can have lasting value. Realization of the eternal Truth is an initiation into the unchangeable Being, which is the supreme Reality; and no acquaintance with the occult world or capacity to manipulate its forces can really amount to realization of the Truth.

Occult phenomena are as much within the domain of false imagination as are ordinary phenomena of the gross world. From the spiritual point of view, the only important thing is to realize Divine Life and to help others realize it by manifesting it in everyday happenings. To penetrate into the essence of all being and significance and to release the fragrance of that inner attainment for the guidance and benefit of others-by expressing, in the world of forms, truth, love, purity, and beauty-this is the sole game that has intrinsic and absolute worth. All other happenings, incidents, and attainments in themselves can have no lasting importance.